

# BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Gardiners Avenue School

## Partner with a snowman for winter reading

There's just something about snowmen that seems to inspire writers. And December is the perfect time of year to check out one of these wintry titles:

- ***Sneezy the Snowman*** by Maureen Wright.
- ***The Greatest Snowman in the World!*** by Peter Hannan.
- ***Horrid Henry and the Abominable Snowman*** by Francesca Simon.
- ***Beware, The Snowman*** by R.L. Stine.
- ***Case of the Sneaky Snowman*** by Carolyn Keene.



Jupiter Images

After sharing one (or all!) of these snowy stories with your child, it's time to make your own. First, build a snowman with your child—either outside, out of actual snow, or inside, out of paper, cotton balls or even marshmallows.

Then, encourage your child to get inspired by his snowman. Ask him what kinds of adventures his snowman could have. Have him write his tale down—then make it a tradition to read his story on the first day of winter every year!

## Learn about the five 'phones' of literacy

What does *phonics* mean? How about *phonemic awareness*? Are they the same thing? These literacy terms can be confusing. There are actually five "phones." They include:

1. **Phonics.** This teaching method focuses on how letters and sounds are related. For example, *S* says ssssss, as in snake.
2. **Phonology.** Kids use this to distinguish between similar sounds, such as *wait* and *wade*.
3. **Phonetic spelling or reading.** This happens when kids spell (or read) a word the way it sounds (or appears). This leads to mistakes like writing *luv* for *love*.
4. **Phonological awareness.** Kids build awareness that words may contain several sounds. Counting syllables is one way to help with this.
5. **Phoneme awareness.** Kids also learn the sounds that create words. You can support this by emphasizing parts of words, such as each letter in *M-o-m*.

Source: S. Wren, "The Phive Phones of Reading," Reading Rockets, [www.readingrockets.org/article/347/](http://www.readingrockets.org/article/347/).

## Good attendance boosts reading skills

Research shows missing school has negative effects on reading and learning. This winter, resolve not to let your child miss school unless absolutely necessary. Then start 2012 with helpful routines. Stick to a regular sleep schedule and prepare school supplies at night. This makes mornings easier and prevents tardiness.



Source: "Every School Day Counts: The Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data," National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubns2009/attendancedata/chapter1a.asp>.

## Don't let cold weather increase your child's time in front of the TV

It's easy to lose track of TV time when it's too cold to play outside. Experts recommend kids have no more than 10 hours of screen time per week. To stick to that limit, come up with a plan. Decide on fun reading-related alternatives ahead of time, for example, or act out a play.



## Story starters bring life to writing

To help your child practice writing, make it fun! Instead of saying, "Why don't you write a story?" offer irresistible story starters like these:



- **It's the year 2100.** What are your future relatives doing?
- **You're a space explorer.**

What does your ship look like, and where are you going?

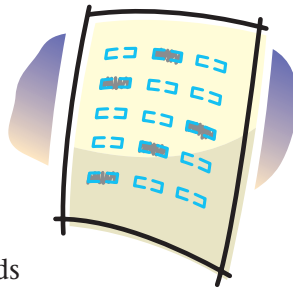
- **Oh no! Your hair turned into spaghetti,** and when you eat it, it grows right back! What will you do?

## Help your child understand how to read analogies *before* taking standardized tests

Analogies (or comparisons of words) often appear on standardized tests, and they may look something like this: *Apple* is to *sweet* as *lemon* is to \_\_\_\_\_. To help your child with questions like this, suggest that he:

- **Decide how the first two words are related.** In this example analogy, an apple *tastes* sweet. In other analogies, the words may be antonyms (opposites), synonyms (words with similar meanings), a whole and a part (like *hand* and *finger*) or a group and an item (such as *animal* and *bear*), for example.
- **Use that information to solve the analogy.** How does a lemon taste? Sour. *Sour* belongs in the blank.

Source: A. Reckner, "What's an analogy?" Fact Monster, [www.factmonster.com/spot/analogy.html](http://www.factmonster.com/spot/analogy.html).



## Reading is a fun, productive way to unwind

Few things are more relaxing than sitting down with a good book. Thankfully, this is one of the best ways to develop reading skills! To make reading a fun, family affair:

- **Visit the library regularly.** Look for books related to events in your lives. For example, "Grandma is planning a trip to Australia. Let's get some books about the country and things to do there."
- **Read together.** Choose a daily time for reading, such as before bed. Read to your child or take turns reading aloud. If your child prefers to read independently, stay nearby and enjoy a book yourself.



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Source: "Reading, Literacy and Your Child," University of Michigan Health System, [www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/reading.htm](http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/reading.htm).



**Q:** My child gets frustrated when he struggles to read a word. How can I help?

**A:** Suggest that he become a "reading detective." He can look for clues, such as sounds in the word and nearby pictures. You can also discuss similar words he knows. Sometimes it helps to re-read the sentence or to skip the troublesome word and keep reading. Then say, "What word would make sense there?"

Do you have a question about reading? Email [readingadvisor@parent-institute.com](mailto:readingadvisor@parent-institute.com).

## Popular reading show is online—and portable

"Between the Lions" is a respected PBS Kids show about reading. Now it also has an entertaining website for kids, complete with songs and videos to download and take with you! Find it at <http://pbskids.org/lions>.



## For lower elementary readers:

- ***The Gingerbread Man Loose in the School*** by Laura Murray (Putnam Juvenile). A gingerbread man is left behind as the class goes to recess. But this smart cookie plans to find them—and will get into plenty of trouble along the way.
- ***Mirror, Mirror: A Book of Reversible Verse*** by Marilyn Singer (Dutton Juvenile). These poems based on fairy tales have a special feature. They can be read down or up the page for different meanings!



## For upper elementary readers:

- ***Word After Word After Word*** by Patricia Maclachlan (Katherine Tegen Books). A writer tells fourth graders that everyone has a story to tell—and together they discover how right she is.
- ***The Case of the Fire Alarm*** by Dori Hillestad Butler (Albert Whitman & Company). Who pulled the school fire alarm? Buddy the therapy dog will find out! This is the fourth book in the *Buddy Files* series.

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