



Helping Your Child Choose Books for Independent Reading

Becoming a skilled reader is a lifelong pursuit. It doesn't happen overnight or by reading *only* at school and it requires continuous practice, development and refinement.

Independent reading should be part of all children's daily home routine by the time they're in the third or fourth grade. Check with your child's teacher to determine how long your child should be reading independently at home each day.

Reading at home requires access to books that are interesting and appropriate for the reader. The following are some ideas to help you select books for independent readers.

1. What are your child's interests or hobbies?

Follow your child's interests. Children who are already hooked on a topic will likely become totally engaged by a book on the same theme. Horse lovers will go for almost any horse books – fiction or non-fiction – that they can get their hands on, and the same is true if your child loves sports or music! Not only will your child develop reading skills and increase their knowledge, but they'll also enhance their love of reading by exploring topics that interest them.

2. Does your child have a favourite author?

Once a child finds a favourite author, they'll likely seek out other books by the same author and anxiously await new publications. Ask your librarian about other authors who might write in a similar style. This might broaden your child's reading and introduce a new favourite author.

3. What genres does your child enjoy reading from?

Do you have a child who enjoys mystery or adventure stories? Check at the bookstore or ask your librarian to help your child find a variety of titles in genres that are of interest to them.

Encourage your child to expand their interests by exploring other genres. Introduce them to adventures, mystery, humour, biography, inner conflict, historical fiction or animals.

4. Is your child facing a problem or trying to deal with a recent experience?

Books often help children understand challenging or difficult situations and put their concerns into perspective.

Discussing personal feelings and concerns through book characters is a safe way for children to express thoughts they might not otherwise know how to bring up. Books can open up and extend communication with your child.

5. How easy or hard should the book be to read?

Check with your child's teacher to find out what level your child is reading at. Too many unknown words or vocabulary that's beyond your child's reading level may take away the pleasure of reading and make it discouraging. You can also check the back of the book or the spine for a reading level by age or grade to ensure the book isn't going to be too challenging for them.

6. How long should the chapters of the book be?

Choose books that suit your child's reading skills. Younger readers may need shorter chapters to help them see they're making progress through the book. This also allows children who are still developing fluency the opportunity to reread a chapter if they need to review for understanding.

7. How can you tell what a book will be like until you read it?

Encourage your child to pay attention to book titles and to carefully examine book covers for clues on what the book will be about. Read the summary on the back of the book jacket or the inside flap. Go to the first page and read the first paragraph and skim through the book to see if it's appealing.

8. Does your child enjoy books with pictures or illustrations?

Children who are visual learners especially enjoy these books. Images also help children comprehend what they're reading.

9. What if my child only wants to read comic books?

Children go through stages in which they choose to read only one type of book. Continue to offer and introduce a variety of books that are easy to read. Remember that all types of books help develop comprehension and fluency!

10. If my child is an independent reader, does that mean we shouldn't read together anymore?

Too often the experience of being read to gets left behind when children become independent readers. Children of all ages enjoy listening to stories. Take advantage of this time together to continue to build an enjoyable and close relationship.

The bottom line on choosing books...

Remember that your child is ultimately the one who will be best at choosing a book that suits their personal interests and needs. Allow your child this choice. Be there to guide, encourage and support reading.

And finally...

We know that children who read become adults who read. We also know that, like any other skill, reading needs to be practiced on a daily basis, both at home and at school.

Provide your child with a variety of reading material and the opportunity to read, read and read some more! Talk to your child about what they read, encourage their efforts and praise their accomplishments.

Nurturing a love of reading is one of the most wonderful gifts you can offer your child!

“There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island.”

– Walt Disney

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