

PARENTS CORNER

Introduction

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

Walt Disney (Retrieved from <https://inspiremykids.com/20-inspiring-quotes-about-reading-for-kids-and-students/>)

Importance of home reading

Home reading is a meaningful, enjoyable, and effective way of encouraging children to read. This method helps them increase their vocabulary, critically evaluate various types of texts, and stimulate the mind. Reading at home should be a pleasurable activity that would let a child enjoy their own discovery journey through a book. Parents can support this immersion by joining the child with their own book or providing a stimulating environment. Any kind of punishment or pressure is out of place and would not serve the main aim – motivating children for reading.

How to create a supporting reading environment

Parents can create a positive environment by making reading a memorable and enjoyable experience for children. They can agree on some regular reading time in a quiet and safe place (e.g., bedtime reading, weekend 30-minute reading). Of course, reading rituals depend on children’s preferences. Children can be accompanied by their favourite toys or pets, or other family members can join in. Creating a rich and safe environment at home activates your child’s cognitive, linguistic, and social development and supports literacy skills.

Some benefits of reading in English

Reading literature stimulates creativity, curiosity and imagination. Reading (not only in English) is crucial for children to develop literacy and succeed in school.

Using books or any reading materials fosters motivation to learn a new language.

Reading in the target language helps raise a child’s awareness of sound aspects of the language; it enhances fluency, learning spelling and pronunciation. At the same time, it allows the understanding of cultural differences. An opportunity to delve into a story supports natural learning. Children will pick up words from different contexts that they would never learn from textbooks. It provides a space for understanding how language works in concrete situations, which is a memorable way of learning language chunks and grasping grammar rules.



Reading supports handling emotions

Children sometimes cannot manage their emotions, are not empathetic, and cannot follow the rules or solve problems. Such children are often a source of conflict and disharmony and do not have healthy relationships. Parents can introduce books describing various events that children often encounter and cannot cope with: the situation when one of the parents is in the hospital, a sick father or mother or any close relative/friend, the arrival of a new sibling, ridicule from a classmate, and bullying, the first meeting with death, moving a close friend, struggling with fear, the first trip without parents, first love failure, divorce or getting to know new neighbours. Reading about these situations helps them in their current life and prepares them for what they may encounter in the future.

Reading with comprehension

Comprehension is an ability to understand what has been read. If children do not fully understand what they have read, they cannot benefit from reading in any way. Reading with comprehension means that the child understands how things, people or events in stories or texts relate to each other. If parents want to help children understand the story, they should talk about the book. The questions should spring out of curiosity rather than from controlling intentions. It would strongly support the child's autonomy and critical thinking. Instead of playing the role of a testing teacher, we can ask questions such as:

Is it a good story? Why?

What do you think about the main characters?

Which characters do you like most/least? Why?

What is the problem?

Why did it happen?

Could they have done something else?

Who is trustworthy? How do you know?

Could it happen in our times/town/school/home?

What is the main message?

When it comes to reading itself, it is essential to realise that every reader needs a reason to read a text. Therefore, it is necessary to think about the right motivation for the child – that is, to identify why they should read a specific book. Practising reading strategies such as finding certain information in the text, finding out what the text is about, predicting what the text will be about or how the text will continue, asking questions about the text, using one's own knowledge that might relate to the reader to read, summarising the content or visualising it, will not only help to focus the child's attention but also motivate them to read the chosen book.

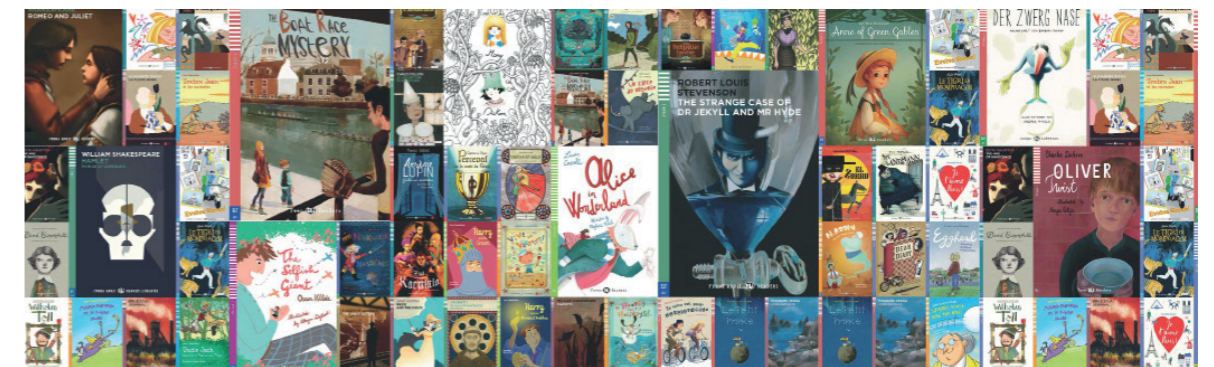


What to read

There are many ways to read literature in a target foreign language for learners. One option is to choose graded readers according to their level of competence. Another option is to search for literature suitable for young learners, such as picture storybooks. A good choice is Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*, Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings*, Helen Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.

As illustrations are a crucial component of picture books, children learn about the content of the text (a story, a poem) more effectively and quickly.

Graded readers are books for learners of foreign languages to help them improve their reading skills. They are available from many different publishing houses which offer fiction, non-fiction, biographies and other genres. The books are either simplifications of pieces written for native readers or original texts explicitly written for language learners. It is helpful to read stories that readers are familiar with, such as fairy tales. Such tales often contain dialogues and also repetitive phrases. Moreover, the stories include many past tenses and present tense verb forms. A good example is *A Princess and the Pea* by Hans Christian Andersen (accessible through <https://www.storynory.com/the-princess-and-the-pea/>), *Little Red Riding Hood* (<https://www.dltk-teach.com/rhymes/littlered/story.htm>) or *Peter Pan* by James M. Barrie ([https://www.raabe.sk/peter-pan-\(peter-pan\)](https://www.raabe.sk/peter-pan-(peter-pan))). You can find a plenty of thrilling graded readers based on a child preference and interest at <https://www.raabe.sk/jazykova-literatura/anglicky-jazyk/?bfilter=f3:44>.



As for the *poetry*, *nursery rhymes* or other types of poems, such as *limericks* or *counting out rhymes*, are suitable for learning grammar. Moreover, they are often funny and short. One may easily download them via the Internet (some examples are found at <https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/15-short-english-poems-for-kids-to-recite/>). Other sources: the poetry of Robert Louis Stevenson or Christina Rossetti.

A helpful way to introduce young learners to serious topics, such as ecology, social problems, and relationships, is graphic novels (also adaptations of classic novels and plays by famous writers). Some novels may be downloaded from <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals/resources/paul-nations-resources/readers/free-graded-readers/Fire-on-the-Mountain.pdf>

What if I don't speak English and want to support my child

- You do not have to speak English to help your child improve their reading. There are plenty of ways how to support them.
- You can sit next to your child and become a reading model by reading a book in your mother tongue while they read in English. It is worth challenging your child to read an entire series. You can read the same but translated version (e.g., Anne Shirley series, Harry Potter, Peter Rabbit). Children love to imitate, and they need role models.
- You can keep your reading interesting by sharing ideas, commenting, and asking simply by interacting.
- You read with children on a regular basis. It is excellent to make reading time a daily activity. Thus, children have more time to fit English.
- You can ask your child to invite a friend/friends to read together and talk about the book. It can generate a book club in your sitting room, and you can become a chair of a discussion after reading.
- You can choose the bilingual book you know and enjoy (e.g., English-Slovak versions: Let's go to the park; My mum is the best: Children's picture book). It means that you start with something you, as a parent, understand.
- You can reread the same book as it helps children figure out information and get familiar with letters and words.
- You can encourage your child to bring home English readings, portfolios or any other materials and let them explain.
- You can present various kinds of books: humorous books, books with beautiful illustrations, rhyming books, e-books, graphic novels, comics, fairy tales, factual books... .
- You can show many types of reading experiences: recipes, newspapers, television information, instructions, street signs, brochures, junk mail, electronic communication, notes, song lyrics, and written communication.
- You can discuss a child's development with an English language teacher.

What resources I can access as a parent

„So please, oh PLEASE, we beg, we pray, Go throw your TV set away, And in its place, you can install, A lovely bookshelf on the wall.“

Roald Dahl, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
(Retrieved from <https://inspiremykids.com/20-inspiring-quotes-about-reading-for-kids-and-students/>)

The most convenient way to ensure reading material for reading is by building a library. With books stored in bookcases, displayed on the shelves, kept in baskets and containers, piled in strategic places all around the house/rooms, children are surrounded by books.

School or public libraries, bookshops, and language centres offer books in English that you can read with your children. You can talk with other parents from the class about the books. You can create a class collection of books or English-language resources that children can enjoy even at their homes. You can give books as birthday presents. Children can swap books, read new stories and spend no money. Reading online is another possible way to find books (e.g., <https://www.readingrockets.org/>, <https://www.raz-kids.com/>, <https://www.getepic.com/>).

