

## **Fifty Ways to Keep Your Kids Reading**

**All Summer** By Gwynne Spencer If you'd like to encourage your kids to read more (and watch less) this summer, here you will find half a hundred easy ideas. Reading isn't the most important thing—it's the **ONLY** thing!

1. Go to the library every single week and give the kids an hour to find a book they want to take home. Don't make them commit to reading it, just taking it home. Afterward, go get an ice cream cone. Chances are they'll read while they eat. Problem licked.
2. Go to a bookstore once a month and let each child buy one book. As their personal library grows, so will their love of books and owning them. When you own something, it takes root in your daily life.
3. Turn off the TV for at least two hours a day. Or limit the watching to two hours a day. The typical kid watches 20-30 hours of TV a week—a part time job! It won't kill them (or you) to turn the thing off.
4. Read out loud to your kids, no matter how old they are, unless they have moved out of the house and taken their furniture with them.
5. Read aloud at every meal
6. Keep a book in the car. Read out loud when you are waiting at soccer games, sitting in the drive-through, or just stuck in the car.
7. Keep a list on the refrigerator of books the kids have read this year. If they want to add a comment, so much the better.
8. Don't censor what kids read (within reason). If they're on a Harry Potter jag, sooner or later they'll run out of books and move on to something else.
9. Build kids' listening stamina by reading in short bursts (three minutes) and building up gradually until you get to at least thirty minutes.
10. Don't test kids on what they read (like Accelerated reader). Share it, yes, but don't give them the third degree or they'll quit reading altogether.
11. Don't have a fit if they abandon a book in the middle. They may go back to it, or it may not be the "right size" or it may be emotionally more than they can handle right now.
12. Ask the kids to read aloud to you while you drive, especially on long road trips. Ask them to read road signs to you, too.
13. Keep a reading journal that helps kids remember books. Don't ask them to do this on

their own—do it for them.

14. Listen to tapes of favorite books or books they'd never be able to read on their own. Highly recommended are the tapes from Listening Library, with hundreds of titles to choose from.
15. Help start a reading club for three other kids (plus yours) who are reading similar books. Treat them to pizza while they talk about the books. Take them on trips to the bookstore. Help them write to the author.
16. Encourage kids to write to their favorite authors and learn letter writing skills as well as acquaintance with real live authors. Most can be found on the Internet, or ask your library to look them up in *Something About the Author* series.
17. Set a good example and read every day yourself.
18. Read picture books to your big kids, not just the little ones. Try *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch or *The Day My Dogs Became Guys* by Merrill Markoe.
19. Encourage kids to try their hand at illustration using examples like Jan Brett and Tomie de Paola.
20. Make reading fashionable every chance you get.
21. Make sure Dad reads to kids too. Real men may not ask for directions, but they do read aloud.
22. Strategically place dictionaries, wordbooks, joke books and other "light reading" in the bathroom.
23. Casually pile a large stack of books in front of the TV every day.
24. Rotate different titles to the top of the microwave so kids will read while they wait for the popcorn.
25. Read nonfiction aloud to your kids when they are interested in a topic like bears or earthquakes or bombs. Some kids hate fiction and think of it as "lies" but may love nonfiction.
26. Take your kids to meet real live authors and illustrators at bookstores, libraries.
27. Read the book and THEN rent the video. Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*, Wilson Rawls' *Where the Red Fern Grows*, Louis Sachar's *Holes*, Natalie Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* are just a few examples.
28. Don't make kids look up hard words in the dictionary; tell them a synonym and keep going.
29. Reward reading with reading. When kids have read ten books, go for a field trip to the bookstore, not pizza.
30. Read them junk, too. Joke books, riddles, cartoons all count.
31. Read them short little stories like *One Minute Mysteries*, Encyclopedia Brown stories or short stories.

32. Read funny stuff that they might have missed because it didn't get published when they were reading in that "stage." Junie B. Jones series is too good for anybody to miss, and just because a kid is ten doesn't mean they won't love it!

33. Talk about books over dinner, the way grownups do. You may find out that your kid is in love with Marguerite Henry books or biographies, and you might never have known it because they were busy doing the required reading for school.

34. Don't get sucked into page-count wars with teachers. Just because a book doesn't have a certain minimum number of pages doesn't have anything to do with its literary merit.

35. Read Sue Denim's *The Dumb Bunnies* series before you go on trips and then write (and illustrate) your own Dumb Bunnies books.

36. Before you go on a long road trip, read Marissa Moss' *Amelia* books and then buy your kids composition books, colored pencils, Scotch tape, and write every day while you rest up from the day's travels.

37. Keep a book in your backpack or purse—word puzzles, jokes, little stories, riddles. You never know when you'll need it.

38. Take books along when you go camping. Nothing better than reading while the rain pours down on the tent.

39. Provide comfy places for kids to read.

40. Cook with kids using books as the basis (see *Recipes for Reading* for ideas of snacks that come from picture books like Rotten Ralph's Kitty Litter Cake) 41. Let kids draw while you read to them

42. Read outdoors when the opportunity arises

43. Share books while kids sip lemonade on a hot summer day.

44. Don't read too fast; give the listeners places to enter into the material through pauses and spaces.

45. Help kids compare and connect books and movies. How is Harry Potter like Luke Skywalker? Is there any similarity between Heidi and Misty of Chincoteague?

46. On a big wall map of the world, help them add a pushpin to show where each book takes place. You're teaching geography and literature together!

47. Invite other kids to join you on your jaunts to the library and bookstore.

48. Start a mother-daughter reading club or a mother-son reading adventure society to bring the world of books alive in a group of people.

49. Do art projects based on books. For inspiration, start with *The Rainbow Goblins* by UI de

Rico, and learn how to create similar color tableaux. Explore different media. 50. Go to library story times. If your kids are "too old" to sit and listen, have them volunteer to help work with younger children. 51. Have a book-nic. Pack a picnic lunch and take a stack of books to the park. Spend the day reading while eating a great lunch. Kids will think reading is an adventure.

52. Make your own books. Take digital pictures at your next field trip, print them out, and paste them to blank books or pieces of construction paper. Write your own story about your trip--great for beginning readers.

1. For older kids, take a class at a local community center in bookmaking or bookbinding. Adds to appreciation of the artwork of books.

2. My two sisters and I are insatiable readers, largely due to my mother's love of books.

1. When my kids were young, we had a tradition of reading in bed with snacks on rainy days.

2. When my kids asked for a raise in their allowance, I decided that rather than raise their allowance, they would get a trip to the bookstore to pick out their book of the month.

3. Each child gets a trip to the bookstore for a new book and hot chocolate when they make Honors at report card time.

4. When they find a book they love, I take them to the bookstore or library to find other books by the same author.

5. I give coupons for trips to the bookstore and a book for every birthday and major holiday (I've put the coupons in envelopes on the Christmas tree, put them in their Easter basket, etc.) My mom had a strict "no reading after bedtime" rule, then provided us with flashlights and extra batteries. Funny how she never caught us reading after lights out!

If you have an idea that ought to be added to this list, you can send it and get a free bumper sticker: *What Did You Read To Your Kid Today?* Gwynne Spencer is author of *TEACH YOUR CHILDREN WELL: A Guide to Teaching Your Child to Read At Home*, available for \$10 from Fifth Raccoon Publishing, P O Box 121, Mancos, CO 81328 or [fifthraccoon@aol.com](mailto:fifthraccoon@aol.com). ©2005 Gwynne Spencer