

Motivating Middle School Readers

Learning to Read

During the early years and in Grades K – 3 children are building their reading skills, learning to recognize letters and the sounds they make. Once children have the basic skills mastered fluency and comprehension become more important. Fluency is being able to read the way we speak. This happens when children feel comfortable decoding words and reading sentences. Comprehension is understanding the meaning of what is being read.

In grades K through 3 children are typically *learning to read*. Once children enter fourth grade they are usually *reading to learn*. If your fourth grader or older child is still struggling with reading share your concern with your child's teacher. They may need extra help or specialized instruction.

When children read a lot and enjoy reading, the vocabulary, fluency and comprehension will develop naturally over time. To help middle school students become better readers we have to encourage them to read more, but at this time in their lives they're more likely to give us some resistance.

What's Stopping Them?

Even the best readers in 4th or 5th grade may begin to lose interest as they go into the higher grades. Some of this may be because they are reading more in school and have greater amounts of homework, so they want to spend their free time doing other things. Their interests outside of the home may have expanded so they seem to have less time. And they have definitely become more social, so hanging out with friends or talking on the phone are more of a priority for them.



Overcoming Excuses

To overcome the excuses we have to make a lot of choices available, and create an environment that makes reading enjoyable for them.

- There are so many options besides traditional books that offer good reading material: short stories, magazines, comics, how-to books, the Internet, and books on tape. Use clever strategies like keeping books on tape or comics in the car for trips. They need to be able to choose when they want to read, so our job is to make those choices available.
- Find out what other kids are reading. Your child is more likely to read what his friends are reading. Some kids like to trade books or comics, and may even discuss novels or a series they're reading over the phone. Reading can be a very social activity, with friends and at home.
- Get help with finding interesting books to read. Internet sites like NoveList allows you to look up a favorite book to find similar books. You can access NoveList through the Concord Library.
- You can't make kid's read, but if they experience it as fun or enjoyable they're more likely to do it. Some kids love jokes. You can buy or borrow joke books and read them aloud or write one down in an email to your child. If you're reading the newspaper or a magazine and there's something funny share it.
- Reading is part of most board games, so if friends are over encourage games that include reading (but don't tell them that's what you're doing!)