

**January 2005  
Resources to Help Parents Improve  
Literacy of Children in Grades 4-8**

**Websites**

---

**Parental tips on literacy (9-12years)**

---

**<http://www.carolhurst.com/profsubjects/reading/parentreading.html>**

This is an online article by Carol Otis Hurst is a nationally-known storyteller, lecturer, author and former teacher from Ohio. The article is entitled “Reading with your Children at Home”. The article outlines the benefits quality reading time can produce and how to make the most of reading activities at home. She stresses that book selection and discussion of the book after reading are key components of reading activities.

By reading out loud and discussing the books afterwards on a regular basis Carol guarantees “an increase in vocabulary, critical thinking and the art of conversation, and discussion” and goes on to add that “you may even get some insight into your child's view of the world and his/her values” from this discussion time. She does admit that it is not as easy as it sounds and that parents need to “go slowly” at the beginning.

**Concerning older children she says:**

“You may think your job is finished once the child has learned to read, but it's just begun...Some older children prefer to read to and by themselves and you must respect those wishes, but many children love being read to right through middle school or even adulthood. If they do elect to read alone, you're still not off the hook. Read the same book, another book by the same author, or a book on the same subject on your own. [this is] what I call “**Parallel Reading**” wherein parent and child read books at their own levels on the same topic and then talk about what they've discovered.”

This article highlights communication between parents and teachers, parents and librarians, but most importantly between parents and children.

**<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=720&q=2>**

Dr. Kevin Feldman Explains How Parents Can Help Their Older Kids with Reading Problems [July 17, 2002]. In this short article Dr. Feldman replies to a question from the Schwab learning website (How can parents help their older kids who struggle with reading improve literacy skills?). He brings up the difficulty of finding reading material that is both reading-level and maturity-level appropriate for “middle grade” students (specifically 12 year olds). He stresses two main points: constant encouragement of

reading and a quality partnership with the school, “to make sure that our kids are getting what they need”.

[http://www.rif.org/parents/9\\_12.msp](http://www.rif.org/parents/9_12.msp)

This “Reading is Fundamental” site is divided up according to specific ages and is a wonderfully varied site for all sorts of reading related resources. The page that we are interested in is “Your Independent Reader (ages 9-12)”. “A child in grades four through six has probably mastered basic reading skills and can read independently for pleasure. This is a great time for you to keep encouraging and motivating your child to read more often. And don't forget the importance of reading aloud to your child and participating in reading- and writing-related family activities”.

There are a few things that you can do to help build your child's literacy skills:

- Continue reading aloud books
- Provide a steady flow of books and conversation about them.
- Help children who seem to lose interest in reading find the time to read at home for pleasure. Make sure that their lives haven't become overly scheduled.
- Help your children find more reasons to write. Enlist them in taking messages, making the shopping list, writing letters, and answering email.

Try introducing the following types of books to your child:

- Classic fiction and other more recent novels to read aloud together
- Longer chapter books for “middle readers”
- Books in a variety of genres, including biography, fiction, nonfiction, and poetry

---

### Parental tips on literacy (not age specific)

---

<http://www.ala.org/ala/pio/parents/page/10wayskidsconnect.htm>

This website from the American Libraries Association reminds parents that “it's important to keep reading together even after your child begins learning to read. The teacher will teach him how to read, but it's up to you to make reading fun and meaningful in everyday life so your child will want to be a good reader.” They list pointers for parents like **using the library often, leading by example** (both parents), encouraging your child to **use their skills daily** (reading letters, lists, internet surfing, diary) and having a set time when **the entire family reads aloud together**.

They also stress that **parents should know what their child is reading** and list 8 pointers on how to accomplish this. Many of these tips surround the library as well as **open communication** between parent and teacher, parent and child, parent and librarian, and child and librarian.

<http://www.nncc.org/Parent/8ways.read.html>

This resource is created by the National Network for Child Care and lists 8 ways parents can promote reading at home. It has an author: Marilyn Lopes, Extension Specialist, Family Life Education, Cape Cod Cooperative Extension, University of Massachusetts,

*With the compliments of*

which gives it increased validity. The site also features suggestions for **parents who are not good readers**, “As your children learn to read, ask them to read to you. Talk about the books your children have read. Ask a friend or relative to read aloud to your children”.

The 8 tips listed echo the suggestions from the ALA site explained above:

**Read yourself; Make sure your children read every day; Make the library a habit.** Make sure everyone in your family has a library card. Schedule regular trips to the library; **Read aloud to the children.** (In \*The Read Aloud Handbook\*, Jim Trelease reports on research showing that this is the most important thing parents can do to help their children become better readers.); **Use your newspaper to encourage reading:** create a scavenger hunt, give your child a list of things to find in today's newspaper. Here are some ideas: a map, the temperature in the city where a family member lives, three words that begin with "w", a movie that is playing at a nearby theater; **Give books as gifts; Make reading a privilege.**

---

### Just for boys

---

<http://www.guysread.com/>

“Guys Read” is a site dedicated to addressing male literacy from childhood to adulthood. The site’s mission is to “motivate boys to read by connecting them with materials they will want to read, in ways they like to read”. This includes broadening the definition of what materials are considered reading materials. For example comic books and graphic novels (illustrated novels), action-adventure magazines and websites should be suggested to young male readers as reading materials. Just because they aren’t traditional doesn’t mean they don’t have value.

Basically this site advocates expanding the choices of reading materials available and providing male reading role models (not just mom!) to increase male literacy. Overall this site is geared for “boys” and is a very good resource for interesting and appropriate reading material for males (and females) or all ages.

---

### Parents as Tutors

---

Diaper,G. (1990). A Comparative Study of Paired-Reading Techniques Using Parents as Tutors to Second-Year School Children. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy (CLTT)*, 6(1), 13-24.

Kelly-Vance, L. & Schreck, D. (2002). The Impact of a Collaborative Family/School Reading Programme on Student Reading Rate. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 25(1), 43-53.

Shuck, A., Ulsh, F., & Platt, J. (1983). Parents Encourage Pupils (PEP): An Innercity Parent Involvement Reading Project. *The Reading Teacher*, 36(6), 524-528.

Wilks,R.T., & Clarke,V.A. (1988). Training versus nontraining of mothers as home reading tutors. *Perceptual & Motor Skills*, 67(1), 135-142. US: Perceptual & Motor Skills.

---

## Book Ideas

---

### Reading Aloud – Recommended Titles for grades K-9

[I have only copied grades 4-9]

<http://www.carolhurst.com/profsubjects/reading/readingaloud.html>

**Fourth grade** is going to start with a picture book about home as well. Eve Bunting's Dandelions with illustrations by Greg Shed (Harcourt, 1995 ISBN 015200050X) brings us to the prairie. Since many fourth graders study the westward movement in the United States, this picture book about a little girl who plants a clump of dandelions on the roof of their sod house will surely lead us there.

We could go to what makes a place home or what beauty is. We could do a theme on wild flowers, or we could go to the novel which seems to fit so well with that picture book, Grasshopper Summer by Ann Turner (Troll, 1991 ISBN 0816722625). Sam White's father makes the decision to leave grandparents and other family behind in Kentucky and head for the plains in Dakota Territory. For Sam, his father and younger brother, the sod house they build soon becomes home. His mother has a harder adjustment. When the land is cleared and the crops are planted, however, everybody's spirits are up -- until the grasshoppers come. The book is fairly short, reads aloud well and the description of grasshopper plague is suitably gross. It should open the way to independent reading of many novels and picture books set in this time and place.

**Fifth graders** could start with a Chris Van Allsburg book. His are always intriguing and have many layers of meaning. We want to get them into looking beneath the surface of books so read aloud The Widow's Broom (Houghton, 1992 ISBN 0395640512). The illustrations are wonderful and the story is reminiscent of "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" but it's the superstition and prejudice that we want to emphasize. The Spivey's determination to rid the neighborhood of the witch's broom and all its marvelous accomplishments is equaled by the widow's determination to keep her newfound friend and worker.

The novel to read next, The Witch of Blackbird Pond (Dell, 1978 ISBN 0395071143), takes up the witchcraft theme and is a good introduction to the early settlers in America. A high spirited female character pitted against the superstition and fear of Puritan Connecticut is a good lead-in to that study or to a search for other strong characters that fight convention.

**Sixth graders** are idealists, for the most part, and so you might start with the picture book Rebel by Allan Baillie, illustrated by Di Wu (Ticknor & Fields ISBN 0395692504). This story is about a community that stands together against a bully. Based on a true story, it tells of how a General marched his army into a village. They round up the villagers. "You are my people now!" he shouts and a single, small sandal is thrown at him from the crowd. Enraged, he orders his army to find the culprit -- the child wearing just one sandal -- but the villagers thwart him by putting all their sandals in a big pile and they all stand bare footed.

We can go from Rebel to Jerry Spinelli's Wringer (HarperCollins, 1997 ISBN 0060249137). Here's a wonderful, frightening story about a kid who dares to rebel against a brutal custom that involves an entire town. They kill pigeons there during a yearly rite. Pigeons are captured and then released on the green and the men shoot them. Ten-year-old boys have a coming of age rite at that time -- they run out and wring the necks of any surviving pigeons. This year Palmer is ten. To refuse is to bring down condemnation and scorn upon his head. Every sixth grader has felt peer pressure to do something he or she knows is wrong. Here's a book that brings it to center stage.

*With the compliments of*

**For seventh grade** we can dig into value systems by reading aloud Byrd Baylor's wonderful picture book The Table Where Rich People Sit (Atheneum, 1994 ISBN 0684196530) illustrated by Peter Parnall. Here a young narrator has called a family meeting to discuss money -- she thinks they don't have enough. Her parents, however, consider themselves quite rich and they proceed to describe and enumerate their riches. They value working out of doors, wildlife, sunsets, coyote howls and the beauty they see all around them. The humor keeps the book from being saccharine and it should get students thinking about the things they value.

We can go from that book to Lois Lowry's The Giver (Houghton, 1993 ISBN 0395645662). In case you've been living in Antarctica and missed all the discussion about this book, we can tell you that it's about a seemingly ideal society. The society has eliminated all that they find inconvenient or unpleasant. They value conformity, good health and hard work. The price they've paid for their ideal society is something we learn about bit by bit. We should get into some good discussions as a result of this heart-stopping novel and, of course, a study of our society's values.

**Eighth graders** like to be read to too and we can use Ed Young's Lon Po Po: A Red-Riding Hood Story from China (Putnam ISBN 0399216197). They'll be surprised at your choice of a fairy tale for eighth graders, but look where you can go with it. We could go to fairy tale variants around the world but it's even more fun to go to the wolves. Young's images of the wolf dominate the book in both obvious and subtle ways. Find them together and talk about images of wolves -- the atavistic fear and awe and respect that most of us hold for those fascinating creatures.

We'll go from it to Melvin Burgess's novel of obsession The Cry of the Wolf (Beech Tree, 1994 ISBN 0688136257). What if there was one surviving wolf in England and what if a man's obsession was to kill that wolf? What if you knew where that wolf was and you inadvertently told the hunter? What if the tables were turned and the hunter became the hunted? You'd have a thriller and an audience of eighth graders sitting on the edge of their seats. We can go from there to other books about obsession, about wolves and about the pros and cons of hunting.

Chaucer's Canterbury Tales is usually reading material for college students rather than **ninth graders**, but take a look at the edition illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman (Lothrop, 1988 ISBN 0688062016). The selections are age appropriate and the artist vividly renders the characters. It's a good introduction to the time and to the idea of pilgrimage, which will be extended in our choice of novel for reading aloud to ninth graders.

The Ramsay Scallop by Frances Temple (Orchard, 1994 ISBN 0531068366) is a wonderfully wise novel, steeped in careful research, and full of fascinating details about life in the middle ages. Elenor and Thomas's marriage has been arranged for them. Elenor is a curious, lively and joyful person who has been enjoying her life. Now, however, Thomas has returned from a crusade, discouraged and disillusioned about what he has done and seen during what should have been a holy war.

Father Gregory devises a pilgrimage for Elenor and Thomas to Spain. Their trek takes them around Europe, joining up with other pilgrims, getting to know many others and themselves. What they see and experience on their journey gives us insight into the way of life for many during the Middle Ages but Temple also offers ideas and dilemmas about such things as religion -- Catholic and Islam, honor, heroes, dedication, the nature of sin and the debts owed by human beings to each other.

You won't stop here, of course; you can't. **Aim for quality and variety.** If your first book is a fantasy, try for realism next time. If your first main character is female, the boys should find a hero in your next choice. Keep it varied. Keep the reading level one half step above that of the average reader in your class. Read aloud choices should open doors and help the kids reach for the best. Good luck.

## **Parent Conferences: End-of-the-year tips: 88 great reads**

[Only the intermediate books appropriate for grades 4 and up are included for brevity. There are many titles for grades 3-6 and other overlapping levels listed at this site]

[http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/endyear/88\\_great\\_reads.htm](http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/endyear/88_great_reads.htm)

### Intermediate Fiction

#### All Alone in the Universe

Thirteen-year-old Debbie is devastated when her best friend drops her in favor of another girl. By Lynne Rae Perkins (Greenwillow, 1999) **Grades 5–8.**

#### Bud, Not Buddy

During the Great Depression in 1936, 10-year-old Bud runs away from his latest foster family in search of his father. By Christopher Paul Curtis (Delacorte, 1999) **Grades 5–7.**

#### Dave at Night

At the Hebrew Home for Boys in Harlem, newly orphaned Dave sneaks outside at night and befriends an elderly fortune-teller. By Gail Carson Levine (HarperCollins, 1999) **Grades 4–8.**

#### The Folk Keeper

Fifteen-year-old Corinna, disguised as a boy, is in charge of keeping the dangerous, underworld Folk under control. By Franny Billingsley (Simon & Schuster, 1999) **Grades 5–8.**

#### Francie

Growing up in a segregated Alabama town, 12-year-old Francie yearns to join her father in Chicago. By Karen English (Farrar, 1999) **Grades 5–8.**

#### Getting Near to Baby

Willa Jo and Little Sister sit on the roof of their aunt and uncle's house, as Willa Jo recalls the awful weeks since their baby sister died. By Audrey Coulombis (Capricorn, 1999) **Grades 5–8.**

#### Good Night, Maman

While Karin Levi and her brother Marc grow accustomed to living in a refugee camp in New York in 1944, Karin longs for her mother, left behind in France. By Norma Fox Mazer (Harcourt, 1999) **Grades 5–8.**

#### Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

In Harry's second year at Hogwarts, he and his friends Hermione and Ron must find out who — or what — is turning students to stone. By J. K. Rowling (Scholastic, 1999) (S) **Grades 4–8.**

#### Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Harry would like to blend in at Hogwarts in his third year, but an escaped murderer from the dreaded Azkaban prison is seeking him. By J. K. Rowling (Scholastic, 1999) (S) **Grades 4–8.**

#### Our Only May Amelia

The only girl in a family with seven brothers, 12-year-old May Amelia describes country life with her Finnish farming family in Washington State, 1899. By Jennifer L. Holm (HarperCollins, 1999) **Grades 4–7.**

#### The Princess Test

Accident-prone Lorelei, the blacksmith's only daughter, captures the heart of Prince Nicholas, whose parents want him to marry a real princess. By Gail Carson Levine (Harper Collins, 1999) (S) **Grades 4–7.**

*With the compliments of*

Putnam and Pennyroyal

Uncle Frank tells his niece Cora Lee a story about a pied-billed grebe named Putnam. By Patrick Jennings (Scholastic, 1999) **Grades 3–7.**

Skellig

With the help of his new friend, Mina, Michael sets out to care for a sick and disheveled man he finds in his shed. By David Almond (Delacorte, 1999) **Grades 5–8.**

Unbroken

After her mother dies when her horse and buggy collides with a Model T Ford, Harriet is sent to live with her disapproving Aunt Sarah on a Vermont farm in 1910. By Jessie Haas (HarperCollins, 1999) **Grades 5–8.**

Understood Betsy

In this reissued classic written in 1917, shy, frightened Elizabeth Ann is sent to live on her cousins' farm in Vermont. By Dorothy Canfield Fisher (Dell, 1999) **Grades 4–6.**

Wander

Secretly caring for a stray dog is the only good thing that's happened to James and his little sister Sary since their mother died. By Susan Hart Lindquist (Dell, 2000) **Grades 4–6.**

When JFK Was My Father

When Georgia's parents separate in 1963 and she is sent to boarding school in Connecticut, she imagines that President Kennedy is her real father. By Amy Gordon (Houghton Mifflin, 1999) **Grades 5–8.**

Non-fiction

Through My Eyes

In 1960, first grader Ruby Bridges was one of the first African-American children to attend a formerly all-white New Orleans public school. By Ruby Bridges (Scholastic, 1999) **Grades 4–8.**

### **Specifically for Boys:**

[The recommended readings at this site are divided up for “young”, “middle” and “older guys”, judging from the titles 9-12 year olds seem to fall under “middle guys” so that is the list copied below, but titles from the other lists may also be appropriate]

<http://www.guysread.com/>

A Series of Unfortunate Events by <b>Lemony Snicket</b>	The Jumping Tree; Finding Our Way by <b>Rene Saldana Jr.</b>	Brian's Winter; The River; Hatchet by <b>Gary Paulsen</b>
The Baseball Card Adventure Series by <b>Dan Gutman</b>	Harry Potter books by <b>J.K. Rowling</b>	Nothing But The Truth; Poppy by <b>Avi</b>
Bud, Not Buddy by <b>Christopher Paul Curtis</b>	Tangerine by <b>Edward Bloor</b>	My Side of the Mountain by <b>Jean Craighead George</b>
Sideways Stories from Wayside School	The Beast by <b>Walter Dean Myers</b>	The Giver by <b>Lois Lowry</b>

*With the compliments of*

by <b>Louis Sachar</b>  Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark edited by <b>Alvin Schwartz</b>  Maze; Far North by <b>Will Hobbs</b>  Bunnica by <b>James Howe</b>  Charlie and the Chocolate Factory by <b>Roald Dahl</b>  The Day My Butt Went Psycho by <b>Andy Griffiths</b>  This Can't Be Happening at MacDonald Hall by <b>Gordon Korman</b>  Maniac McGee by <b>Jerry Spinelli</b>  Be A Perfect Person in Just Three Days by <b>Stephen Manes</b>  The Spiderwick Chronicles by <b>Holly Black</b>	Among the Hidden by <b>Margaret Haddix</b>  Unreal; Undone by <b>Paul Jennings</b>  Island Boyz by <b>Graham Salisbury</b>  The Phantom Tollbooth by <b>Norton Juster</b>  Touching Spirit Bear by <b>Ben Mikaelson</b>  Silverwing; Sunwing; Firewing by <b>Ken Oppel</b>  The Last Book in the Universe by <b>Rodman Philbrick</b>  Cirque du Freak books by <b>Darren Shan</b>  Eagle of the Ninth by <b>Rosemary Sutcliffe</b>  Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher by <b>Bruce Coville</b>  October Sky by <b>Homer Hickam</b>	Skellig; Kit's Wilderness by <b>David Almond</b>  Artemis Fowl books by <b>Eoin Colfer</b>  Smugglers, and Wreckers by <b>Iain Lawrence</b>  The Alex Rider books by <b>Anthony Horowitz</b>  Joey Pigza books by <b>Jack Gantos</b>  Merlin books by <b>T.A. Barron</b>  Tuck Everlasting by <b>Natalie Babbitt</b>  The Moves Make the Man by <b>Bruce Brooks</b>  Chicago by <b>Richard Peck</b>  The Tripod Trilogy by <b>John Christopher</b>  Frindle by <b>Andrew Clements</b>
---	--	--

For more information contact  
**Research Works! for child literacy**  
 Room 3269 PAS  
 200 University Avenue West  
 Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1  
 kbloom@research-works.ca