

Reading at Home

Oldfield Park Junior School



A few ideas that might be useful ...



Why does my child need to read at home?



As with most things in life, reading is a skill that develops and grows with practice over time - quite simply, the more you put in, the more you get out. The school day is pretty jam-packed and, even with some of our smaller classes, we may only get to hear your child read once, perhaps twice a week. In all honesty, this is quite simply not enough and we need your help to support the children even further. Studies have shown that for children to make “good” progress they should be reading with an adult at least five times a week for no more than fifteen minutes per session. These sessions should be *active* as opposed to *passive*, packed with discussion and questions – hence the fifteen minutes.

I cannot stress enough how important reading is to the academic development of a child. If they cannot read, they will not be able to adequately access every other subject in the curriculum. Comprehension skills encompass every single facet of school life. I have been working with less able mathematicians in Year 6 now for many years and, as a generalisation, usually at least 75% of the children in my care share a common weakness in reading, or a lack of reading support at home. Unfortunately – as with all areas of the curriculum - there is a tremendous amount of comprehension in mathematics.

We all lead very busy lives, but being a strong reader will provide a child with greater academic and social opportunities; their writing will improve exponentially as will their deeper understanding of the world around them. Being a strong reader is an ideal we should *all* encourage and support in our children.

Through this booklet I will endeavour to cover a handful of reading techniques and questioning ideas which may well improve the experience at home. You may find that you are already doing many of these things – in which case, carry on and thank you for your amazing support.

How can I make reading at home more fun?

In an ideal world we want all of our children to come to reading independently and learn to love it much as many of us did. However, there is no avoiding the possibility that this may not happen spontaneously for every child. The best way to help develop a love and interest in reading is by leading through positive example. Sharing stories in partnership with your child could just be the key to turning a

challenging daily grind into something worthwhile, educational and, dare I say it, fun.

The simplest way of making reading fun is by simply using silly voices. I know it sounds ridiculous and it certainly isn't in the National Curriculum, but focusing on the characters traits and how they interact with one another can almost instantaneously transform the reading experience into something light and fun for all involved.



“The reason you cannot see the mouse circus,” said the man upstairs, “is that the mice are not yet ready and rehearsed. Also, they refuse to play the songs I have written for them. All the songs I have written for the mice to play go oompah, oompah. But the white mice will only play toodle oodle, like that.”

Have a quick look at the passage above (taken from Neil Gaiman's "Coraline"). The book has already established that the man upstairs is a, "crazy old man." Reading the dialogue in the style of a "crazy old man" would almost immediately turn a passive session into something bubbly and fun. Give it a go – then get your child to deliver their best version of the, "crazy old man." On a serious note, using voices can also establish how well your child understands the characters they are reading about.

What is a retrieval question?

It is sometimes very easy to be lulled into a false sense of security by our child's reading – *their reading is fluent, they use intonation, ergo they must be a "great" reader.* Unfortunately, reading is a lot more complicated than this. To begin with – and this has happened to me more than once – fluency and intonation can sometimes mask a child's actual understanding of what they are reading; you can have a fantastically fluent reader who, quite paradoxically, doesn't understand the content of the book they are reading. The only way to gage and develop a child's skills in this particular area is to ask them questions about the texts they share with you.

The easiest questions to ask are geared around the child retrieving direct information. Retrieval question are the most basic question type and they establish that the child has at least garnered a "surface" understanding of what they are reading.



She explored the garden. It was a big garden: at the very back was an old tennis court, but no one in the house played tennis and the fence around the court had holes in it and the net had mostly rotted away; there was an old rose garden, filled with stunted fly blown rose bushes.

Looking at the excerpt, there are quite a few obvious retrieval questions we could ask:

How does the author describe the rose bushes? Where did Coraline explore? What was wrong with the fence around the tennis court? Who played tennis in Coraline's house?

How do I delve even deeper?

As I mentioned earlier, retrieval questions establish a child's "surface" understanding of a text. Inference questions delve much deeper below the surface and really establish how much a child comprehends what they are reading. In simple terms, inference is about taking two or more ideas and putting them together to come up with an unstated or ambiguous conclusion.

Look carefully at the excerpt from "Coraline". The author has already established much earlier in the text that a bunch of keys has been placed above the kitchen door.

*Coraline got a chair and pushed it over to the kitchen door. She climbed on to the chair, and reached up. She clambered down, and got a broom from the broom cupboard. She climbed back on the chair, and reached up with the broom.
Chink.*

At no point in this paragraph does the author mention the bunch of keys directly. There are two key questions that could be asked here, both of which require the child to glue different clues in order to come to a reasonably definitive conclusion:

What is Coraline doing in this paragraph?

Why does it say 'Chink'?



In order to answer both of these questions the child must have a deeper understanding of what they are reading. The word ‘*Chink*’ is clearly the sound of the keys being swept from their hiding place onto the kitchen floor – a concept not easy to understanding if you find reading challenging.

Predicting the future:

Using the same passage we can also get the children to make predictions based on what they know of the characters and the story as a whole. Prediction questions (like retrieval questions) occur quite early on in a child’s reading development and they also help to establish understanding. Regarding the above passage, there are several obvious predictive questions we could ask:

What do you think Coraline will do with the key?

Why will she do this?

What will happen next in the story?

What does that word mean?

As mentioned previously, it is really easy to be dazzled by a child if they read with great fluency. Do not be fooled. It is astounding how much they don’t understand, but they will often fail to ask, happy to breeze along at a break-neck pace despite any misconceptions they may have. Stopping for a chat once you find a “challenging” word can be a bit of an eye-opener.

There was also a haughty black cat, who would sit on walls and trees stumps and watch her, but would slip away if ever she went over to try to play with it.

The word “*haughty*” is interesting. Neil Gaiman (like all good authors) enjoys throwing in old-fashioned vocabulary just to keep things interesting. Ask the children about the word meaning – *can they place it in a different context? What do they think it means?*

If it transpires that neither of you know the word meaning, look it up together. What you’ll quickly find is your child will begin to apply new

vocabulary that they understand into their own writing – they may even use it in conversation.

Final Thoughts

My most important message here is reading has value, more so than nearly every other academic area of the curriculum. The time spent reading with your child will benefit them in ways I cannot even begin to describe. Figuratively, a strong understanding of reading is the backbone to their entire academic development.

I hope you have found some of the points I have made here interesting and, if you have any further questions please don't hesitate to come in and ask.

Thank you,

Mr Dack (English Subject Lead)