

BUILDING READERS®

How Families Can Help Children Become Better Readers

Grand Elementary School

Fill the shortest day of the year with seasonal fun and learning

December 21 is the winter solstice—the day with the fewest daylight hours of the year. Enjoy learning about this astronomical phenomenon together while you strengthen your child's:

- **Reading skills.** Help your child research online why there is so little daylight on this day.
- **Vocabulary.** List words like *orbit*, *equator*, *hemisphere*, *celestial*, etc. Challenge your child to put them in alphabetical order, then find and write their definitions.
- **Observation skills.** Have your child go online to research the sunrise and sunset times in different parts of the country. Does your child notice any patterns?
- **Oral language skills.** Since it gets dark so early, share stories around a flashlight “campfire” after dinner. You can read a family favorite aloud, or let family members take turns telling spooky stories.



Strong attendance has a direct impact on your child's reading skills

Consistently attending school, especially in the early grades, is directly linked to stronger reading skills.

This winter, recommit to ensuring your child is in school on time every day. Follow routines that support regular attendance. For example, stick to a regular sleep schedule and gather items for school the night before.



Don't let cold weather increase time spent in front of screens!

Experts recommend families limit passive screen activities. But it's easy to lose control of screen time when it's too cold to play outside.

Together, make a list of fun reading-related screen-free activities. On cold days, have your child choose an activity from the list.



Share strategies for studying vocabulary

Teachers assign vocabulary words because they are essential for understanding reading assignments, learning new concepts and succeeding on tests. To promote word mastery, have your child:

- **Make crossword puzzles** with the words to practice their spellings and definitions.
- **Make flash cards** and use them to strengthen recall.
- **Draw a sketch** that connects each word to something that is personally meaningful to your child.
- **Play charades** with words. One player acts out the definition while others guess the word.
- **Use as many vocabulary words** as possible in conversations throughout the day.

Introduce your elementary schooler to graphic novels

Graphic novels—books that use pictures and words to convey their stories—offer more than just entertainment. Many address complex concepts that are relevant to students. They cover and encourage interest in many types of literature, like mystery, fantasy and historical fiction.

To help your child find some interesting graphic novels, suggest asking a librarian or searching titles online at Common Sense Media.



Stage a consonant scavenger hunt

Consonant blends—the sounds that two consonants make when combined, such as *st* and *br*—can be tricky for young readers to grasp. To practice these blends, send your child on a consonant scavenger hunt:

1. **Write a variety of blends** on index cards. Each blend should go on its own card. Here are a few suggestions: *bl, br, cl, cr, dr, fl, gr, pl, sc, sl, sm, sn, sp, st, sw* and *tr*.
2. **Select a card** and ask your child to practice saying the blend. Brainstorm a few words that begin with that sound.
3. **Ask your child to find** as many things in your home as possible that start with that blend. (For the *bl* card, your child could find a *blanket*, a *block* and a *blender*.)
4. **Repeat these steps** with a new letter blend!



A snowman makes winter reading fun

There's just something about a snowman that seems to inspire writers. And December is the perfect time of year to check out wintry titles, such as:

- ***Sneezy the Snowman*** by Maureen Wright.
- ***The Greatest Snowman in the World!*** by Peter Hannan.
- ***Case of the Sneaky Snowman*** by Carolyn Keene.

After sharing one of these snowy stories with your child, build a snowman together—either outside using actual snow, or inside using paper, cotton balls or marshmallows.

What kinds of adventures could your child's snowman have? Ask your child to write down a tale. Then, make it a tradition to read your child's snowman story together on the first day of winter every year.



Q: My first-grader's teacher says I should not worry about misspelled words in schoolwork. Won't that affect my child's ability to write—and read—well later on?

A: When children first begin to write, they use *invented spelling*. They write words the way they sound. When they don't have to worry about spelling, children are

more likely to write freely and think writing is fun. At other times of day, you can continue to practice reading correctly spelled words with your child.

Practice summarizing skills

Here's a fun way to help your child stay informed and practice the skill of summarizing:

1. **Cut the headline off** a news article and then give the article to your child to read.
2. **Ask your child to write** a headline for the article after reading it.
3. **Compare the actual headline** to the one your child wrote.

For lower elementary readers:

- ***Rosie Revere, Engineer*** by Andrea Beaty. This rhyming story is about a young inventor named Rosie. Inspired by her aunt, who built planes in WWII, Rosie sets her sights on the skies.



- ***Henry's Heart*** by Charise Mericle Harper. Learn how a heart works, including its important role as a muscle and what makes it beat extra quickly.

For upper elementary readers:

- ***Love, Amalia*** by Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel M. Zubizarreta. Amalia has a special relationship with her Abuelita. Abuelita always knows the right thing to say and do.
- ***Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School*** by Mark Teague. When Mrs. LaRue sends her dog Ike to obedience school, he is not happy. He writes her letters to convince her to let him come home.

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