

Parents Page: a note about reading

We all know how important it is that children develop a love of books. Not only is reading an engaging way to pass the time, but research shows that children who read for enjoyment are more likely to succeed at school, and as parents we all want our children to do well.

Understanding the message, thinking critically about the content, using imagination, and making connections is at the heart of what it means to be a reader and why children learn to love books.

Here are some ways you can help your child enjoy reading at home:

- **Make sure the book is "just right".** Not too easy because it will not stretch them enough, but equally not too hard because it will only frustrate them. The **Five Finger Test** is a quick and easy way to find a "just right" book. I use it all the time in school - ask your child to explain it to you!
- **Make your home a reader-friendly environment.** Fill it with books, magazines and newspapers that everyone can read. Dedicate a special area for your child to read in and make it nice and cosy.
- **Be a good role model.** Let your children see you reading, and looking after your books. Your actions really do speak louder than your words.
- **Make time for reading.** Like any other skill reading gets better with practice.
- **Talk about and share the books you read as a family.** This will help boost your children's confidence and improve their comprehension skills because reading is so much more than just decoding words. It's also a good way to check that they have understood what they have read and that the content is age-appropriate.
- **Read aloud to your children.** This is one of the most important things you can do, no matter how old they are. Even independent, confident readers benefit from being read to especially books that are as yet too advanced for them to access themselves. It's a great way of expanding their vocabulary and of course it's just a lovely thing to share together. Never assume your child is too old to be read to! Please ask for help and advice if you are struggling to find books that are 'just right'!
- **Get into the library habit.** There is no pressure to purchase and your children can experiment without risking wasting money! While you are there, don't forget to check out a book yourself and pass on any recommendations along the way!

- **Visit bookshops, car boot sales and charity shops to see if you can uncover book bargain.** When you are in the bookshops, look out for any author events they may be advertising – they're normally free even for those hosted by children's laureates! My favourite specialist children's bookshops in the area are... The Book Nook (Hove), Bags of Books (Lewes) and the Steyning Bookshop. They really know their stuff and apart from anything else you can attend their story sessions, author signings and competitions throughout the holidays, and obtain recommendations and discover the latest books.
- **Read the film.** Recent research has discovered that children often try to read the books on which the films and TV programmes they have seen are based, even if they are more challenging. Knowing the story seems to make the book less intimidating!
- **Make reading something special – a privilege even!** Say, "You can stay up 15 minutes later tonight if you read in bed." Or you might say, "Because you helped with the dishes, I have time to read you an extra story."
- **Appeal to your children's competitive instincts.** Creating challenges and offering rewards can improve motivation.
- **Grab a gadget.** Not everyone is a fan of e-books but modern children may be swayed by the extra screen time, plus the in-built dictionary and the ability to change font sizes, backgrounds etc. often increases a book's appeal especially for the struggling reader. Digital books published in weekly, serialized chapters can also create a real buzz of expectation.
- **Discover audio books.** These have always been successful in providing a way for reluctant or struggling readers and those who have English as an Additional Language pupils to access and enjoy books. Audio-books have a lot to offer the average, avid, or gifted reader too. They can challenge children by offering them books above their reading level, encourage critical listening, model good reading aloud practices, introduce new vocabulary and unfamiliar words and dialects. Plus they are great for whiling away the time on long journeys! You can borrow audio-CDs and MP3s from the public libraries as well.

FINALLY AND MOST IMPORTANTLY

Be positive about what your child reads. Don't judge their reading choices or obsess over 'progression' and 'quality' – it is okay for them to read comics, read the same book over and over, or prefer a particular author or genre to the exclusion of all others! They will eventually move on! Remember every child develops at their own speed so try and be patient.

FURTHER READING

Help Your Child Love Reading - a Parent's Guide by Alison David

The Reading Bug ... and how you can help your child to catch it by Paul Jennings

The Rights of the Reader by Daniel Pennac

The Ultimate Book Guide: Over 700 Great Reads for 8-12s edited by Leonie Flynn

Great Books to Read Aloud by Jacqueline Wilson