

5 Turning Them Into Readers



Practical Teaching Ideas



Providing adult role-models

Children learn by imitating adults.

If children see adults absorbed in (and enjoying) books, they come to regard reading as a normal part of grown-up life. If, on the other hand, adults in positions of influence – such as teachers – say they are too busy to read because they have other, more important things to do, then children are likely to stop reading at the earliest opportunity because not reading ‘feels’ like grown-up behaviour.

It is therefore essential for young people to see lots of adult ‘role-models’ reading books.



As children hit puberty, their interests change and the ‘reading habit’ they have (hopefully) acquired comes under increased pressure. This is when adult role-models can be particularly important in helping to protect and ‘shore up’ the child’s reading habit.



What teachers can do

If you are a teacher, here are the top tips to promote reading amongst the children you work with.

-  Always have a book with you that you are in the process of reading. Make sure that everybody can see it sticking out of your bag or on the corner of your desk. Show that books are important to you.



Make it clear that you take your book wherever you go in case you get an odd moment to read.

-  Let the children see you reading for pleasure.



Talk about the books you are reading. Talk about the characters, or the situations that they find themselves in. Discuss some of the plot issues with the children.

Show that reading is rewarding.

-  Talk to parents about the importance of providing reading role-models at home. Make practical suggestions about how they can help their children with reading.



It can need handling with tact but, for example, boys who see dads and other men in their lives reading are probably more likely to become readers than those who don't.

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-  If the class or group is reading silently, then you read too. If you undertake any other activity, you are suggesting that that is more important than reading. It isn't (except in the direst of emergencies, such as to tend a sick child).
-  Talk informally with the children about books and about reading. Do it often.
-  Present yourself as someone who never leaves home bookless, who sometimes forgets to wash up because you're so deep in your book, who often can't remember whether you've read the book or seen the film ... and so on. Tell them the things you never leave home without (house keys, money, mobile phone, book ...).



The children may laugh at, and with, you – but they will register the fact that books can be fantastically rewarding, and some will copy you.

Become a book fanatic. Make it clear how much pleasure reading books gives you.

-  Tell them about books you enjoyed when you were their age – and/or about books your own children have liked.
-  Listen to what children tell you about books they have read which you haven't. Make a point of reading some of them and then feeding back your thoughts.



It is very gratifying for a child if a teacher heeds a recommendation and spends time exploring it. It gives real status to reading.



Adults – especially dads – can be powerful role-models.



What parents can do

And here are the top tips for parents.

- ✍ Make a point of reading any book, or comic, or whatever else your child reads, so that you can discuss it with them.
- ✍ If the book relates to a TV programme or film, chat about which was better and why.



What can a book do that a film can't? What can a film do which a book can't?

Why, for example, is the plot of the film version of a book nearly always simpler than the original book?

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- ✍ Read as much as you can yourself – books, magazines, newspapers, websites – whatever. Make sure you let your children see you doing it. This applies particularly to dads and sons, so that boys grow up thinking that reading is an OK, ‘blokish’ thing to do.
- ✍ Go to the library or bookshop (or look at on-line bookshops) with your child so that you choose books and/or magazines together – and they see that you are interested in reading.



Getting help from heroes

It really encourages young readers if they discover that their heroes and heroines (film stars, premier league footballers, pop musicians, etc.) value reading too.



Famous sports personalities are great role-models to promote reading.

- ✎ Several of the big football clubs in Britain run literacy education programmes, whereby players go into schools to encourage reading. This is usually done alongside coaching the children in football and inviting them to the ground as an incentive.



If you are a teacher it is worth contacting your local club to see what's on offer, if anything. Or take the initiative and start a partnership with the club.

- ✎ At a national level, the UK Government's *Playing for Success* scheme works to motivate pupils through study support centres at sports clubs. During the National Year of Reading (2008) many Premier League and First Division Clubs joined in the scheme, and others joined in local partnerships with, for example, libraries or Local Authorities, to promote reading. This work continues.
- ✎ The UK's National Literacy Trust also runs *Reading the Game*, an initiative to promote literacy through sport. Many Premier League football clubs (for example) have players directly involved in this scheme. You can find out more at www.literacytrust.org.uk/reading_the_game.html.



Listening and following

Make use of audio-books. These are available on CD from high street and on-line book-shops, and also as downloads from websites such as Amazon, Audible.com or via iTunes.



In a busy classroom, or in the living room or kitchen at home, you can easily set children up with headphones so that others are not disturbed.

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 Encourage a child listening to an audio-book to follow the story in the book as it is read to them. Doing so binds reading and listening together.



Many audio-books contain abridged versions of the text. If the child is listening to an abridged audio-book, it may not be easy to follow with the printed book.

-  For a child learning to read, there are advantages to listening to a recording whilst following the written text. For example:
- ✓ It develops listening skills.
 - ✓ It helps to build concentration span.
 - ✓ It boosts confidence, because the child feels as if they are actually reading.
 - ✓ Even if the child listens and follows without much adult support, they will still acquire some whole-word recognition.
 - ✓ If a grown-up is available to work on the phonics opportunities afterwards, it puts valuable learning into an enjoyable context.
 - ✓ In time, if a child has listened and followed the same text several times, they will begin to know it by heart.



When you hear a child ‘reading’ the book aloud without the audio-book, you know that they are really progressing.