

BUILDING READERS

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Pollard School Reading Room
Ms. Tozier and Mrs. Rockwell

Celebrate 2011 with literacy resolutions

On New Year's Day, many people make resolutions—mostly to break bad habits or start good ones, such as by pledging to work out more. Why not encourage your child to make a resolution to work out his reading skills this year?

You can suggest that he:

- **Resolve to read more.** He may decide to try to read one book each week or a book a month. (Just remember it's meant to be fun and not a chore that he's rushing to complete on the 29th each month.) Or if your child is already a voracious reader, perhaps he'd like to introduce a new genre (like trying one non-fiction book a month if he usually sticks to fiction).
- **Resolve to write more.** What does your child think he can write in a month: A poem? A short story? A chapter in a novella? By December, he'll have so much material he'll be ready to "publish"! Stopped by writer's block? Encourage your child to look at a picture and write a story about it.
- **Resolve to learn more.** Your child can plan to learn (and use) one new word a day! You don't need a fancy "word of the day" calendar; just a dictionary will do. By the end of the year, he'll have 365 new words under his belt.



Strengthen your child's math vocabulary

You've probably worked hard to build your child's reading vocabulary. But what about her math vocabulary?

Understanding the language of math is a big part of solving problems. To help your child with this:

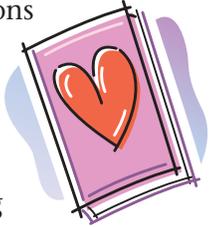
- **Use math words in conversation**, such as *add*, *divide* and *percent*. "We have a coupon for 20 percent off. This shirt is \$20. Twenty percent of \$20 is \$4. We save \$4!"
- **Explain that some words** have special meaning when they're related to math, such as *quarter* and *find*. "In this problem, 'find x' means figure out what number x is."
- **Start a math journal.** Encourage your child to write about things she's learned or wants to understand better.

Source: K. Robertson, "Math Instruction for English Language Learners," Reading Rockets, www.readingrockets.org/article/30570.

Reading aloud has endless benefits

There are so many reasons to read aloud to your child—even if she can already read beautifully! Reading aloud:

- **Reminds** your child how pleasant reading can be.
- **Improves** vocabulary and listening skills.
- **Gives** you chances to discuss stories and how they relate to real life.
- **Helps** your child enjoy new literature.



Source: "Tips for Reading Aloud With Elementary-School Children," Reading is Fundamental, www.rif.org/kids/leer/en/barrio/leerninosescolar_english.htm.

Ideas and answers offered online

"What reading activities can I do with my child?" "How should I read aloud?"

These questions and many others

are answered at www.readwritethink.org,

a site run

by language arts professionals. Just click on "Parent & Afterschool Resources" for helpful ideas.



Add reading to your child's schedule



Many schools expect kids to read at home every day. To help your child take responsibility for this, make it part of his daily routine. He might

read during homework time, for example, or in bed each night. Whatever time you choose, be consistent. Keep interesting materials handy to build excitement. Enjoy a book yourself, too! Show that reading is a family priority.

Don't let tough words escape your child

What should your child do when he sees a challenging word? Attack it! *Word-attack strategies* help children figure out the meanings of unfamiliar words. Encourage your child to add these strategies to her arsenal:



- **Notice pictures.** Photographs and illustrations often give kids clues about unfamiliar words.
- **Identify chunks.** Kids may recognize familiar sounds—or “chunks”—within words, such as “call” and “ing” in *calling*.
- **Keep reading.** Try reading the sentence again. Or read the next sentence for more information.
- **Make connections.** If the unfamiliar word reminds your child of another word, the two may be related.

Source: “Word-Attack Strategies,” North Kansas City School District, <http://w4.nkcsd.k12.mo.us/~lphillip/Web--Word-Attack%20Strategies.html>.

Help your child explore the library

The library is a wonderful place for children to practice seeking information. Instead of just walking through the aisles, suggest that your child use the catalog and talk with the librarian. For example, “Can you please help me find a fiction book about fish?” It’s important to supervise, of course. But let your child take the lead. Practicing now will boost your child’s confidence and success later.



Source: “Library Services,” U.S. Department of Education, <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Library/Services.html>.

For lower elementary readers:

- **Art & Max** by David Wiesner (Houghton Mifflin). Explore the creative process with two lizard friends.
- **The Lion & the Mouse** by Jerry Pinkney (Hachette Book Group). Vivid pictures retell Aesop’s fable about a lion who saves a mouse, and the mouse who returns the favor.



For upper elementary readers:

- **Where the Mountain Meets the Moon** by Grace Lin (Little, Brown). In this story inspired by Chinese folktales, a girl sets out to find fortune for her family.
- **Chains** by Laurie Halse Anderson (Atheneum). Follow Isabel’s fight for freedom from slavery in the spring of 1776.

Find exciting books for your child

Some kids have great trouble finding books they want to read. But this doesn’t mean the books don’t exist! To help your child discover them, first visit a library or bookstore alone and:

- **Talk with the librarian** or book-seller. Describe your child’s reading level and interests.
- **Try books yourself.** Pick some from the shelves and see what you think of the first few pages.
- **Read book reviews** published in magazines, newspapers and online.
- **Notice which books win awards** and are placed on respected reading lists. (The American Library Association is a good



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place to start. Its website is www.ala.org.)

Source: Nancie Atwell, *The Reading Zone*, ISBN: 978-0439-92644-7, Scholastic.



Q: What is a simple way I can check my child’s comprehension after he reads a textbook?

A: Just by talking! It’s always a good idea to discuss textbook readings with your child. Encourage him to summarize them in his own words. To make this easier, notice section headings and words in bold print. Turn them into questions. For example, “Harriet Tubman was an amazing person. What did she do that still inspires people today?”

Do you have a question about reading? Email readingadvisor@parent-institute.com.

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How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Publisher: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Jennifer McGovern.

Writer: Susan O’Brien.

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P.O. Box 7474, Fairfax Station, VA 22039-7474

1-800-756-5525, ISSN:1533-3302

www.parent-institute.com