

So, you have a reluctant reader...? What can you do?

HGSS Top tips!

Reading for pleasure is possibly the single-most important activity your child can do to improve achievement in school. Research has shown that reading helps cognitive development: a recent Institute of Education study revealed that students who read at home do 'significantly better' across the curriculum – including 9.9% better in maths – than students who don't read. Linked to this is the fact that reading is the best way to improve vocabulary, essential for success in every subject.

Reading also has social and emotional benefits. It increases self-esteem and studies show that students who read are more empathetic. Growing up is tough -- reading can help young people explore complex problems from the safe fictional world of a book.

The problem, of course, is convincing young people of the importance and joy of reading. It is clear that we live in a world of electronic distractions and promoting reading as an option can be difficult however it important that as adults we introduce reading as something that is purposeful, valuable and can be pleasurable. Here are some ideas and suggestions (some of them are sneaky!). They won't all work as each child is different but it is worth giving some of them a try if your child is a reluctant reader.

Tip 1 - Find books with a connection to something they love:

If they are football fans, look for footie fiction for teens – try *Booked* by Kwame Alexander or Dan Freedman or Tom Palmer's books, for example. If they like military/action/war, then try the *Dog Tag* series by CA London or Andy McNab's teen books. If they like to watch Youtubers, try Zoella's book club. And if they are into gaming, try fast-paced chapter books or 'choose your own adventure' stories. (Tip: try teen/YA author Alex Scarrow's books – he was a professional video-game developer before he turned to writing; or Jeff Norton's *MetaWars* series, billed as 'a video game you can read').

- Look at the HGSS 'Recommended Reads' list available on the school website: we have lists broken down by genre and particular interests.
- Any type of reading is helpful, so try graphic novels. Graphic novel versions of *The Recruit* by Muchamore, *Silverfin* by Higson and *Stormbreaker* by Horowitz are popular.
- If your child has dyslexic traits, try Barrington Stoke books; these are produced with tinted pages, special fonts and spacing, thicker paper and editing to reduce comprehension barriers. <https://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk/>



Tip 2 - Sneaky reverse psychology:

If your child is ready, you might select a 'grittier' book, then verbally hum-and-haw about whether or not they are old enough to read the book. Tell them maybe they should wait six months as 'there is some language and some blood'. Pretty soon they will be begging you for the book, and you can eventually give in, saying 'since you are now in Year ..., I guess it is okay'. Charlie Higson's *Enemy* series is a gritty series written for teens, as is *Zom-B* by Darren Shan.

- Visit the library with your child when you go into town. Ask your child to meet you in the library and then take your time selecting a book to read yourself. Putting your child in the environment of books may sway them to at least take out a book from the library.
- Try a 'phone free' hour and put books around the house. Eventually (out of boredom) they will start to re-read their favourite series or read something new.
- Be enthusiastic about what they are reading: Ask them to describe a character or to read aloud an exciting bit. You might read a teen/YA book yourself; the plot-driven nature of many of these books means they are relatively easy reads – perfect after a day at work.
- Let your children see you reading for pleasure, and talk about what you read and how you choose books.
- If you have younger children, ask your older (reluctant reader) child to read aloud to them. This is a big confidence booster and it helps with sibling bonding. Michael Morpurgo is a particularly good shared read, as his books have something for everyone; I highly recommend *Kensuke's Kingdom* for sibling read-alouds.
- It sounds a bit odd but children can also read to pets. Parents have reported that their child would read aloud to the dog for ten minutes a day which got reluctant readers' back into reading and also got the dog loving being read to! Sounds weird but if it works...!
- Continue to read aloud to your children (even if they are fluent readers). A recent survey highlighted that high on the list of things that teenagers miss is being read to. Choose a book together that they probably wouldn't read on their own. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Mildred Taylor) is a good book to read out loud with teenagers as it is a poignant book, set in 1930's America, explores the impact of racism on children.
- Another idea is to find the book version of a movie: *Stormbreaker*, *Eragon*, *Harry Potter*, *The Book Thief*, *I am Number Four*, *The Princess Diaries*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Percy Jackson*, *The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, *Maze Runner*, *Fault in Our Stars*, *Twilight* and *Inkheart* and *Wonder* are all films based on children/YA books. Both of you can read the book, go to the movie together -- then discuss the differences.
- Have them pick up a device – an e-reader! Then check with your local library about borrowing e-books or try the Kindle daily deal.

- Try audio books: Libraries have free, downloadable audio books plus Audible has a wide range of teen books. Many teens like the idea of being able to do something active while listening to a book. By listening to an audio book, your teen will pick up new vocabulary, hear complex sentence structures and engage with stories.
- Listening to audiobooks as a family is another good idea. Sharing a story together is a fabulous way to bond.
- Visit a bookstore and allow your child to select a book of their choice. The visually appealing marketing and layout of best-selling books can attract even reluctant readers.
- Try biographies/autobiographies that interest your child. Recent student favourites have been *Maddie Diaries* by Ziegler & *The Greatest* (Muhammed Ali) by Walter Dean Myers.
- Non-fiction books linked to a child's interests are a great way to spark a desire to read.
- Gentle encouragement works best. Don't pester or nag as it can further increase the negativity around reading.

Tip 3 - Make Reading family time

Research has shown that teenagers regularly report that one of the things they enjoyed most about reading as a child was being read to by a family member. Many teenagers say that they miss these reading moments. Creating a designated family reading time has many merits. It is simply turning off distracting technology (TV, phones, tablets, video games etc.) for at least twenty minutes and sitting down to read as a family. It will create a nice atmosphere to read and also create nice memories of reading with family.

If your child is a reluctant reader it is a challenge to convince them to read. However, it is important to explain to your child that reading is an extremely valuable act. Your child should not give up what they enjoy (video games, listening to music, social media etc.) to read but they should fit it in with their hobbies and recreational time.



