



Nurturing the Reading Habit

Activities That Encourage Children to Read

by Gail Lennon

Parents complain that schools have failed to teach their children to read and write. In this era of carpools, working parents, and TV kids, it is little wonder that children do not see reading as a valuable activity. Teachers report that very few students do any reading outside school hours, yet the public decries a high level of illiteracy in our youth, and businesses complain that their employees cannot read business materials and cannot fill out application forms. Every teacher knows that to become good at something, students require lots of practice. Any good parent knows that if children are to see reading as an extra-curricular activity, they must see adults reading and must be, themselves, nurtured to read. What are the strategies that nurture a love of reading? The following are activities guaranteed to get the most reluctant reader interested in reading.

- Provide children with books of their own. Whether these are acquired as gifts, through a regular trip to a bookstore, by way of a book-of-the-month club, from an aunt or uncle or grandparent who is looking for ways to help, from an older cousin who has outgrown these books, from a garage sale or a library clearance, it is important that children have books of their own.
- Give books as treats. Instead of candy or money for a job well done or exemplary behavior, have a stack of inexpensive books to offer children.
- Let kids help choose books for other children as gifts for birthdays, get-well gifts, thank-you gifts, and so on.
- Check out bookstores and garage sales for used books. Repair the bedraggled ones, adding a book cover if necessary.
- Provide books for travel and vacation fun. Activity books are a great time passer in the car. Carry a ~~cas-~~ ~~sette~~ and read-along book in the car for even the smallest children.

Use books on CD or iPod.

- Place an audio book in the car stereo when traveling, even for short trips and errands.
- Get the library habit early. Even before children are able to read by themselves, visit the library for children's programs, to pick up picture books, and to play with the library toys. Children should see the library as an inviting, fun place to spend time.
- Let children experience a book from all angles: the book itself, the audio tape, the video or movie, live productions, and so on.
- Buy "how to" books for starting or extending a hobby or hobbies.
- Buy books about nature and explore your natural surroundings using the books as guides to birds, bugs, animals, historic buildings, and so on. Books like *The Bug Book* or *The Bird Book* or *Leaf and Tree Identifier* are good ways to get started.
- Introduce children to biographies by starting with a book about a hero, a relative, or an acquaintance.
- Help children learn the services of the library by teaching the importance of returning books on time, renewing books, requesting books through inter-library loan, using the electronic catalogue, perusing the magazines, using online services, and so on.



- Take an interest in what children are reading and help direct them to some old favorites which they may not have yet discovered, such as *Berenstain Bears*, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, *Curious George*, Mark Twain, Judy Blume, R. L. Stine, Cynthia Voigt, and Jack Kerouac. If you are unsure of some good choices, get a book to help you locate good books, ask the librarian, consult older kids, and don't be afraid to discover the joy of children's authors together with your kids.
- Don't force reading or reading changes. If children are stuck with one topic such as horses, or one author such as Steven Kellogg or Dr. Seuss, let them work through this phase. There is nothing wrong with reading the same book time after time. Rather, encourage reading variety by providing other books as alternatives, but also encourage rereading old favorites.
- Provide a regular reading time, like a few minutes before bedtime. Help students get the reading habit by sticking to this schedule, which builds in reading time or just time to look at books.
- Read to kids. They are never too old to be read to. As students begin to read their own books, there is still a place for sharing a book and reading together.
- Make space in your home for books. Give children bookshelves of their own.
- Purchase or make an attractive book bag for carrying books back and forth from the library.
- Buy or borrow joke and riddle books and share the jokes and riddles at the dinner table.
- Subscribe to a children's magazine, such as *Chickadee* or *Owl Magazine* (for science enthusiasts), *Jack and Jill* or *Challenge*, *The Good Apple Newspaper*, or *Lollipops*. There is something very exciting for children about having reading materials arrive in the mail addressed to them.