

What Kids Really Want to Read



Know your child

Thousands of new children's books—long and short, poetry and prose, fantastical and realistic—are published every year. With this great variety, how can a parent or caregiver select just the right book to

capture a child's interest?

Even if you are not familiar with children's books, you know more about your child than anyone else does. You have the best possible chance to find a good fit.

A boy who dislikes reading may become engrossed in a book about his favorite athlete. A girl who rarely finishes books may discover a series that makes her feel as if she's found new friends. Knowing your children's interests helps you to tell when a book is "just right."

Don't worry if you can't find the perfect book right away. Make a list of your child's interests and then go to the library. If possible, select books you're also interested in, because enthusiasm is contagious, says Dr. Deborah Wooten of the University of Tennessee.

If you and your child aren't enjoying a book you've selected, don't be afraid to try something else.

Babies and toddlers

At this age, the *experience* of reading together matters as much as the actual book. Babies enjoy simple picture books without lots of clutter on the page. Those that offer bright colors, sounds, and textures work very well.

As your child shows more interest and patience, move on to short, simple stories. Toddlers enjoy rhyming and repetition, as well as stories based on familiar songs ("Old MacDonald") or set in familiar places (the grocery store, the park).

Preschoolers

Preschoolers are beginning to understand that other people live differently than they do. As your child asks questions and exhibits curiosity, turn to books to help him or her make sense of the world.

For example, a child who lives in the city can enjoy a book about life on a farm or on board a ship. Books are a way to go new places, and preschoolers are ready to set out.

Preschoolers also like

- Stories about kids their own age
- Nonfiction books
- Stories about animals
- Repetition of sounds, words, or phrases in a story
- Stories with funny-sounding words
- Books with pictures that tell the story, even without the words

Early graders

Some children learn to read very young. Even if your child can read alone, Wooten advises that you spend some time each day reading aloud to him or her. As you're reading, ask questions about the story. Talk about what might happen next, and draw connections to your child's life.

Children in early grades learn from picture books, but they can handle more text. For the books you read together, look for complex stories and advanced character development.



If your child isn't reading independently yet or needs help, speak with his or her teacher, who may have ideas about how to deal with the situation. Browse the easy reader section at your local library. You'll find books with simple vocabulary that build confidence, designed for children struggling to read.

Don't worry if your child insists on reading books labeled for lower grades, Wooten recommends. Once your child gains confidence, he or she will gradually move on to more challenging books.

Older children

Third or fourth graders usually develop personal preferences. Unfortunately, some may be developing a preference *not* to read.

Resistant readers think books are boring, but you can often find books that spark their deeper interests. "If your child likes basketball, help him pick a great basketball book," Wooten says. "Always offer several choices to give your child some control."

Consider graphic novels (comics), topical magazines, funny books, mysteries, and stories about weird events or strange people. Don't worry whether a particular book is "appropriate" reading material. The important thing is that your child is reading something he or she wants to read.



Good readers need help branching out. Learn who your child's favorite author is. Librarians, websites, and bookstore staff can recommend similar books by the same author or others.

Tell your child to ask friends and teachers for recommendations. Remind him or her that it doesn't hurt to try something new.

Getting some guidance

The International Reading Association provides annual lists of favorite children's books chosen by children (Children's Choices), young adults (Young Adults' Choices), and teachers (Teachers' Choices). You can download them free at the Association's website, www.reading.org.

Other great Web resources include

- Association for Library Service to Children: www.ala.org/ala/alsc/alscresources/booklists/booklists.cfm
- National Council for the Social Studies: www.socialstudies.org/resources/notable/
- National Council of Teachers of English: www.ncte.org/elem/awards/orbispictus
- National Education Association: www.nea.org/readacross/resources/catalist.html
- Parents' Choice Foundation: www.parentschoice.com



What Kids Really Want to Read is one in a series of brochures produced in response to questions that parents frequently ask about their children's reading instruction. Single copies may be downloaded free at the Association's website, www.reading.org. Bulk copies may be purchased online or by telephone at 302-731-1600.

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- Enhance the professional development of reading educators worldwide
- Advocate for research, policy, and practices that support the best interests of all learners and reading professionals
- Establish and strengthen national and international alliances with a wide range of organizations
- Encourage and support research to promote informed decision making about reading practice and policy
- Provide leadership on literacy issues around the world

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