

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Vancouver Public Schools

Introduce your child to the world of poetry

There are countless types of poetry. This month, spend some time exploring several of them with your child.

First, read aloud from few books of poetry together. Notice elements of each poem, such as the rhythm of words, repetition or the location of line breaks.

Then, experiment with reading and writing different types of poems, including:

- **Haiku poems.** This Japanese form of poetry features three-line poems with a specific number of syllables on each line (5,7,5).
- **Song lyrics.** Have your child write down the lyrics to a favorite song. Compare the structure of the lyrics to that of some of the poems you've read.
- **Acrostic poems.** The first letters of each line of the poem should spell out a word, such as your child's name. Have your child write an acrostic poem about her best qualities!



Play fun games to build vocabulary

Improve your child's reading skills by building his vocabulary. With an increased knowledge of words and their meanings, your child will understand more as he reads.

To make learning new words fun, play:

- **Word of the Week.** Take turns choosing a challenging word from your child's vocabulary list. Use it often. Keep track of how many times you and your child use it in a sentence during the week.
- **Word Origins.** Find a book about the origins of common words. For instance, *salary* comes from *salarium*, the Latin word for *salt*. That's because Roman soldiers were paid in salt. Name some words and possible origins. Who can guess the correct origin?

Imagination and experience strengthen your child's memory

Your child's memory of what she reads will improve when the words she reads are meaningful to her.

Have her draw pictures that represent new or difficult words. Help her use mnemonic devices to remember lists or spelling words. Whenever possible, add some excitement! If she's learning about another country, for example, learn a traditional song from that country together.



Let reading inspire family activities

Use what your child is reading for school to inspire family fun! Plan an adventure related to the book.

If your child is reading about Benjamin Franklin, he might learn that Franklin started the first all-volunteer fire department in the United States. As a family, you could visit a fire department in honor of Franklin's work.



Find ways to make reading fun

Try something new to show your child just how much fun reading can be. For example:

- **Get into character.** Don't just read a story with your child—act it out!
- **Draw a map** of the setting where a story takes place together.
- **Invite a character to dinner.** Plan a menu the character would like.



Suggest comics for reluctant readers

If your child hesitates to pick up traditional chapter books, encourage him to give comic books or graphic novels a try.

Experts say that comic books are just another type of reading material. They provide the same benefits as traditional books. In fact, picture books have adopted elements of comics, including motion lines and speech bubbles.

By reading comic books that you approve of, your child will understand how words and pictures can come together to tell a story. He will also be able to see the progression of a story from beginning to middle to end.

So when your child says that he just doesn't want to read, suggest a comic book featuring some of his favorite characters—he may just change his mind about reading!



Cook up some reading and math success

What simple—and necessary—activity involves reading and math? Cooking! And it's something you and your child can do together every day. When you prepare a dish:

- **Take turns reading the recipe.** Ask your child to read the list of ingredients aloud, for example, while you collect them.
- **Let your child measure.** Set out measuring cups and spoons and teach your child how to use them.
- **Use math terms.** Say things like, "We need to *add* sugar," "Let's *divide* that into *quarters*" or "That's *half* of what we need."
- **Make more—or less.** Take an uncomplicated recipe and double—or halve—it. Do the math together. How many people will it serve?



Q: Part of my child's homework is to read every day, but she often refuses to do it. How should I handle this?

A: This is a concern to discuss with your child's teacher. Share your ideas about possible reasons for your child's refusal. The teacher will have suggestions that might make reading time easier, such as taking turns reading aloud. Work together and you'll find a strategy that will help your child.

Following instructions requires reading

Most assignments require students to read directions. After your child looks at an assignment—but before she begins it—ask her to tell you what she's supposed to do in her own words. She may have to reread, but she won't have to redo her work.



For lower elementary readers:

- ***Big Mean Mike*** by Michelle Knudsen (Candlewick). Mike is the biggest, meanest dog on the streets. So what will everyone think when they start seeing cute, fuzzy bunnies pop up in Mike's car?
- ***The Pros and Cons of Being a Frog*** by Sue deGennaro (Simon & Schuster). A pair of friends are deciding what costumes to dress up in. After trying out life as a cat, one boy decides to dress up as a frog.



For upper elementary readers:

- ***Love to Langston*** by Tony Medina (Lee & Low Books). In a tribute to Langston Hughes, the famed Harlem Renaissance poet, Medina has written new poems based on Hughes' life.
- ***Black and White*** by David Macaulay (HMH Books for Young Readers). Four different stories are interwoven in this story—or are they? Challenge your child to make sense of this crazy book.

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