

## Readers: Kindergarten – 3rd Grade

### Listening and Learning

From kindergarten through third grade, a child's ability to read grows by leaps and bounds. Although teachers provide lots of help, parents continue to play a very important role in their child's reading development.

Kids who are first learning to read get more information from listening to books read aloud than from reading them independently. This is especially true for vocabulary development – kids will learn much more about what words mean by hearing books read aloud and discussing new words with their parents than from reading on their own.

As your child's reading skills improve, he or she will begin to read independently. This doesn't mean, however, that you should stop reading to your child. Reading aloud together can help build vocabulary, improve reading skills, and foster a sense of closeness between you and your child. Encourage discussion about characters and share your reactions to books to help reinforce the connection between what you read and everyday life.

### Your Growing Reader

Here's how reading usually progresses from kindergarten to third grade:

**Kindergarten.** This is the time when most kids begin learning to read. By the end of the school year they will probably know most letters and their sounds, be able to match words with the same beginning or ending sounds, and read/write several simple words. They might be able to read simple text as well.

**First grade.** In this year, most kids learn to read many more words. They sound out words with a variety of phonics patterns, recognize a growing list of words by sight, and connect meaning to the words and sentences they read. Most first-graders can read simple books independently by the end of the school year.

**Second and third grade.** Kids in second and third grade continue to learn more phonics patterns and sight words for reading and spelling, read aloud more expressively and fluently, use reading to discover more about the world around them, and perhaps show a preference for specific authors and types of books. You'll likely start to see a shift as your child begins to focus his/her energy on learning new information from text. Ideally, children at this age have learned how to read, and are now reading to learn.

If you have concerns about your child's reading level at any time, talk to your child's teacher, school counselor, and doctor. Kids who are not making good reading progress might have a

reading disability, such as dyslexia. With the right educational help, most kids can become readers, but identifying the problem and addressing it early will bring about the best results.

## What to Read

As your child becomes a more confident reader, continue to introduce a wide range of books. When it comes to reading aloud, look for two types of books – those that could be read alone and those that are above your child's current independent reading level. With this mix, your child can re-read some of these books independently, while you'll have to do the reading (or at least help) with the challenging ones that allow your child to enjoy a more sophisticated story and learn new words.

Let your child's interests lead the way when you are choosing books. Sports? Music? Dinosaurs? Look for books on topics you know are of interest and ones that relate to these things. For example, if you know your child is interested in whales, look for books that talk about famous explorers or historical fiction set on whaling boats. As your child gets older, you will find that he or she enjoys increasingly complex books that can teach about the world and introduce social and ethical issues.

Talk about the books your child is reading independently and for school, and discuss favorite topics and authors. If the author has written a series of books, encourage your child to read them all. Some kids enjoy keeping a checklist of favorite authors' books.

Other types of books kids might like include:

- biographies of famous people
- books about kids dealing with challenges
- books containing language play
- mysteries
- science fiction and fantasy

Another way to grab your child's interest is to pick books that have a personal connection. Introduce your childhood favorites and talk about why you love them. Kids may also like to read junior versions of the same magazines you read.

## When and How to Read

The school-age child's schedule can be a busy one. You may be having dinner on the go as you scoot from soccer practice to music lessons. But if you can find 30 minutes a day to read with your child, you will help ensure future reading success. Even if 30 minutes isn't possible, remember that any time you spend reading is better than no time at all.

Use the same strategies you did when your child was younger – talk about what you read before, during, and after, asking open-ended questions that encourage your child to have a conversation with you. Read expressively and with enjoyment.

At this age, it's important to let your child read to you. You might choose to take turns reading ("You read a page, then I'll read a page," etc.). To help with less familiar words, you can "practice" them in advance by having your child point to the words you say on a given page, or even in a specific line of text.

If your child is reading and comes to a difficult or unfamiliar word, encourage "sounding it out" or breaking the word into smaller parts to read one part at a time. If the word still is too hard, suggest skipping it and reading the rest of the sentence, then thinking about what word would make sense in that context ("What do you think would work in this sentence?").

Be careful not to correct every error your child makes, as this will be frustrating for both of you. If your child seems discouraged or frustrated while reading, you can offer to take over.

If you're reading a longer chapter book, here are some tips for maintaining your child's interest:

- Before you begin a new chapter, talk a little bit about what happened in the previous one
- Re-read lines your child found funny
- Let your child read to you (if he or she wants to)
- If a block of text is too challenging for your child, don't be afraid to summarize or skip over it. Or offer to take over the reading momentarily.
- Ask your child's opinion about a character's actions or decisions. What would he or she do in the same situation? Save questions for the end so your child can simply enjoy the story.
- Offer your own honest opinions about what you've read, and ask the same of your child

## Making Time to Read

Reading aloud isn't the only way to encourage kids to read. There are plenty of opportunities during day-to-day life, like cooking together and having your child read you the recipe. Or when you play a new game, ask your child to read the directions aloud.

You might invite kids to participate in your family's vacation planning by having them read through brochures or magazines about a potential destination and highlighting things of interest.

Buy a children's dictionary so your kids can look up definitions of new words, and help them look for answers to questions in an encyclopedia or online. When using the Internet, help your kids learn to question and think critically about the information found online.

Kids should have a library card and lots of opportunities to use it. Let yours make selections or ask the librarian for help finding books.

As your child gets older and spends less time every day with you, reading together can continue to be a way for you to connect on a daily basis. Talking about what you've read gives you a window into your child's imagination and thoughts about the world.

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