Elementary School • April 2026

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Baldwin-Whitehall School District

Students who read independently read more—and enjoy doing it

Research shows that independent reading has a positive effect on school success: The more students read for pleasure, the more they enjoy—and benefit from—reading in school.

Unlike assigned reading, independent reading lets students choose reading material and read purely for enjoyment. They don't have to answer comprehension questions or check in with a teacher.

To encourage independent reading at home:

- **Set an example.** If you read for pleasure often, your child may join you.
- **Carve out time** each week when family members gather together to read.
- **Ask questions** about what your child is reading. Demonstrate interest in learning more about the books your child likes.

Source: *Literacy Leadership Brief: Creating Passionate Readers Through Independent Reading,* International Literacy Association.

Explore different types of literature while learning about flowers

Spring is here and flowers are in bloom—in gardens, in planters and even in books. Help your preschooler learn more about flowers by investigating different types of literature. With your child, read a:

- **Fiction story about a flower.** Discuss ways to tell that it is fiction. For example, do the flowers speak?
- **Nonfiction book about flowers.** Discuss characteristics of nonfiction. Are there photos or realistic illustrations? Did your child learn facts?
- **Poem about a flower.** How can your child tell that this is poetry? Do the words follow a pattern or rhyme?

Have fun with poetry this month

April is National Poetry Month, so look for collections of funny poetry to read with your child. Try Shel Silverstein's *Where the Sidewalk Ends* or Bruce Lansky's *A Bad Case of the Giggles*.

Then, don't just read the poems together—act them out! Use a booming voice, a whisper or a squeaky voice—whatever you think is appropriate. Or, change the words to make an even sillier poem.

Reading mission: Find mistakes!

Mistakes aren't fun—unless you're the one catching them! Challenge your child to find mistakes when reading. Your child might see them in your local newspaper, on signs or in notes you write. Consider making a mistake on purpose to see if your elementary schooler can find it!

Ask 'what if?' questions

Frequent writing reinforces and enhances children's reading abilities. Ask a few "what if?" questions to spark imagination. Then, challenge your child to write short stories that explain the answers.

Ask questions like:

- **What if** oranges were purple?
- **What if** dogs could talk?
- **What if** you could stop time?
- **What if** everyone had the same name?
- **What if** gravity suddenly stopped working for an hour?

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Stand up to the 'fourth-grade slump'

Interest in reading often drops as students move from early elementary school to the upper grades. Some experts say fourth grade tends to be when this starts.

To maintain your child's interest, make sure reading time at home is frequent and fun. Keep irresistible materials around the house, such as:

- **Novels** related to your child's interests.
- **Kid-friendly news articles** and comics.
- **Biographies** of role models.
- **Magazines** about your child's favorite topics.
- **Cookbooks** and other how-to books.
- **High-quality graphic** (comic-book style) novels.
- **Books and articles** you enjoy reading—so you can set a good example!

Review the rules for capital letters

Your child has learned about capital letters in school. Talk about when to use them. Beyond using them to begin sentences, your child should use them when writing:

- **The pronoun "I."**
- **Important words** in titles (*The Mouse and the Motorcycle*).
- **Names of people,** organizations and specific places (*Bryan, Brown Elementary School, Spain*).
- **Days of the week**, months and holidays (*Monday, April, Earth Day*).
- **Titles** associated with names (*Aunt Rosie, Grandpa*).

Encourage your child to look in books to find other times that writers use capital letters. Talk about why people capitalize when they write. What if we only used lowercase letters? What if we only wrote in capitals?

Q: My elementary schooler is not very confident when reading aloud. What can I do to help build my child's confidence?

A: Encourage your child to practice! Read together every day. Take turns reading aloud. Demonstrate how to pronounce words your child is unsure of. Support reading comprehension by asking your child plenty of questions. In addition to reading, keep talking with your child every day to foster language and vocabulary skills.

Help your child select a book by ranking titles

Next time you're at a bookstore or library, suggest that your child take a closer look at the book titles. Which five or 10 titles does your child like best? Why? What's the top pick? Suggest your child try that book and see if it lives up to its name!

For lower elementary readers:

- ***The Day the Crayons Quit*** by Drew Daywalt. When Duncan opens his crayon box, he finds a note from each of his crayons. Every crayon is upset and they've all gone on strike!
- ***A House for Hermit Crab*** by Eric Carle. Hermit Crab outgrows his shell and finds a new home. Kids will relate to the discomfort and value of change.

For upper elementary readers:

- ***Nouns and Verbs Have a Field Day*** by Robin Pulver. It's Field Day in Mr. Wright's class—and the nouns and verbs that the students have been studying join in!
- ***The Have a Good Day Cafe*** by Frances Park and Ginger Park. Every day, Mike's family sells food from their food cart. But when business starts to slow, Mike and his grandma come up with a plan.

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