

Raising Readers: Tips for Parents

**JERRY L. JOHNS
LITERACY CLINIC**

Promoting a Love of Reading at Home for Students in Grades 6-12

Having the “skill” to read is an important part of the equation, but it is not sufficient for developing life-long readers. The other essential ingredient is having the “will” to want to read. In this issue of *Raising Readers*, I offer a brief rationale for families promoting a joy of reading as well as strategies, activities, and routines to help children and teens become life-long readers who love to read.

Many of the struggling readers I have worked with over the years didn't read for fun because they saw reading as a chore or an assignment. As a result, they avoided reading, only doing it when absolutely necessary. They then had less practice reading so they did not improve as readers, and they then enjoyed reading less because it was more difficult.

This cycle of the poor reader not reading and then falling farther behind in their reading while the good reader reads often and continues to improve as a result of the increased practice is



referred to as the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 1986) because the “rich get richer and the poor get poorer” as readers. Therefore, it is important for all readers, including those who struggle, to read often both in and out of school. By reading with children at home, parents can build a love of reading and provide opportunities for reading practice which can contribute to reading growth and enjoyment.

While teachers can do a great deal to help students build their reading skills and to encourage them to develop a love of reading, parents and families play an important role in building life-long readers. With so many competing demands for children's time, reading needs to become a habit. Families can give children the valuable gift of being a life-long reader, regardless of the child's age or present reading skills. Just like eating healthy or exercising regularly, it is important to help children build their “reading health” so that they can become motivated, enthusiastic readers. The following fun and simple activities, strategies, and routines can help students in grades 6-12 build their interest and joy for reading, books, and learning.



What Can Parents Do To Promote a Love of Reading with Children in Grades 6-12?

1. Reading takes many forms. If your teens are more interested in reading online, reading magazines, or reading video game manuals than reading novels, take heart; they are still reading! Praise your teens for reading, provide access to the types of things they like to read, and encourage them to expand reading interests.
2. Involve your teen in a family reading time on a regular basis. Many teens have hectic schedules with homework, extra-curricular activities, and friends. Try to set aside time at least several nights per week when your whole family reads, including teens.
3. Adolescents are very social and taking group outings as a family or with friends to the bookstore or library will connect that social interest to reading. Many bookstores and libraries have special events for teens such as book clubs, poetry slams, or author presentations. In addition, teens enjoy “hanging out” in the bookstore café with their friends reading and discussing books and magazines.
4. Many popular book series for teens have been made into movies such as *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Twilight*. Encourage your teen to read the book first and then to view the movie to consider which they liked better as well as how the book and movie versions differed.
5. Teens love their smart phones, and many great free reading “apps” are available such as: Word of the Day, Dictionary.com, Scrabble, e-books, and Good Reads (a social networking site for book reviews and recommendations).
6. Many teens tend to spend a great deal of time playing video games. Encourage your family to play word games together such *My Word Coach* and *Word Jong Party*, *Puzzler Collection*, and *Puzzle Challenge* for the Wii video game system.
7. Teens are often interested in current events, sports news, and entertainment news. Make newspapers (either print or electronic) available to your teen to read about these interests. Some popular topics addressed in teen magazines include entertainment, fashion, sports, and video gaming. Consider giving your teen a subscription to a favorite magazine for a gift.
8. Graphic novels have become very popular with teens. Most libraries and bookstores have sections devoted to graphic novels that appeal to teens. The American Library Association publishes lists of the best graphic novels on their website: <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/yalsa/booklist/sawards/greatgraphicnovelsforteens/gn.cfm>
9. Help your teens find reading materials related to their interests or hobbies. For example, if your teens are interested in music, cooking, art, fashion, video games, basketball, history, or technology, help them find books, magazines, websites, and other materials to read about these interests.
10. Read a popular novel that interests your teens and discuss it with them. By sharing books you and your teens can enjoy together, you can help them build a love of reading.
11. Don't nag your teens about reading because doing so will make reading a negative experience for them. Stay positive and keep looking for interesting, appealing materials and opportunities for your teens to read.



Questions or Comments?

Reach us at:
Jerry L. Johns
Literacy Clinic
3100 Sycamore Rd.
Suite 2003
DeKalb, IL 60115
(815)753-1416