

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Grand Elementary School

Help your elementary schooler build key literacy skills by talking about books

When elementary schoolers talk about what they read in detail, it strengthens their memory, thinking skills and overall comprehension. Beyond simply recalling facts, discussing books helps your child connect with the material on a deeper level.

To foster conversations about books:

- **Discuss what your child reads.** After your child finishes a book, talk about it together. Ask about the characters, plot and ending. Consider reading the book yourself for a more in-depth talk.
- **Encourage family discussions.** Everyone in your family can read the same book and then gather to share their views. Did anyone have the same favorite part?
- **Help your child** create a book club with friends. After they finish reading the same book, your child can host a book club meeting to discuss it.



Holidays offers literacy opportunities

The holiday season is a fantastic time to engage your child in fun literacy activities! Here are some ideas:

- **Explore holiday stories and create your own.** Read the poem “Over the River and Through the Woods” by Lydia Maria Child with your child. It tells the story of a Thanksgiving long ago. As a family, write a story or poem about your own special holiday traditions.
- **Create holiday-themed word games.** Create word search puzzles using seasonal words, or have a scavenger hunt where clues are simple riddles involving holiday items.
- **Extend read-aloud time.** Take advantage of a more relaxed schedule. Set aside extra time for reading aloud. Consider a later bedtime for your child and read a longer story.

Look for signs of reading progress

Older elementary schoolers usually read independently, which can make monitoring reading progress challenging. To check that your child’s skills are continuing to develop, look for these indicators. Can your elementary schooler:



- **Read grade-level** books independently?
- **Enjoy reading** books independently?
- **Understand** and analyze reading material without constant guidance?
- **Use reading as a tool** to learn new information and expand knowledge?

Discover real-life adventures

Biographies offer true stories that are often just as exciting as any made-up tale. Let your child know these books are about real people and the amazing things they’ve done. Ask who your child would like to learn about. Then, find books about that person’s life.



A dictionary name game makes learning new words personal

This simple activity uses your child’s name and a dictionary to make learning new words fun. Have your child:



1. **Write down 10 unfamiliar words** from the dictionary that begin with the first letter of your child’s name.
2. **Define the words** and put them in alphabetical order.
3. **Write a sentence** for each word and read it aloud to you.

Take advantage of your local library

The library isn't just a place to find new books to read with your child. Libraries offer a wealth of information, programs and other helpful services. Libraries have:

- **Read-aloud and book club programs.** Some of these may be led by children. There may also be presentations by authors that your child enjoys.
- **Reference materials.** Help familiarize your child with dictionaries, almanacs, atlases and subject encyclopedias, in print and online. Knowing how to use these resources will help your child go beyond googling to find reliable information for assignments.
- **More than just books.** From magazines to audiobooks to movies, there is a lot more than just books at the library. See what you and your child can find on your next visit!



Word webs connect words and ideas

Creating word webs is a visual way for your child to connect concepts, questions and words. Word webs can also help your child organize thoughts for writing. To create one, have your child:

1. **Write a word** in the middle of a blank sheet of paper (*gardens*, for example).
2. **Write other words** around the page that relate to the main concept (*grow*, *vegetables*, *plants*). Draw lines that connect these new words to the center word.
3. **Think of words** that relate to some of the other words. For example, your child might write *carrots* as a branch off the word *vegetables* and *water* as a branch off the word *grow*.



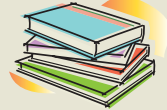
Q: My elementary schooler often picks books that are too challenging and gives up after just one chapter. How can I help my child make better book selections?

A: Choose a handful of books that you know are a match for your child's reading ability. A good rule of thumb is that if your child can read a full page and only stumble on five words or fewer, it's likely a good fit. Then, let your child pick from your selection of books. If your child needs encouragement to get through a book, you can take turns reading pages or paragraphs.

Simplify long pages of reading

Does your child get overwhelmed by too much text on a page? If so, suggest using a sheet of paper to cover up parts of the page.

This strategy allows readers to focus on one paragraph at a time. Your child can then slide the paper down to uncover more paragraphs when ready.



For lower elementary readers:

- ***Flight of the Honey Bee*** by Raymond Huber. Follow Scout, a honey bee, on her journey to find a flower full of nectar. This book includes fascinating facts about honey bees.
- ***Prince and Pirate*** by Charlotte Gunnufson. Two fish that are used to being on their own are put into the same fish tank, so they must find a way to get along.



For upper elementary readers:

- ***I Am Jack*** by Susanne Gervay. After Jack is bullied at school, he'd rather be anywhere else but there. With the support of his family, he finds a way to persevere.
- ***Happy Happy Clover*** by Sayuri Tatsuyama. This story about a bunny's adventures is told in comic-book style, which may appeal to reluctant readers.

Building Readers®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Publisher: Doris McLaughlin.

Publisher Emeritus: John H. Wherry, Ed.D.

Editor: Rebecca Hasty Miyares.

Copyright © 2025, The Parent Institute®
(a division of PaperClip Media, Inc.)

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

1-800-756-5525

www.parent-institute.com