**7 Family-Friendly Literacy Activities to Empower Families as Readers**

As educators and [**advocates for literacy**](http://www.booksource.com/content/advocatehome.aspx), our efforts focus primarily on the day-to-day school environment. But to inspire a love of reading and have a positive impact on the literacy skills of today’s students, there’s one crucial ally we need in our corner: **families**.

**Literacy Begins at Home**

We all know that more frequent reading equals better readers. Students need to read widely and deeply - and become engaged with books from an early age - to develop strong literacy skills and a real desire to read.

**And this begins at home**.

According to the [**U.S. Department of Education’s America Reads Challenge**](http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/startearly/ch_1.html) (1999):

*“If daily reading begins infancy, by the time the child is 5 years old, he or she has been fed roughly 900 hours of brain food! Reduce that experience to just 30 minutes a week and the child’s hungry mind loses 770 hours of nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and stories. A kindergarten student who has not been read to could enter school with less than 60 hours of literacy nutrition.*

*No teacher, no matter how talented, can make up for those lost hours of mental nourishment.”*

With **World Book Day** on 7th March 2019, **International Literacy Day** on 8th September 2019, and **National Poetry Day** on 3rd October 2019 now is the perfect time to think about how families can incorporate reading and other literacy activities into their daily lives. Here are some of our favourite ways for children and parents to enjoy books, reading and literacy together.

**Family-Friendly Literacy Activities…**

* **Read together. Or separately. Really, just read.**

Children take their cues from what they see around them. Reading a favourite **fairy tale** or [**picture book**](https://www.booksourcebanter.com/2015/05/28/booksource-book-club-reads-picture-books/) aloud at bedtime, for example, allows parents to model fluency, expression, pronunciation and more - in the same way that teachers model these skills in the classroom.

But children also benefit when they see the adults around them reading on their own. Whether you’re engrossed in your favourite mystery series, reading the newspaper over breakfast on a Saturday morning or searching for non-fiction titles at the local library, you are setting the example that reading is a natural - and valuable - part of everyday life.

1. **Go to Family Literacy events at school.**

From fun events like book walks to mini-lessons on the value of reading workshop, [**Family Literacy events**](http://www.proteacher.org/c/874_Family_Literacy_Nights.html) provide parents with an opportunity to better understand what engaged literacy looks like in a school setting. This experience, in turn, can help them better implement engaged literacy practices at home.

(And if you’re an educator looking for more ways to build strong family-school partnerships, we recommend [***An Educator’s Guide to Family Involvement in Early Literacy***](http://www.booksource.com/Products/Educators-Guide-To-Family-Involvement-In-Early-Literacy--An__9781425807535.aspx?FromSearch=True) as a helpful and informative resource.)

1. **Take advantage of the many literacy resources available.**

Most parents aren’t teachers or literacy experts, and that’s okay. If you’re not sure how to talk about a book with your child, look for a resource like these activity-based [**Reading Adventure Packs**](http://www.readingrockets.org/article/reading-adventure-packs-families) from Reading Rockets - which are designed to support parents as educators.

The [**National Center for Families Learning**](http://www.familieslearning.org/) also features a wide variety of literacy-related resources and initiatives to help multiple generations learn and prosper together.

1. **Start a family book club.**

Is there a new title that your son or daughter wants to read? Why not read it together as a family! Take a page from the [**book clubs and literature circles**](https://www.booksourcebanter.com/2015/11/05/the-research-is-there-and-its-not-new-part-2-small-group-work-intimate-non-threatening-and-personal/) that teachers use in the classroom and get an in-depth conversation going.

Be sure to choose a book that appeals to all readers - and can accommodate all reading levels - in your family. [**Mother-daughter book clubs**](https://motherdaughterbookclub.com/) (or mother-son, father-son, father-daughter, grandparent-grandchild book clubs… whatever family dynamic you prefer) are another neat way to share books and reading with the people closest to you.



1. **Initiate dinner table discussions.**

You don’t always need to read the same titles as your children to talk about books together. Over dinner, discuss what they’re currently reading, and ask some basic [**comprehension**](http://www.booksource.com/SearchResults.aspx?q=comprehension%20strategies) questions like:

* “What is the main topic of the book?”
* “Where is the story set? How do you know?”
* “What do you think will happen next?”
* “How does this book compare to another one you’ve read on this topic?”

Let the conversation flow naturally, and be sure to share what you’re reading too. You can do this with homework too. (See ‘How I can help my child to succeed’ document)

1. **Explore print and language in the real world.**

Words are everywhere - not just in books. Yes, children benefit when parents and other adults read to them on a regular basis, but there are many other language- and print-rich environments that can help families prioritise literacy from an early age.

* Point to signs in the supermarket and identify sounds like “a” for apple when shopping for produce with a pre-schooler
* Pull out a cookbook and show your child how you follow the steps to make a batch of cookies
* Sing nursery rhymes and have lots of conversations (on any topic you like!) to help your child build a rich vocabulary and strong oral language skills
* Ask younger children to tell a story by drawing pictures and then “reading” their story to you
* Play a board game like Scrabble with older children to practise reading skills, expand vocabulary and more
* Listen to audio books together as a family (on a long car trip perhaps?)

1. **Develop 21st century literacy skills.**

Today’s students need to be prepared to do more than just read; they need to know how to critically evaluate text and media in a wide variety of formats. Does your child realise that reading something online doesn’t necessarily make it true?

While teachers are spending more and more time [**integrating technology into the classroom**](https://www.booksourcebanter.com/2015/10/09/are-you-using-or-integrating-technology-in-your-classroom/) and preparing students for a world that requires an increasingly broader set of literacy skills, it’s still up to parents to help our children think deeply about the multimedia they consume.

* Talk about the apps they use and the video games they play. See if they can identify the subtle messages each piece of digital media conveys.
* After watching a family movie, take the time to research a topic or theme from the film. Watch an online video or read a news article that offers more information. Discuss how the varying pieces of media present the topic differently.
* Does your child understand the subtle tactics advertisers use to influence customers? From TV commercials to cereal boxes, show them how marketing works - and how strong literacy and critical thinking skills can help them make informed decisions.

*Whether you’re a teacher or a parent (or both!), there are so many easy - and fun - ways to help children develop the literacy skills that are crucial to a lifetime of reading and learning.*

*What are you waiting for? With these ideas for family-friendly literacy activities, you can get started today!*

**According to research by the National Literacy Trust,**

* A boy born into an area with some of the most serious literacy challenges in the country can have a life expectancy 26.1 years shorter than a boy born into an area which has some of the fewest literacy challenges.
* A girl born into an area with some of the most serious literacy challenges in the country can have a life expectancy 20.9 years shorter than a girl born into an area which has some of the fewest literacy challenges.

**Literacy has an impact on EDUCATION…**

* Without the right help, between 50% and 90% of children with persistent communication needs go on to have reading difficulties. Vocabulary at age 5 is a very strong predictor of the qualifications achieved at school leaving age and beyond.
* The reading skills of 5 year olds with good and poor oral language skills were followed up; at age 6 there was a gap of a few months in reading age. By the time these young people were 14, this gap had widened to a difference of 5 years in reading age.
* Only a fifth of children with speech, language and communication needs reach the expected levels for their age in both English and Maths at age 11. Only 10% achieve 5 good GCSEs including English and Maths.

**Literacy has an impact on EMPLOYMENT…**

* Employers now rate communication skills as their highest priority - above qualifications - with 47% of employers in England reporting difficulty in finding employees with an appropriate level of oral communication skills.
* More than 8 out of 10 long-term unemployed young men have been found to have speech, language and communication needs.
* The cost to our economy of youth unemployment is substantial. A 2007 study by the Prince’s Trust put the economic cost of youth unemployment through lost productivity and benefits payments at £4,690,000,000 a year (£4.69billion).

**Literacy has an impact on HEALTH…**

* Poor communication is a risk factor for mental health.
* 40% of 7 to 14 year olds referred to child psychiatric services had a language impairment that had never been suspected.
* Without effective help a third of children with speech, language and communication needs require treatment for mental health problems in adult life.

**According to American research, people with serious mental illness:**

* Experience significant premature mortality NOT explained by suicide rates or smoking.
* Experience high levels of stigma.
* Are more likely than people without mental illness to have limited literacy.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING A RICH VOCABULARY**

***“One forgets words as one forgets names. One's vocabulary needs constant fertilizing or it will die.”*** *(Evelyn Waugh)*



* *A note for parents/carers*
* *Notes for pupils*
* *“No one speaks like that…”*
* *How you can develop a rich vocabulary*

(A note for Parents/Carers)

**5 REASONS WHY RICH VOCABULARY IS CRUCIAL TO YOUR CHILD'S SUCCESS**

* **It gives your child the ability to say what he or she means. By having several words at their disposal for describing an event or emotion, they can be explicit when sharing their ideas and opinions.**
* **It helps your child understand what other people are saying and what she/he is reading. Vocabulary is the foundation for comprehension. Unfamiliar words become holes in the text, preventing your child from completely understanding what he or she has just read.**
* **It bolsters their ability to grasp ideas and think more logically. The greater number of words your child has, the more he/she can interpret ideas from others and express his/her own ideas.**
* **It boosts your child’s power of persuasion. Having a rich vocabulary will help your child communicate in a more engaging way. Relying on one or two words to describe an idea will be repetitive and not as persuasive, as relying on a vocabulary of 10-15 similarly descriptive terms.**
* **It helps your child make a good impression on others. How articulate your child is constitutes a big part of the impression she or he makes on others throughout life.**

(Notes for Pupils)

**THE IMPORTANCE OF A RICH VOCABULARY WHEN WRITING**

* **Every good mechanic has a toolbox full of tools. Some tools are used more than others, but each one has a specific purpose.**
* **In much the same way, writers have a ‘toolbox’. Just as a really good mechanic can pull out the right tools to make a good engine even more powerful, a good writer can pull out the right tools at the right time to make good writing even more powerful.**
* **One tool that can ‘power-up’ your writing is a strong vocabulary.**

**“NO ONE SPEAKS LIKE THAT, THOUGH, SO WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?”**

* **We use spoken and written words every day to communicate ideas, thoughts and emotions to those around us. Sometimes we communicate successfully but sometimes we’re not quite so successful. *“That’s not what I meant!”* becomes our mantra (an often repeated word or phrase). However, a good vocabulary can help us say what we mean.**
* **When you’re faced with a writing assignment, a good vocabulary is an indispensable tool. If you have several synonyms (words with similar meanings) in your repertoire, you’ll be able to choose the best word for the job. Avoid vague words like ‘stuff’ or ‘things’ - these words do not give the reader a clear idea of what you really good mean.**
* **You need to work on building a rich vocabulary so that you can choose the stronger, more descriptive words in your writing. It makes your work more sophisticated and, often, more thought-provoking for the reader.**
* **It is also crucial to have a rich vocabulary when you tackle Close Reading-type papers. The SQA has stated that a great obstacle to success in this area is a lack of vocabulary from which pupils can draw. Many of the Nat 5 and Higher ‘Vocabulary Expansion’ worksheets contain words from past papers; these will undoubtedly help you prepare for the sort of testing vocabulary you are likely to face in examinations.**

**HOW YOU CAN DEVELOP A STRONGER VOCABULARY**

* **If you don’t have a strong vocabulary yet, the first way you can develop one is with a couple of tools: a thesaurus and a dictionary. A thesaurus (a book that lists synonyms and antonyms) is a helpful tool, but it is essential (very important and necessary) that you use a dictionary along with it. For example, imagine that I want to say that putting an engine together is difficult.**
* **However, I want a more descriptive word than ‘difficult’. What other word could I use? A thesaurus might give me choices like these: ‘complex’, ‘intricate’, ‘tricky’, and ‘thorny’. It’s important to have a good sense of the meanings of each word. The next step, then, is for me to look the words up in a dictionary to be certain of their meanings.**
* **Notice that each word has a slightly different meaning. Which meaning seems to work best when talking about an engine? Since an engine has many complexly interrelating (connected together like a puzzle) parts, the word ‘intricate’ seems to be a great choice. Putting an engine together can definitely be intricate work. My choice is made. The thesaurus and dictionary have saved the day and have helped me develop my vocabulary!**
* **Another way to develop a wide vocabulary is to read challenging books that contain rich vocabulary. These books will help you see the words in context (in their natural settings). The context can help you guess the meanings of the words and can give you a good sense of how they should be used.**
* **Write down words that you don’t know and look them up. Try to find them elsewhere, and write down the sentences you find. Listen for them in the world around you. Write down the sentences that you hear. Study these words when you can, and look for opportunities to use them in your speaking and writing.**
* **When tackling the ‘Vocabulary Expansion’ exercises on this website, begin by writing the basic definition of the word. Then write three sentences containing the word. The sentence context must demonstrate that you understand how to use the word appropriately. For example, if the word is ‘voracious’, it’s no use just writing: ‘The boy was voracious’ – this doesn’t demonstrate any understanding of how to use the word. You’d be far better off writing a sentence such as: ‘After playing in the game of football, the boy was so hungry that he had a voracious appetite.’**