Reading Together

Reading to your child is one of the best ways you can encourage a love of reading. Children who are becoming strong, independent readers still enjoy the warm intimacy of “story time” with their parents. Here are some tips for making this a special “you-and-me time.”

• Set aside a time each day to read with your child. Making reading a regular routine shows your child that it’s an important family activity.

• Find a cozy, comfortable place for reading. Set out comfy cushions on the sofa. Get snuggly on your child’s bed. Make a tent by throwing a sheet over a table and sitting underneath with a flashlight. Spread out a blanket on the front porch or in the back yard. Whatever setting you choose, make reading time a special, intimate time with your child.

• Choose reading materials that will captivate and challenge your child. When choosing something to read, include books and magazines that are fun to read but that also broaden your child’s view of the world. For example, introduce a story about a character from a different culture. Or, read a nature magazine, a how-to book, or other nonfiction work and explore fascinating new topics.

• Ask questions during reading time to check comprehension. Ask questions such as Why did the character do that? and Would you have done what the character did? This lets you check your child’s comprehension of the material. It also encourages your child to evaluate or form opinions about what was read. However, only ask questions when they seem natural and they don’t interrupt the reading flow. More importantly, keep the discussions low-key so that the focus is not on interrogation, but on your child’s enjoyment of the book.

• Change it up. Actively engage your child in the reading process. Read to your child on some days, but on other days, let your child read to you. Or, take turns reading paragraphs and pages. You might even try reading a few sentences together in unison. Varying your reading approach will help keep your reading time fresh.

A Special Word Book

A rich vocabulary helps a child use spoken and written language more effectively. The more words that a child knows, the easier it is for him or her to figure out and understand them the first time he sees them in print. Motivate your child to learn new words by making a special word book. First, provide your child with a blank notebook. Let him or her decorate it so that it is colorful and inviting. Then, each time your child comes across a new or interesting word, have him or her write the word and its definition in the book. Your child may also want to include a sentence using the word or a picture illustrating its meaning. Every time your child fills the book with 10 new words, provide a reward such as a small treat, a 3-D sticker or special pencil, an extended special time with you, or a favorite snack. Continue with this process for as long as your child stays interested; it’s amazing to see how long your child’s list of words can grow!

Variation: Have your child alphabetize the notebook by labeling the first few pages A, the next few B, and so on. (Adjust the number of pages according to how many pages are in the book.) As your child learns new words, have him or her write them on the appropriate pages.

Synonyms Pickup

Synonyms help expand children’s vocabulary as well as teach the subtle nuances of language. (For example, the sentence This building is old evokes a different “picture” from This building is ancient.) Prepare a fun flashcard game to review synonyms with your child. First, choose a word that has various synonyms, and then write several of the synonyms on index cards or construction paper. (For instance, you could choose big as your target word, and then make flashcards with colossal, enormous, giant, gigantic, huge, and large.) Include a few cards that display words that are not synonyms. To play the game, lay the cards face down on a table. Tell your child the target word. Then, at your signal, your child should start turning over the cards and picking up the matching synonyms. See how quickly he or she can find all the words.

Variations:

• Let your child use a children’s thesaurus or the Internet to find ten or more synonym pairs such as huge/large, small/little, and bright/shiny. Help your child make flashcards with the words. Then, lay all the cards face down on a table. At your signal, have your child turn over the cards and pair up the synonyms as fast as possible.

• Help your child make flashcards of antonym pairs. Then, play the game as described above.

Tips for Reading Success

Your Hot Dots® Let’s Master Reading set offers structured question-and-answer activities designed to introduce and reinforce grade-specific reading skills. This tip sheet is designed to provide ways to supplement the learning in the set.

Second and third graders already know many words by sight and are able to “sound out” unfamiliar words by using phonics and other decoding skills. At this stage, the focus is on helping children become fluent, efficient readers. The following tips and ideas will help you build on your child’s developing skills and foster reading success.
On the Lookout for Prefixes and Suffixes

A knowledge of prefixes and suffixes helps children identify the meanings of new words. Use this simple activity to let your child see that prefixes and suffixes make up many of the words found in everyday reading and writing. Begin by writing a prefix or suffix at the top of a sheet of paper, and include its meaning (see suggestions below). Next, display the paper in a convenient spot, such as on a refrigerator or a bulletin board, and keep it there for one week. During that time, challenge your child to be on the lookout for words containing that prefix or suffix. Encourage him or her to look in library books, textbooks, magazines, flyers, or other reading materials. Whenever your child finds an appropriate word, have him or her write it on the sheet of paper, along with the sentence in which the word was used. At the end of the week, discuss the words and their meanings with your child. Repeat the activity with a new prefix or suffix the following week.

Here are a few prefixes and suffixes to get you started:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prefix</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bi-</td>
<td>two</td>
<td>bicycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dis-</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>im-, in-</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>impossible, incorrect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mis-</td>
<td>wrongly, badly</td>
<td>misbehave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pre-</td>
<td>before</td>
<td>preview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>re-</td>
<td>again</td>
<td>rewrite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un-</td>
<td>not</td>
<td>unhappy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tri-</td>
<td>three</td>
<td>tricycle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-able</td>
<td>able to</td>
<td>changeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-er, or</td>
<td>one who</td>
<td>worker, doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ful</td>
<td>filled with</td>
<td>cheerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ish</td>
<td>like</td>
<td>foolish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-less</td>
<td>without</td>
<td>careless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ly</td>
<td>in a manner of</td>
<td>slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-ness</td>
<td>having</td>
<td>kindness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Share Some Laughs

Jokes and riddles manipulate words in fun and surprising ways. In fact, because many of them rely on puns, they are the perfect medium for teaching the concept of multiple-meaning words to children.

Riddle: What animal is sad all the time?  
Answer: The blue whale!

Jokes and riddles boost language development and encourage a sense of humor. Once children are “hooked” on jokes and riddles, they’ll be eager to learn more! Here are some ways you can incorporate reading and laughter into your family’s routines:

• Provide your child with joke books, either by buying them yourself or by borrowing them from the library. Then read the books together, or let family members take turns reading the jokes and riddles to one other.

• Cut out newspaper comic strips that you think are funny and age-appropriate, and post them on the refrigerator for your child to enjoy.

• Have your child make a book of favorite riddles. Have him or her write and illustrate a riddle on the front of a sheet of paper, and write and illustrate its answer on the back. Store the papers in a binder. Then, every so often, let your child read the collection to you.

Treasure Hunt

The ability to read and follow directions accurately is important for people of any age. Help develop this skill by challenging your child to an exciting treasure hunt. Prepare the game ahead of time without your child’s knowledge. First, hide a small treasure in your home or yard. The treasure can be an inexpensive toy, a fun snack, a note from you to your child, or other item. Next, write clues on five slips of paper. The first four will take your child from one part of the home to another while the fifth clue will lead your child to the treasure. Place all but the first clue in the appropriate places (see the examples below). Then, hand your child the first clue. Have your child read the clue, go to the appropriate place, and find the second clue. Have your child go from clue to clue until the treasure is found.

Example:

Clue 1: Go to the kitchen and look in the drawer where the spoons are kept. (Clue 2 will be in the drawer.)
Clue 2: Look under the blue mat that’s in the family room. (Clue 3 will be under the mat.)
Clue 3: Open your bedroom closet. Look in the left pocket of your bathrobe. (Clue 4 will be in the pocket.)
Clue 4: Go to the bathroom and look in the bathtub. (Clue 5 will be in the bathtub.)
Clue 5: Go to the front door. Open it to find the treasure!
Fun with Recipes

Following recipes is a terrific way for children to build reading skills. Choose recipes that are short and easy to follow as well as ones that will result in something tasty for your child. Start by looking over the ingredients list with your child. Ask him to read the list and help you set out the items one by one. Go over any unfamiliar words or abbreviations (such as tsp. or c.). Then, read the recipe together and help your child follow the steps. Demonstrate or explain cooking terms such as whip or fold as needed. After your “reading lesson” is done, the two of you will end up with a delicious treat your whole family can enjoy.

Variation: Let your child collect the recipes to make his or her very own recipe collection, typing out the recipes on sheets of paper and storing them in a binder.

Comic Strip Sequencing

Effective readers are able to make connections between a series of events or ideas presented in the text. Understanding sequence—the concept that one thing follows another—helps your child make these connections. Here’s a quick and easy way for your child to practice sequencing skills at home. Cut apart a comic strip from the newspaper. (For younger readers, use comic strips made up of three panels; for older readers, use up to five or six panels.) Then, ask your child to put the pictures in order.

If you find that your child has trouble sequencing the pictures, read the panels together. Help your child to recognize clues that indicate story sequence. (For example, one panel might show a whole pizza and the next might show the pizza half-eaten. Another panel might show a character asking a question and the next might show a different character giving a response.) Work together to put the panels in order, and then read the story aloud together.

Look-Through-a-Book Scavenger Hunt

Here’s a great way to give children practice on scanning pages for specific information. Ahead of time, look through a book your child is reading or has read. Make a list of five or more directions like the following:

1. Look on page 4 for a five-letter word that describes a mountain.
2. Look on page 12 for a word that tells what the hikers found.
3. Look on page 7 for a four-letter word that rhymes with “sky.”
4. Look on page 15 for three words that tells where the girl hid the coin.
5. Look on page 10 for two words that tell how the boy felt.

Give the list to your child, and have him or her look through the book for the answers. As your child finds the words, have him or her write them beside the corresponding clues. Repeat the activity at a later date with a new book and a different set of clues.

Variation: Do the above activity, but use a newspaper instead. Write questions that can be answered easily by skimming through the pages. For example, questions can include: What is today’s weather forecast? What famous person visited our city yesterday? What is one movie that is playing this week? What store has an ad for washing machines?

Super Books

Let your child make a memory book of the books read with you. Provide a large, blank book, such as a sketch pad. Have your child write Super Books on the cover. Every time your child finishes a book, have him or her complete one of the following activities in the memory book. (Some activities are tailored to fictional stories while others are better suited to nonfiction material.) Have your child date the work so that he or she can keep track of when the books were read.

• Design a new cover for the book. Include the title and author’s name.
• Draw the part of the story you liked the best. Write a sentence to go with the picture.
• Write a main character’s name vertically on a sheet of paper. Use each letter to begin a word, phrase, or sentence that describes the character or tells what the person did.
• Write a book review telling why other children would or would not like the book.
• Make a pamphlet that describes the main characters, events, or facts in the story.
• Write five facts you learned.
• Write six questions that are answered in the book.
• Create a magazine ad for the book.