

Summer Learning Spotlight

Reading

Early Childhood/
Elementary School
Summer 2023

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®

Be a 'regular' at the library!

One of the best ways to get your child excited about reading and learning is to make frequent trips to the library together. Research shows that children who regularly visit libraries read more. To get the most out of library visits:



- **Help your child sign up** for a library card. Your child will feel important, and using the card will teach responsibility.
- **Explore the building**—not just its books. Check out its nooks and crannies, play areas, stairways and cozy places to sit. The library should be a place that feels like home to your child.
- **Get to know the librarian.** Help your child think of questions to ask, such as, “Why did you become a librarian?” If your child asks for an autograph, it’ll be easy to remember the librarian’s name.
- **Have your child pick** a favorite subject—rockets, penguins, etc.—and ask the librarian for help finding resources about it.
- **Go on hunts** through the children’s section. For example, ask your child, “Can you find a book whose author’s name starts with the same letter as yours?”
- **Explore** the library’s website. You’ll find e-books, information about special events and reference resources. The library may even offer online homework help, videos and virtual field trips.

Reading and writing go hand in hand

Writing will make your child a stronger reader, and vice versa. To inspire interest in summer writing:

- **Give your child** a “writer’s toolbox.” Include a special notebook and different kinds of paper, pens and pencils.
- **Spark creative writing.** Find a picture book with few or no words, like *Goodnight, Gorilla* by Peggy Rathman or *Tuesday* by David Wiesner. Have your child write a story to go with the illustrations.
- **Encourage your child** to keep a summer journal. Entries might include My Summer Adventures and Books I Read This Summer.
- **Ask your child to teach you** how to play a game by writing step-by-step instructions.

Make reading time fun for the whole family

Your child is more likely to spend time reading this summer if the whole family gets involved. Sit together while everyone reads silently, take turns reading aloud—or do both. To add to the fun, have a:

- **Beach-read day.** Wear swimsuits and read on beach towels or in lawn chairs. Read stories about the beach or nonfiction books on ocean life.
- **Reading campout.** On the weekend, “camp out” in the living room or backyard. Get into pajamas and snuggle up to read by flashlight. Read outdoor adventure stories or spooky tales.
- **Book-nic.** Pack a picnic lunch and head to a park with something you can read in short snippets (a volume of children’s poetry, a joke book).
- **Theme party.** Choose a theme and pair books with party activities. For example, read a mystery, then play Clue® or another mystery game.
- **Play performance.** Give each family member a copy of a short, easy-to-read play script and a role to play. Encourage everyone to be dramatic and ham it up.

Build background knowledge for better comprehension

Children with a strong knowledge base tend to have stronger reading comprehension skills. That's because they understand references to a wide variety of places and situations described in books. To broaden your child's foundations:

- **Find learning opportunities** during errands. At an auto shop, let your child watch the mechanics working on cars. During your pet's checkup at the veterinarian's office, encourage your child to ask questions about how the doctor cares for animals.
- **Talk with older relatives,** neighbors or family friends. Invite them to share stories about life in the past or historical events they've lived through.
- **Explore other cultures.** Visit international food marts and try new foods. Listen to music in different languages. Attend cultural festivals. Read storybooks about different kinds of people.
- **Watch documentaries** and listen to podcasts together about everything from science to pop culture.
- **Provide hands-on** experiences. Bake together, plant a garden, let your child help with household repairs, take hikes to explore nature and visit museums that offer interactive exhibits.
- **Share a wide variety** of reading materials. Encourage your child to read biographies, poetry, science fiction, historical fiction, field guides, etc.



Ask questions about books

Build reading comprehension by asking questions that encourage your child to think analytically and creatively about books. Here are some questions that work for just about any book.

For fiction:

- *What could be another title for the story?*
- *How did the main character change throughout the book?*
- *How would the story be different if it were set in another place or time? (In the city instead of the country, in the 1800s or the 3000s instead of today, etc.)*
- *What other book did this one remind you of?*
- *Who would you recommend this book to? Why?*

For nonfiction:

- *What did you like best about the book?*
- *Why do you think the author wrote the book?*
- *What three things did you learn that you didn't know before?*
- *What do you still want to know?*
- *What nonfiction features did you notice, like bold words, photo captions, diagrams, etc.? How did they help you learn from the book?*



Let's play with words

The ability to hear sounds in words (*phonemic awareness*) is a key predictor of reading success. Playing with words is an easy way to build this important awareness in your child. Weave word play into everyday conversations with these ideas:

- **Silly name game.** During a meal or car ride, ask your child to choose a random letter, such as T. Whenever family members speak to each other, they must swap T for the first letter in their name. So Mom becomes Tom, Lee becomes Tee and Dad becomes Tad.
- **Guess my rhyme.** Take turns sharing something about your day, but swap in a few rhyming words. You might say, "I went to the grocery *bore* to buy some *silk*." Can your child figure out that you went to the grocery *store* to buy some *milk*? Now it's your child's turn.

Enrich your child's vocabulary

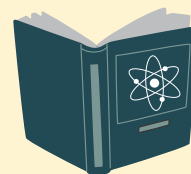
“I had a *magnificent* day!” A rich vocabulary lets your child express ideas in a variety of ways. It also boosts reading comprehension because your child understands more words found in books. To give your child's vocabulary a boost:

- **Use a dictionary.** There's a lot to learn when your child looks up new words—not only how to spell and pronounce them, but also information about their origins. If possible, get a dictionary in book form. When you look up a word, your child may notice other new words on the same page. Point out the guide words at the top of the page. Ask your child to predict what words are on that page (because they come between the guide words in alphabetical order).
- **Explore a thesaurus.** Have your child look for synonyms (words with the same or similar meanings) and antonyms (words with opposite meanings). For example, instead of saying something is *large*, your child could say it's *colossal*, *gigantic* or *astronomical*. *Large* is also an antonym for *infinitesimal*, *tiny* and *microscopic*.
- **Consider context clues.** While reading, see if your child can tell what a new word means by the text around it. If a book says, “We went snorkeling in the ocean. We saw many colorful fish under the water,” your child may realize that *snorkeling* is an activity that lets people observe ocean life.
- **Introduce unfamiliar words.** During a conversation, try to weave in at least one word you think your child doesn't know. You might say “We're *fortunate* it's sunny outside.” instead of “We're *lucky* it's sunny outside.”

Read about school subjects

Strong reading skills can help your child do better in every subject. To help your child make the connection between reading and other academic areas:

- **Read biographies** of famous mathematicians, scientists, engineers and historical figures. Talk about their accomplishments.
- **Check out** a book of science experiments. Pick a few to try together. Your child can read the instructions and follow the steps.
- **Visit historic places** in your area, such as monuments, battlefields, museums and buildings. Ask your child to read signs, plaques and engravings to learn some local history.
- **Read books about math.** A librarian can help you find nonfiction books on topics ranging from counting to fractions to geometry. Point out math vocabulary like *multiply*, *denominator*, *hexagon*, etc. Solve or act out any math problems in the books. Read fiction that includes math, too, like *One Grain of Rice* by Demi.



Think outside the book

Show your child that reading is useful—and all around us. Read everywhere you go, including:

- **At the grocery store.** Explain that reading food labels can help you eat healthier—ask your child to find 100% whole-grain cereal or canned vegetables with no added salt.
- **In a waiting room.** Read books, magazines and brochures while you wait for the doctor or dentist.
- **While doing errands.** Put your child in charge of reading the map. Name the stores you need to go to, and let your child navigate.



- **On the road.** Read billboards, store displays, road signs and lettering on trucks.
- **At the pool, beach or playground.** Have your child read the safety rules.

Reach a struggling reader

More than a third of students who started school during the pandemic need extra help with reading. If your child is one of them, you may worry about your student's confidence and motivation. To help a struggling or reluctant reader:

- **Find books** that match your child's interests. Children are more motivated to read books they enjoy—and that's especially true when reading is a challenge.
- **Try nonfiction books** that your child can read in short chunks like children's encyclopedias, almanacs, cookbooks and trivia books. Reading small snippets at a time may feel less intimidating.
- **Let your child** listen to recorded stories while following along in the book. Many children with reading difficulties read



too slowly for stories to make sense, so they get frustrated. Can't find audio versions of favorite books? Consider recording your own.

- **Reread familiar books.** They're comforting to children and build confidence in struggling readers. Also, your child may discover something new about a book with each rereading, leading to a deeper understanding.
- **Ask a librarian** for Hi-Lo books. They have plots that appeal to older readers but are written at a lower reading level. Struggling readers may feel embarrassed about reading "little kid" books, and Hi-Lo books help to solve that problem.

Make the most of summer school

For many children, playing isn't the only activity on the agenda this summer. Summer classes in reading and other subjects are helping kids maintain skills and make up ground lost during the pandemic. If your child is among them, remember to:

- **Boost motivation.** In school, students may feel they're missing out on summer. Say, "We'll go to the pool after school" or "You'll get to see your friends in class today." Also, explain that lots of kids are going to summer school in the wake of the pandemic—your child is not alone.

- **Partner with teachers.** Ask what you can do to help your child succeed. Find out what your child is expected to accomplish before fall. Check in regularly and keep track of your child's progress.
- **Take attendance** seriously. Treat summer school like regular school. Every day is important, especially since summer is short. Try to plan trips and appointments outside of class time.

Turn screen time into literacy time

Too much of the wrong kinds of recreational screen time can interfere with reading. Here's how you can use screen time to inspire your child to read and write.

- **Choose a movie** based on a book. Read the book together, then watch the movie. Talk about how the two are similar and different. Which did your child like better and why?
- **Talk about shows** and videos you watch together. Ask your child to predict what will happen next, guess the motivations behind a character's behavior or imagine the plot of a prequel or sequel.
- **Mute the TV** and turn on closed captions. Read together while you watch the show.
- **Tie watching to writing.** Your child could write a review of a movie, show or video game to share with friends and relatives. Or your child can write recaps of sporting events, then pretend to be a sportscaster and read them aloud.
- **Watch book trailers** and read-alouds online. Your child will get ideas for new books to try and enjoy watching teachers, librarians and even authors read aloud. Suggest that your child make a book trailer, then watch it as a family.

THE
PARENT
INSTITUTE®