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Sharpen Reading Skills all Summer Long!

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The lazy days of summer have begun. What will your child do to keep his or her reading skills up to par over these next weeks? TV and video games will not fill the bill for retaining academic skills, especially reading. Encourage your child to sharpen and expand his or her reading skills during the summer by visiting your local public library or bookstore to shop for good books. Children who don't read during the summer can lose valuable reading progress they accomplished during the school year. Ask your child's teacher to suggest books that are grade-level appropriate and will target his or her academic skills.

Larger public libraries and many bookstores offer free summer reading programs for children of different ages and grade levels. They also provide excellent resources and information about the importance of summer reading to avoid summer learning loss. Many library and bookstore programs offer daily story times and activities (targeted to specific age groups) to encourage kids (and their parents) to read, learn about different genres of literature, and have fun with books.

The Web offers oodles of grade-level reading lists and extension activities, family projects, and target vocabulary for summer reading. These sites are very user-friendly and are excellent resources for students searching for something good to read, parents who are looking to help their kids locate great books, or teachers who may be compiling book lists for the next school year.

Here are 10 suggestions to encourage reading among your family and friends during the summer:

1. Let your children read whatever age- or grade-level appropriate book they choose.

During the school year, children must read whatever the teacher or curriculum dictates. Summer should be a time to read for pleasure about subjects or stories that are interesting to your children. Reading is reading, regardless of the subject.



2. Set the example.

Let your child see you reading books, newspapers, or magazines. Encourage your children to do the same along with you. Reading after a full day of activity is a great way to help children unwind. For little ones, reading bedtime stories creates precious moments to spend with your child.



3. Read aloud.

Young children (even older ones) love listening to stories. Let your child choose a book for you to read aloud. Emulate the characters voices, stop and ask questions, and talk about the illustrations that accompany the story. All of these lead to great discussions and conversation. Ask your child to retell all or parts of the story, tell a specific order of events, tell what they think will happen next, or describe the characters in the story and compare them to people they know (which is good for a laugh!).



4. Pack books for summer trips.

Some children may get motion sickness reading in a moving vehicle. That's okay. Have age-appropriate books, magazines, and puzzle books (word search, crossword, or Sudoku) ready to read or complete during wait time, down time, before nap time, bed time, etc. instead of constantly playing hand-held video games, or worse, doing nothing.



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5. Always have age- and grade-level appropriate materials available for reading at home.

Magazines and books are always free to check out from your local public library. Get a library card for each member of the family. Make a routine visit once a week and let your child(ren) pick out something to read. Return the books and magazines and pick out new ones on the next visit. Shop for used books at yard sales, flea markets, and used book stores. During the school year, keep summer in mind and support your school's book fair where you can buy new books that target grade level academic skills relatively cheaper than in retail stores.



Then have the child write down a short meaning for the word. Continue to review the words and their meanings. Have your child make up a new sentence using each word in the same or, if possible, a different context. Have your child categorize words that refer to occupations, transportation, action words, describing words, etc. This helps the child learn how to generalize word meanings into other contexts. For example the word "bear" is an action word (verb), an animal (noun), and a word that figuratively describes someone's character.

6. Create family activities and projects that correlate to the book your child is reading.

For example, if your child is reading about baseball, attend a game. If the story is about dresses (The Hundred Dresses) draw, cut out, color, and design 100 paper dresses! Let your imagination go wild. Cook some Green Eggs and Ham!



9. Create a book club with other children and their parents.

Meet periodically to exchange books that your children have read countless times for books their friends have read. Have the children recommend books that they enjoyed reading to each other. Parents can take their books to swap as well.



10. When your children outgrow their books... (except for their keepsakes),

donate them to children's hospitals, charitable organizations, day care organizations, doctors' offices, child protective services or safe houses. Never throw away a book!



7. Don't set time requirements for reading as teachers may do during the school year.

Don't insist that your child read exactly 15 minutes every day before dinner. Allow your child to read whatever he or she chooses and read as long as he or she wants. Encourage your child to read, don't demand it. To keep your child interested in continuing to read his or her book, ask your child questions like, "What's happening with Charlotte and Wilbur right now (Charlotte's Web)? Let me know what Charlotte does next."



Enjoy summer reading with your children!



8. Make a "My Vocabulary Book." Purchase or make a small notebook.

Ask your child to write down words in the text that he or she doesn't know or understand and the page number where the word appears. Find the word; read the word in its sentence, and talk about the word in its context.



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