

How to Encourage Summer Reading: A Parent's Guide

from "Shanahan on Literacy"

Summer is almost upon us. The days are growing longer, the sun is higher in the sky, and soon school will be over for the year. Our children's thoughts now turn to swimming, skateboards, baseball, and bike riding.

Unfortunately, for far too many of kids, summer vacation is a time for forgetting. You've probably heard that "if you don't use it, you'll lose it." That's certainly true about reading. Kids who don't read over the summer regress. Their hard-earned reading skills decline.

Boys and girls who manage to keep the rust off their reading, don't suffer a summer reading drop. By reading and writing throughout the summer, they may even manage to improve in reading. Summer reading is easy to build into a family schedule, and most kids come to really enjoy it.

Here are ten ways to make literacy an enjoyable part of your kids' summer:

1. Go to the library and borrow some books.

When I was a boy, my mom would take me to the library once a week. I could borrow as many books as the library would allow. It didn't take much time, but it sure gave me plenty of opportunity for fun reading.

2. Pick out a good chapter book to read to or with your child.

Find a good book to read with your kids. This may be a book that you want to read to them or one for them to read to you (or a bit of both). It can be hard to find time to work all the way through a chapter book during the school year, but it can be easier during the summer months. Books by Roald Dahl and E.B. White were especially popular in our household, but here are some other possibilities:

Kindergarten through Grade 3

Star Jumper by Frank Asch

Winnie the Pooh by A.A. Milne

The Giggler Treatment by Roddy Doyle

The Mouse and the Motorcycle by Beverly Cleary

Charlotte's Web by E. B. White

Little House on the Prairie by Laura Ingalls Wilder

The One and Only Ivan by Katherine Applegate

The Adventures of Captain Underpants by Dav Pilkey

Grades 4-6

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis

Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson

The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett

The Last of the Mohicans by James Fennimore Cooper

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle

The Red Pony by John Steinbeck

The Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling

Souder by William H. Armstrong

Also, ask your librarian for recommendations, or check out these resources:

<http://www.cbcbooks.org/childrens-choices/>

<http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/notalists/ncb>

3. Celebrate the completion of a book.

With my daughters, when we'd finish a chapter book, we'd have a family celebration. Sometimes we'd rent a video of the book that we'd read and pop some popcorn. Other times it might be a trip to a museum related to the book's content or a backyard camping trip or perhaps a cooking experience. One year we even picked our family vacation based on a book we'd read (*Misty of Chincoteague*).

Some children's chapter books that have been into films include: *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *Black Beauty*, *The Hobbit*, *Bridge to Terabithia*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Harry Potter*, *Johnny Tremain*, *Jumani*, *Mary Poppins*, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, *Harry Potter*, *My Side of the Mountain*, and many more.

4. Write a letter to your child and drop it in the mail.

Kids love to get mail. I know in our digital age people write fewer real letters, but a letter can be a surprising and stimulating experience for children. Who doesn't like to get a

personal letter? Write a letter that requires some response: What do you most want to do this summer? What are you reading now? What's that about? Etc.

5. Start a diary.

When we'd go on summer vacation, we always brought along a composition book. When our kids were little, at the end of the day, we'd let them dictate their diary and we'd print out their memories for them. As they developed their own ability to write, they recorded their own trip memories. We'd leave places to tape in postcards and the like.

6. Schedule a daily reading time.

I mentioned that my mom used to take me to the library. That same summer she required that I stay in after lunch for 30 minutes to read. At first, I was resistant, wanting to get out with my friends. It wasn't long before I cherished the time, however. Summer can get kind of boring for kids and having regularly scheduled activities helps. Parents are often good at loading up kids' schedules with things like soccer or swimming—which are great—but schedule in some quiet reading time too, they'll come to appreciate it.

7. Subscribe to a magazine.

We tend to champion book reading. And why not? There are so many great books. However, children's magazines are fun too, and they change things up and bit which can encourage kids to read.

There are lots of good choices of kids' mags. Here are a few suggestions: Highlights, National Geographic Kids, Ranger Rick, Boy's Life, American Girl, Sports Illustrated for Kids, Cricket, Cobblestones, Dig. Pick one that fits your child's interests.

8. Encourage book clubbing.

Some kids find reading to be lonely. There are things that you can do to make it more social and fun for them. For instance, get your child and his/her friends to agree to read a particular book each month. Then have a get-together—perhaps a sleepover—at your house for the kids to share their favorite snacks and talk about the book.

9. Encourage your child to read and use “to do” books.

Kids love to get their hands dirty. Doing stuff is fun. Use reading as a jumping-off-point for arts and crafts activities, sports, cooking, science experiments, etc.

Here are some terrific “to do” book suggestions:

Rosie Revere’s Big Project Book for Bold Engineers

American Girls’ Handy Book

American Boys’ Handy Book

Baking Class: 50 Fun Recipes Kid Will Love to Bake

The Everything Kids’ Science Experiments Book

10. Family reading time.

Parents can get in on this reading thing, too. Maybe one night a week, try turning off all the screens, and everyone pick up a good book or magazine; 15-30 minutes. Not only does that create some good reading practice time for your kids, but it shows them that you’re into this reading thing too, which can encourage reading. Modeling will always be more powerful than telling. If you get into reading, they will, too.