

Volume XVI

Growing Readers Through the Elementary Years

What Changes from Kindergarten to Fifth Grade?

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When your child enters kindergarten, reading may look very different from what it looks like in fifth grade. A kindergartener may be learning to identify sounds in words and blend those sounds together, while a fifth grader may be reading a chapter book and analyzing an author's message.

Both students are doing important literacy work—but the work changes over time.

We believe every child can grow into a confident, capable reader. As children move through elementary school, they build upon the skills they learned in previous years. Our goal is to help families understand what literacy development can look like at each stage and provide simple ways to support reading at home.



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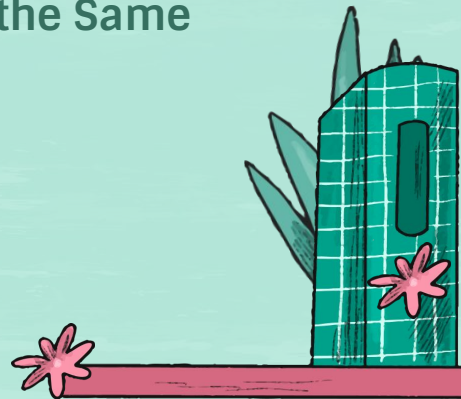
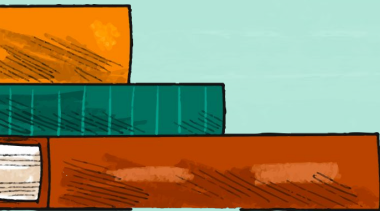
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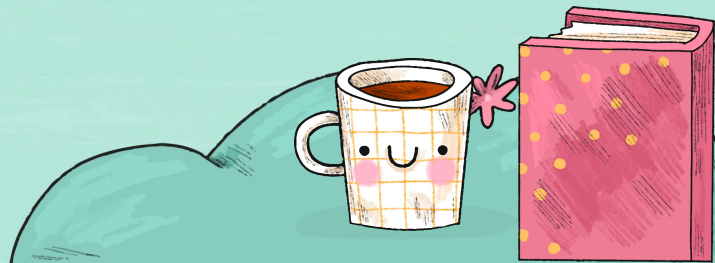
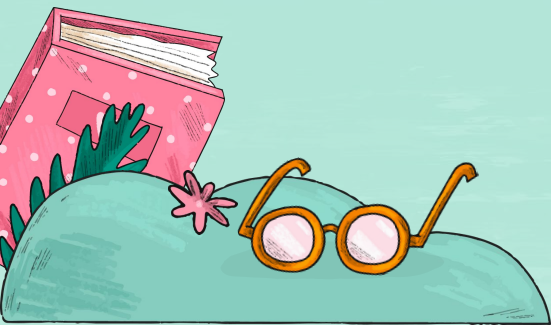


Three books are standing on a pink shelf in the top right corner. The first book is green with a white grid pattern, the second is orange, and the third is brown.

1

Kindergarten & First Grade

Learning How to Read



In kindergarten and first grade, children are developing the **foundational skills that allow them to become readers**.

This is an exciting time because children are beginning to understand that spoken words are made up of sounds and that letters represent those sounds.

What are children learning?

Phonemic Awareness

Children learn to hear and work with the individual sounds in spoken words.

For example:

- What sounds do you hear in *cat*?
- What word do you have when you blend /m/ /ă/ /p/?
- What happens if we change the /m/ in *map* to /t/?



Phonics

Children learn the predictable relationships between letters and sounds and use that knowledge to read and spell words.

Decoding

Students practice using their phonics knowledge to figure out unfamiliar words rather than simply memorizing words.

Fluency

As children become more accurate readers, they work toward reading words smoothly, accurately, and with appropriate expression.

Comprehension

Even beginning readers are developing comprehension. Children listen to stories, talk about characters and events, make predictions, retell stories, and answer questions about what they hear and read.



How can parents help?

 **Read aloud every day.** Even when your child is learning to read independently, continue reading books that are more complex than they can read on their own.

 **Play with sounds.** Notice rhyming words, clap syllables, identify beginning sounds, and play word games in the car or at the dinner table.

 **Let your child work through words.** When your child gets stuck, give them time to look at the letters, think about the sounds, and try the word.

 **Talk about books.** Ask questions such as, "What happened?" "Why did the character do that?" or "What do you think will happen next?"

 **Celebrate effort.** Learning to read takes time. Praise your child's persistence and willingness to try.



A helpful reminder for parents:

At this stage, reading accuracy matters. Children are building the foundational skills they will use for the rest of their reading lives.





2

Second & Third Grade

Becoming More Fluent & Confident Readers



By second and third grade, many children are becoming more independent readers. They are moving from spending much of their reading time **learning how to read** toward using reading as a way to **learn new information and ideas**.

However, foundational skills are still important. Students continue to strengthen decoding, spelling, and fluency while encountering increasingly complex vocabulary and text.





What are children learning?

Fluency

Students work toward reading smoothly, accurately, and with expression. Increased fluency allows them to focus more of their attention on understanding what they are reading.

Vocabulary

Children encounter many new words through books and conversations. They learn what words mean, how words are used, and how different words are connected.

Comprehension

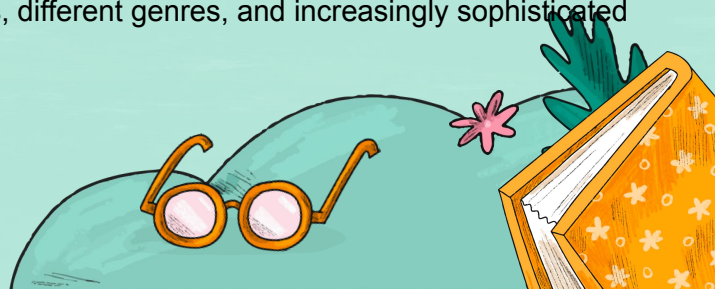
Students move beyond simply recalling what happened. They begin to explain their thinking and use evidence from the text.

Background Knowledge

Reading across different subjects helps children build knowledge about the world. That knowledge actually makes it easier to understand future texts.

More Complex Texts

Students encounter longer books, multiple chapters, unfamiliar topics, different genres, and increasingly sophisticated ideas.



How can parents help?



Keep reading together. Your child may be capable of reading independently, but that doesn't mean you should stop reading aloud together.



Talk about what your child is reading. Instead of only asking, "Did you like the book?" try:

- "What was the problem in the story?"
- "What makes you think that?"
- "What did you learn?"
- "What was the most important part?"
- "Did anything surprise you?"



Encourage rereading. Rereading a familiar book can help children develop fluency, confidence, and deeper understanding.



Read a variety of texts. Fiction, nonfiction, biographies, poetry, graphic novels, magazines, and books about hobbies or interests can all contribute to literacy development.



Build knowledge through reading. If your child is fascinated by dinosaurs, space, animals, sports, or history, use that interest as an opportunity to read and learn together.

A helpful reminder for parents: Don't worry if your child doesn't always choose the "hardest" book. Reading books they enjoy and can read successfully helps build confidence, fluency, and a positive identity as a reader.

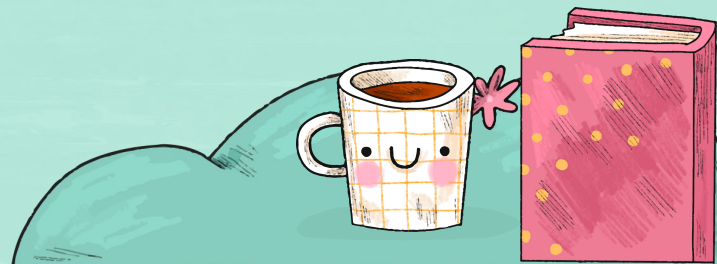
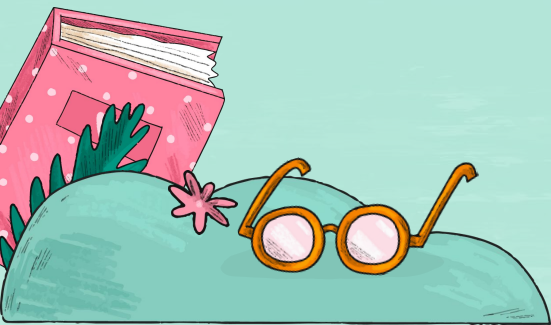


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Fourth & Fifth Grade

Reading to Learn & Think Deeply

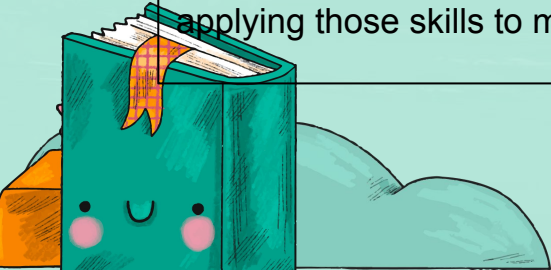




By fourth and fifth grade, reading becomes an increasingly important tool for learning across the school day.

Students are expected to use reading to **learn new information, build knowledge, solve problems, understand different perspectives, and think critically.**

This doesn't mean that foundational reading skills are no longer important. Students continue to develop vocabulary, fluency, decoding, and comprehension while applying those skills to more challenging texts.



What are children learning?

Building Knowledge

Students read to learn about science, history, literature, and the world around them.

Analyzing Text

Students begin to think more deeply about an author's choices, characters, themes, arguments, and ideas.

Vocabulary in Context

Students encounter increasingly sophisticated words and learn to determine meaning using context, word parts, and their growing knowledge.

Making Inferences

Students learn to combine what the author tells them with what they already know to draw conclusions. For example:

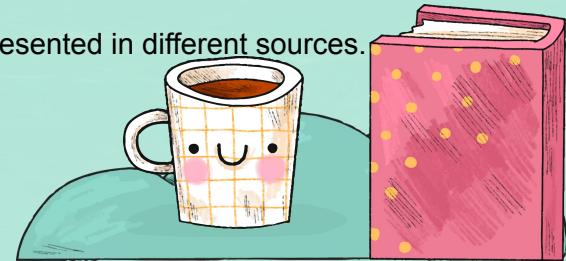
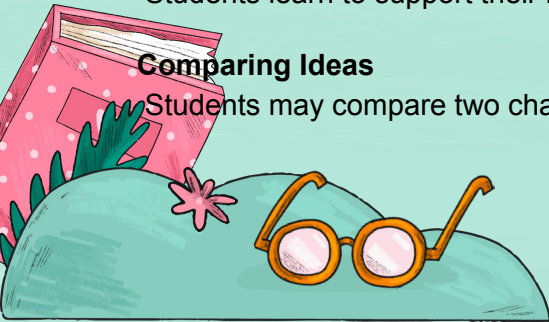
"The character didn't say she was nervous, but the author describes her hands shaking and her stomach feeling queasy.
What can we infer?"

Using Evidence

Students learn to support their ideas with specific information from the text.

Comparing Ideas

Students may compare two characters, two texts, two authors' perspectives, or information presented in different sources.



How Can Parents Help?

Ask your child to explain their thinking.

Instead of focusing only on whether an answer is correct, ask, "What makes you think that?"

Read challenging books together.

Reading aloud remains valuable—even in fifth grade. Parents can introduce children to vocabulary, topics, and books that may be beyond what they can comfortably read independently.

Talk about nonfiction.

Read articles, biographies, science books, historical texts, and informational websites together. Ask your child to explain what they learned.

Make connections.

Ask:

- "Does this remind you of anything?"
- "How does this connect to something you learned in school?"
- "How are these two characters/texts alike?"
- "Why do you think the author included that detail?"

Encourage productive struggle.

When your child encounters a difficult word or passage, resist the urge to immediately provide the answer. Encourage them to reread, look for clues, break apart unfamiliar words, or use context.

A helpful reminder for parents:

The goal isn't simply to read harder books. The goal is to become a deeper thinker.



What Stays the Same from K-5?

Although reading looks different in kindergarten than it does in fifth grade, some things never change.

Children need to:

Read regularly.

Consistent practice matters.

Hear fluent reading.

Children benefit from hearing adults model expressive, thoughtful reading.

Talk about books.

Conversation strengthens vocabulary, comprehension, and critical thinking.

Build knowledge.

The more children know about the world, the more they can understand what they read.

Read things they enjoy.

Interest and enjoyment help children develop a positive identity as readers.

Be encouraged.

Reading development isn't always a straight line. Some books will feel easy, while others will feel challenging. That's part of becoming a reader.



What Does This Look Like at Home?

Make Reading a Daily Habit

Set aside a predictable time each day for reading.

Read Aloud—Even to Older Children

Your child is never too old to benefit from hearing a great book read aloud.

Let Children See You Read

Children notice what adults value. Let them see you reading books, newspapers, magazines, recipes, or other materials.

Keep It Positive

The goal is to help children see themselves as **readers**, not to make reading feel like a daily battle.

Talk, Talk, Talk

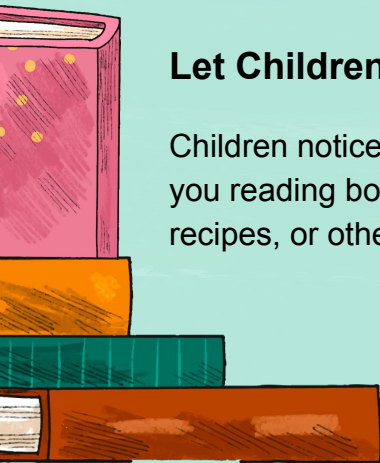
Conversations at dinner, in the car, while cooking, or during a walk are opportunities to build vocabulary and background knowledge.

Visit the Library

Make choosing books a regular family activity.

Follow Their Interests

If your child loves sharks, soccer, Minecraft, horses, mysteries, or space, use that interest to encourage reading.





Every child becomes a reader at their own pace.

Some children fall in love with books immediately. Others need time to discover the topics, authors, or formats that capture their attention. Some children will read independently for hours, while others need encouragement to get started.

Our role as educators—and your role as parents—is to keep helping children move forward.

The small things families do every day—reading a bedtime story, talking about a book, visiting the library, listening to an audiobook in the car, or asking a child to explain something they learned—can help build lifelong readers.

