Summer Learning Spotlight

Reading

Early Childhood/ Elementary School Summer 2025

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Imagine a summer where your child discovers the joy of reading and writing and returns to school ready to take on new challenges. Make literacy a part of everything—from outdoor adventures and games to screen time—by weaving reading and writing into your child's favorite activities.

Take family reading field trips

Watch your child's reading comprehension and vocabulary grow when you connect books with real-life experiences. To pair reading with summer outings and maximize learning:

1. **Visit the library** before family outings. Look for stories and nonfiction books to build your child's knowledge about your destinations. If you're headed to a fair or festival for example, find books about its theme or activities, such as games, foods and crafts.
2. **Make a list** of things to look for during your trip based on your reading. While hiking or camping, your child might look for a giant sequoia, a fawn or trail markers.
3. **Encourage your child** to make connections to the reading during your outings. Your child will be excited to point out a dalmatian during a fire station tour or to show you fossils in a museum. Boost understanding of new concepts by asking questions like, "Why might firefighters sleep at the station?" or "Where do you think this fossil came from?"
4. **Take photos during trips.** At home, your child can make a scrapbook or even write stories about your adventures and use the photos as illustrations.
5. **Reread library books** and have your child point out things you experienced.

Play word games everywhere you go

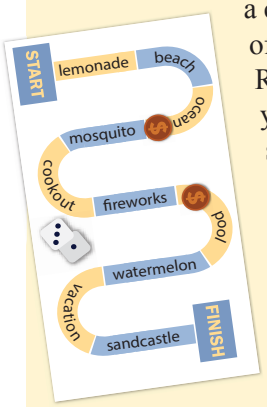
Here are three games that build your child's awareness of sounds and parts within words. They require no materials, so you can play them anywhere:

1. **Blend the Sounds.** Take turns secretly thinking of a word and saying each individual sound within it (*s-w-i-m*). Try not to exaggerate or draw out the sounds. The other person has to guess your word, spell it and use it in a sentence.
2. **Compound Showdown.** Compete to make compound words—long words formed by two shorter words. To start, one player says a short word, such as *ball*. Take turns saying a compound word that includes the word (*baseball, ballpark, gumball*, etc.). The player who thinks of the last compound word chooses the next word. Try *sun, night, yard, board* and *book*.
3. **License Plate Scramble.** Choose a license plate and think of a word that includes all its letters. Your child might see a plate with LPM and say *lamp* or *maple*.

Design a reading board game

Here's a great way to make reading practice fun. Help your child follow these steps to create and play a board game that the whole family will enjoy:

1. **Draw an s-shaped board** game path like in Candy Land on a large sheet of paper or poster board. Draw lines to divide the path into spaces, and label *Start* and *Finish*. In each of the other spaces, write a summer-themed word, such as *sandcastle, pool, lemonade* and *fireworks*.
2. **Take turns rolling a die** and moving a small token, such as a coin, the number of spaces rolled. Read the word you land on, and say another word that begins with the same sound ("*Lemonade, lion!*"). The first player to reach *Finish* by exact count wins.



Now challenge your child to design a new reading game!

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Discover new words during summer activities

Research shows vocabulary drives reading comprehension. Try these strategies to expand your child's word knowledge this summer:

- **Explore degrees of meaning.** Is the weather *balmy*, or is it *hot*? Use a range of words to describe the weather by writing synonyms (words with the same or similar meanings) for *hot* on separate slips of paper. Have your child arrange them according to temperature level (*balmy – hot – sizzling – scalding – boiling*). Try this with other words, too. Would your child describe ice cream as *good* or *scrumptious*? Are the cicadas *loud* or *earsplitting*? Which words could go in between?
- **Use apps to learn** nature-related words. Download a free app that identifies living things (Seek, Google Lens) or stars and planets (Sky Guide, Night Sky.) Take daytime and nighttime summer walks, and help your child use the apps to learn words for plants, animals, planets, stars and constellations.
- **Read everything!** Everywhere you go, look for things to read, such as historical markers, restaurant menus, business cards, advertising circulars, billboards, food labels, museum placards, posted rules, etc. Help your child sound out new words and discuss their meanings.

Source: S.A. Stahl and W.E. Nagy, *Teaching Word Meanings*, L. Erlbaum Associates.

Help your child think like an author

Teachers know that children's authors make strong mentors for young writers. Check out library books by your child's favorite authors. Read them together, and talk about interesting choices the authors make. Help your child notice:

1. **Text elements.** The author may use all capital letters or speech bubbles in some parts of the story.
2. **Small moments.** Instead of writing about an entire day at the beach, an author might focus on watching baby seagulls run from the waves.
3. **Repetition.** Some authors use repeating words or phrases, like "But he was still hungry" in Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

Encourage your child to keep a list of common techniques and try writing stories that incorporate some of them.

Inspire reading

Reading for pleasure for at least 20 minutes a day helps your child maintain reading progress. To provide motivation:

- **Help your child** set fun reading goals. Instead of a certain number of books or pages, your child might decide to read a book set on each continent, every book in a series or all the books by a chosen author.
- **Use screen media as inspiration.** A younger child might like picture books featuring favorite TV characters. An older child might be interested in nonfiction books about video games.
- **Read in interesting places.** Read in a tent, by the pool, on the beach, during a hike or next to a lake.

Mix and match parts of speech

Understanding parts of speech helps your child write clear, meaningful sentences. Writing about summer activities is a great way to practice.

1. **Together, brainstorm** 10 nouns (people, places, things and animals), 10 verbs (action words) and 10 adjectives (words that describe nouns). Have your child write each word on a separate slip of paper and put the slips for each part of speech in a seperate piles.
2. **Take turns drawing a word** from each pile and making up a sentence. A sentence for *family*, *love* and *sandcastle* might be "Our *family loves* to build *sandcastles*."
3. **Ask your child to write** down the sentences and use them to create a story about your family's summer.

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