

What to Read and When

How children develop reading skills from birth through 6th grade including recommended titles for each age level.

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Recommending books to parents can be tricky. Here are some tips, arranged by age/grade level, that can help you as a teacher or librarian in your knowledge of what to read and when.

BABIES (0-12 mos.):

Just read to them! “Give your baby a head start on learning to read. Put your baby in your lap and read a book aloud. In the pages of the book you will find a tiny vacation of privacy and intense love. It costs nothing but twenty minutes a day and a library card.” See the Salt Lake County *Babies Love Books* book list where librarians have linked titles to developmental stages documented by early childhood specialists.

TODDLERS (12mos-3 yrs-old):

Toddlers are a delight ... when occupied! Reading to your toddlers will stimulate their intellectual development. Listening to language while cuddled on your lap gives young children the ability to experience the world. Choose books that present familiar ideas, easy concepts, simple action stories and recognizable characters. Toddlers will delight in rhythm and rhyme, humor, lullabies, and repetition. Their attention span is short, so choose stories that are simple with bright illustrations.

PRESCHOOLERS (3-5 yrs-old):

Reading with preschoolers is great fun! And choosing books for preschoolers is easy – they delight in discovery and simply like books. Picture books are a staple for this age group. They now understand longer, more complex and humorous stories. They enjoy repetition, language play, rhythm and rhyme. Reading together everyday is the single most important activity for learning language and pre-reading skills.

KINDERGARTEN—FIRST GRADE (5-7 yrs-old):

Books for this age group generally are found in your library’s Very Early Readers or Early Readers. Keep in mind that reading is a developmental skill that children master at different ages. If a parent is concerned about their child’s reading skills/level, recommend that they ask their child’s teacher what they can do at home to help their child progress. For many parents this is the most confusing and troublesome aspect of helping their children practice reading. Not all first graders read at a first grade reading level. Some read higher some lower, so how do you tell?

Here are a few simple rules to use in helping parents choose books at the appropriate age level for their child.

- When looking at a book, ask the parent to compare the **text/font size** with the books their child has been bringing home from school or reading at home. The basic rule is the smaller the text size the higher the reading level.
- When looking at a book, ask the parent to compare the **amount of text** on the page with what they have been reading with their child. The more text the higher the reading level. The addition of chapters is also a sign of a higher reading level closer to 2nd grade.
- It never hurts to let a child read books that are 'easy' for them while they are still learning to read. Repetition is also okay. Your child may want to read the story two or three times. This is great practice for fluency. Reading needs to be an enjoyable experience, so make sure your child is having fun. The child will usually want to move on to more complex stories as reading becomes easier for them.
- Don't forget that there are non-fiction titles at **ALL** reading levels. Sometimes a child will be motivated more by non-fiction than fiction titles.

SECOND—THIRD GRADE (7-9 yrs-old):

Once again, remember that reading is a developmental skill that children master at different ages. Books for this age group are relatively easy to identify and are available in many topics and genre interest. The main difference between books written at the second grade reading level and books written at the third grade level is the length of the chapters and the total number of pages. Books for the **second grade** set have the following characteristics:

- They are skinny-having an average of 70 pages
- The chapters are short and episodic.
- The titles are usually part of a series
- They have illustrations scattered frequently throughout the book

A perfect example of an age appropriate book for second grade is *Dude, Where is My Spaceship* by Dan Greenburg. Another series popular with this age group is the *Magic Tree House* series by Mary Pope Osborne.

For **third graders** these characteristics change slightly as follows:

- They have more pages as a whole ranging between 90-105 pages.
- The chapters are longer and the story/action begins to continue over a chapter break.
- They continue to usually be part of a series, but there are more and more stand alone titles.
- The illustrations are fewer and mostly appear one per chapter.

One concern with readers in this age group is their comprehension of the text they are reading. Many children can now begin to use The “Five Finger Test.” This simple test is an ideal way for a child to decide if the book is too hard for them.

FIVE FINGER TEST

The child opens the book to any page in the middle of the book. They put their hand on the page in a fist; whenever they come across a word on the page that they don't recognize, they open up one finger of that fist on the page. When they open all five fingers of that hand, they may want to reconsider whether the book is too difficult for them. This test works as a simple guideline for reading difficulty and is a private, simple experiment that any child can do at anytime.

Second and Third grade is an ideal time to introduce **audiobooks** to children. Studies have proved that there are many benefits to having a young child listen to a book being read aloud. The following is an excerpt from an article from School Library Journal concerning the use of audiobooks in classrooms and libraries:

“The best way to help children become readers is to read aloud to them as often as possible. The more stories children hear, the more aware they are of how language sounds, and the more new words they can learn. Listening to narrators demonstrate proficient reading on audiobooks allows students access to stories they might be unable to read on their own. Audiobooks also help stretch growing attention spans and flex critical thinking skills. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, listening to stories read aloud stimulates brain development and lays down patterns that can become the building blocks for written language.”¹

FOURTH—SIXTH GRADE (9-12 yrs-old):

By the time children reach fourth grade, it becomes obvious which children struggle with reading and which children excel at it. Ideally, students with reading difficulties will have already been identified and are receiving extra help from teachers and parents. The earlier parents and teachers intervene, the better.

Studies show that this is also the age when pleasure reading begins to decline. Therefore, now the main area of focus becomes **MOTIVATION!** Whether the child finds reading easy or hard, they still must be motivated to spend their time with a book instead of the many other forms of entertainment at their fingertips. How do we motivate them? That is the question for this age group. We need to help them find a book that grabs them and keeps them coming back for more. When recommending books to a child in this age group, ask them what they like to read about, what interests them. Ask them what the last book was that they liked.

If they don't know or can't tell you, here is a process that works for me.

- Have a list in your head of 2-3 titles that are sure winners with this age group. Make sure you have a separate list for girls and boys.
- Make sure your reader's advisory promo for these titles is exciting and has a hook.
- Tell the child that if they read two chapters and don't want to keep going, or are not interested, they can stop and try another title. This is very liberating to a child. Reading needs to be enjoyable!
- Tell them that if they don't like any of the titles, to come back and you will try again. There are so many different stories out there you are sure to find one that fits them.
- Don't forget Non-fiction!!! There are many readers who don't enjoy fiction. Make sure to include some non-fiction titles on your 'best' list.

Resources For Parents And Teachers:

Informational Texts

Burns, M. Susan, Peg Griffin and Catherine E. Snow, editors. *Starting Out Right: a Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999. ISBN: 0-309-06410-4. \$14.95.

http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=6014

Hall, Susan L. and Louisa C. Moats. *Straight Talk About Reading: How Parents Can Make a Difference During the Early Years*. Lincolnwood, IL: Contemporary Books, 1999. ISBN: 0-8092-2857-2. \$14.95.

Moats, Louisa Cook and Karen E. Dakin. *Basic Facts About Dyslexia & Other Reading Problems*. Baltimore, MD: International Dyslexia Association, 2008. ISBN: 978-0-89214-064-0. \$15.00.

Neuman, Susan B. and Tanya S. Wright. *A Parent's Guide to Reading With Your Young Child*. New York: Scholastic, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-439-02420-4. \$9.99.

¹Serfini, Frank (Oct. 2004) Audiobooks Promote Literacy-supplement. *School Library Journal*, 50, 9.

Worthy, J., Moorman, M., & Turner, M. (1999). What Johnny Likes to Read is Hard to Find In School. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34, 12-27.

Web Resources

Salt Lake City Public Library – Literacy – Resources for Parents & Teachers web page: Go to <http://www.slcppl.org>, follow the Literacy link on the left sidebar to the Resources for Parents & Teachers web page.

Salt Lake City booklists are also available online at <http://www.slcppl.org>, follow the link on the left sidebar to the Booklist web page.

All Salt Lake County booklists are available online at <http://www.slcolibrary.org/booksnmore/booklists.htm>

Some Of Allison's Favorites By Age Group

Babies:

Hush Little Ones by John Butler
Time for Bed by Mem Fox

Toddlers:

Goodnight Gorilla by Peggy Rathman
Itsy Bitsy Spider by Lorianne Siomades

Preschoolers:

When Dinosaurs Came With Everything by Elise Broach
Dinosaur Train by John Gurney
Fancy Nancy by Jane O'Connor
Go to Bed Monster by Natasha Wing

Kindergarten—First Grade:

My Friend Is Sad: an Elephant and Piggie Book by Mo Wilems
Puppy Mudge Wants to Play: Puppy Mudge series by Cynthia Rylant
Dancing Dinos by Sally Lucas
Time for Bed by Peggy Rathman
Thomas and Percy and the Dragon by Rev. W. Awdry

Second—Third Grade:

Dinosaur Cove series by Rex Stone
 *Book 1: *Attack Of The Tyrannosaurus*
 *Book2: *Charge of the Triceratops*
Rainbow Magic series by Daisy Meadows
 *Book 1: *Ruby the Red Fairy*
 *Other series include: *Jewel Fairies, Pet Fairies, and Weather Fairies*
Weird Planet series by Dan Greenburg
 *Book 1: *Dude, Where Is My Spaceship?*
 *Book 2: *Lost in Las Vegas*
Mercy Watson series by Kate DiCamillo
 *Book 1: *Mercy Watson to the Rescue*
Time Spies series by Candice F. Ransom
 *Book 1: *Secret In the Tower*

Fourth—Sixth Grade:

Sister's Grimm series by Michael Buckley
Homework Machine by Dan Gutman
Pendragon series by D.J. MacHale
How to Steal a Dog by Barbara O'Connor
Sammy Keyes mysteries by Wendelin Van Drannen
Princess Academy by Shannon Hale
Star of Kazan by Eva Ibbotson
The Lightning Thief by Rick Riordan
Travel Team by Mike Lupica
To name a few . . .

For more booklists please visit the Salt Lake County's and Salt Lake City's websites.