Elementary School • October 2023

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Lake Washington School District

Engage your elementary schooler in conversations to build vocabulary

When you have regular back-and-forth conversations with your child and use some advanced vocabulary, you can teach new words—and your child may begin using them! That's great because having a large vocabulary makes reading easier.

When using words your child doesn't know:

1. **Provide a definition** that is easy to understand. "It's a *brisk* fall day. The weather is getting cooler, but it's not cold enough for snow yet."
2. **Help your child** make connections to the word. "Can you remember another time when we were outside in the *brisk* fall air?"
3. **Keep using the word** in your conversations. "It's another *brisk* day today. Let's be sure to put on an extra layer for our afternoon walk."



Ask reading-related questions at your parent-teacher conference

Parent-teacher conferences are a great time to check on your child's reading progress. Be sure to ask the teacher questions such as:

- "**What are my child's strengths** and weaknesses in reading?"
- "**How can I support** my child's literacy development at home?"
- "**What types of material** does my child enjoy reading in school?"
- "**How are my child's** writing skills developing?"
- "**What reading strategies** are you using with my child?"
- "**Are there resources** you can suggest we use at home that would be helpful to improve my child's reading?"

Explore genres at the library

Your child has probably heard of *fiction* and *nonfiction*. But what about more specific kinds of writing? Learning about *genres* can make reading more interesting.

At the library, go on a search with your child and bring home at least one:

- **Mystery.**
- **Autobiography.**
- **Book of poetry.**
- **Work of historical fiction.**
- **Fantasy story.**
- **Science fiction tale.**



Combine reading and math

Want to get an extra boost out of reading time? Choose a book about math. Early readers enjoy books about counting, such as *Curious George Learns to Count from 1 to 100*, by H.A. Rey. Older readers can handle more complex material, such as *Math-terpieces: The Art of Problem-Solving* by Greg Tang.



Find reading inspiration in autumn

Use time outdoors with your child to guide your reading and writing activities. Here are a few ideas:

- **Collect leaves**. Use a guide to identify them, then label them in a scrapbook.
- **Observe wildlife** in a park or in your neighborhood. Ask your child to record observations in a special journal.
- **Do some research** together to learn more about the plants and animals your child has observed.



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Boost your child's desire to read with four simple strategies

When children like to read, they do it more often—which boosts reading skills and overall school success. To ignite your child's love of reading:



1. **Celebrate.** Instead of simply checking out books at the library, make an event of it. Select interesting books, then choose a special place to enjoy reading together.
2. **Explore.** Help your child discover an appealing book series. Kids often can't resist picking up the next book in a series.
3. **Investigate.** Ask a question and encourage your child to find the answer by doing some research online.
4. **Play.** Turn something you just read together into a fun challenge: Ask your child to summarize a story using only three sentences. Can your child use the characters from the story in a new story?

Go on a family reading adventure

Looking for an educational activity that's fun for the whole family? A visit to a child-friendly museum can strengthen your child's reading skills, observation skills and curiosity.

Before you go:

- **Build excitement** by viewing the museum's website together.
- **Read museum brochures** and maps with your child and plan what to see.
- **Check out library books** related to the exhibits.

During and after your visit:

- **Read the museum notes** about the exhibits with your child.
- **Challenge your child** to find things you saw in the museum in books.





Q: My child has a journal, but doesn't want to use it. How can I encourage my elementary schooler to write in it?

A: Journals are great for building reading and writing skills, but some kids don't want to write about their daily activities and feelings. They may respond, however, to "prompts." Suggest that your child start entries with interesting sentences like, "If I could design a school, I would …" or "If I could have one superpower it would be … ."

Play October-themed games

Use the month as inspiration for word games. With your child:

- **Create words** using the letters in the word *October*. How many can you each come up with?
- **Brainstorm** a list of words that begin with the letter *O*. Ask your student to put them in alphabetical order. Then, have your child write a sentence for each word and read it to you.

For lower elementary readers:

- ***Itsy Mitsy Runs Away*** by Elanna Allen. Itsy Mitsy despises bedtime, so she decides to run away. But first, she must pack up all the essentials.
- ***Calvin Can't Fly: The Story of a Bookworm Birdie*** by Jennifer Berne. When Calvin learns to read, he is consumed by his love of books, and forgets to learn how to fly!



For upper elementary readers:

- ***Eliza Bing is (Not) a Big, Fat Quitter*** by Carmella Van Vleet. Eliza is determined to take a cake-decorating class. But first, she must convince her parents that she can follow through with an interest.
- ***Guys Read: Funny Business*** edited by Jon Scieszka. This collection of humorous short stories is designed for boys—including those who avoid reading. But girls will enjoy it, too!

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