

34%
of kids read
5 to 7 days
per week
SCHOLASTIC/
YUOGOV SURVEY

Hooked on books

With constant competition from screens, it's not easy to get kids into reading. Yet reading is one of the very best habits you can pass on for a happier, healthier life. Here's how to instill a love of books in your child, whether you've got a baby or a big kid.

PRODUCED BY **SASHA EMMONS** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **PETE RYAN**

There are the Before Times screen time rules and then there are lockdown rules. If you've let limits on TV and gadgets and YouTube slide (or evaporate altogether), welcome to the club.

But as our increased time at home continues into the summer, you may be experiencing the downsides of excessive screen time: surly moods, power struggles over turning it off, decreased attention spans, and kids imitating obnoxious behaviour they see on shows.

The antidote is simple: books. The benefits of reading cannot be overstated. Studies show it stimulates the brain, increases empathy, grows vocabulary, promotes socialization, can help kids sleep better, and decreases risk of dementia later in life. And research has also proven that time with books can also greatly reduce stress—couldn't we all use a dose of Zen these days?

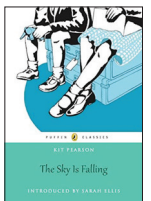
A 2017 Scholastic/YouGov survey of Canadian children found that while the majority of children read for fun, only 34 percent are frequent readers. Boys are less likely than girls to read often. By the time kids reach high school, they are half as likely to read every day compared to when in grade school. It's important to develop a reading habit early, and then encourage your kid to keep it going. "A child who loves reading will practise reading that much more," says Alyson Shaw, a paediatrician at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario and an assistant professor of paediatrics at the University of Ottawa.

The good news is that there are many things parents can do to cultivate a love of books in their kids. With the kids finished school and all of us spending more time at home, summer may be just the right time to kickstart a reading habit. Here's how to get started, age by age.

Oh, Canada!

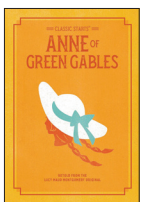
10 Canadian classics your kids can dip into this summer.

Today's Parent worked with librarians and literacy experts to come up with the definitive ranking of children's books by Canadian authors. For the full list of 100 books, go to todaysparent.com/bestbooks.



The Sky Is Falling by Kit Pearson

During World War II, 10-year-old Norah and her brother are sent away from their parents in England to navigate a new life in Canada in this touching historical account.



Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery

Melodramatic and relatable Anne-with-an-E is an 11-year-old orphan who finds love, loss and belonging in picturesque Prince Edward Island.



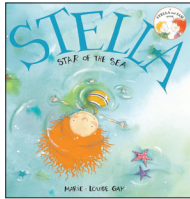
The Cremation of Sam McGee by Robert W. Service

Famed Canadian painter Ted Harrison illustrates the haunting classic gold rush-themed poem.

82%

of school-aged kids say they know they should read more books for fun. The same percentage of parents echoes that sentiment.

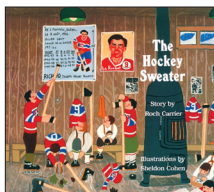
SCHOLASTIC/
YOUNGOV SURVEY



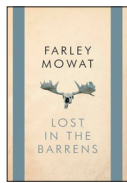
Stella, Star of the Sea
by Marie-Louise Gay
Stella is eager to swim in the sea, but her little brother, Sam, has some reservations in this whimsical first book of the *Stella* series.



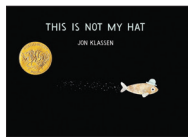
Silverwing
by Kenneth Oppel
In this exciting fantasy novel, a young Silverwing bat named Shade is separated from his family and must embark on a dangerous journey to find them.



The Hockey Sweater
by Roch Carrier and Sheldon Cohen
In a small Quebec town, life revolves around playing hockey and the Montreal Canadiens, but trouble brews when Roch outgrows his Habs sweater and receives a Toronto Maple Leafs sweater as a replacement.



Lost in the Barrens
by Farley Mowat
A Cree boy and a white orphan living with his uncle set out on a thrilling—and, at times, nail-biting—Arctic adventure.



This Is Not My Hat
by Jon Klassen
A little fish steals a large sleeping fish's teeny bowler hat. He's pretty sure the big fish won't catch him!



The Paper Bag Princess
by Robert Munsch
illustrations by Michael Martchenko
In this classic girl-power tale, Elizabeth's betrothed, Prince Ronald, is captured by a terrible fire-breathing dragon. She uses her wits to save him, but was it worth it?



Shi-shi-etko
by Nicola I. Campbell
Illustrations by Kim LaFave
Based on true events, this bittersweet tale follows a young Indigenous girl through her last few days with her family before she's sent to a residential school.

—AMY VALM

BABIES AND TODDLERS

Start early

You might feel slightly ridiculous reading to someone whose one kinda-word is “bah,” but experts say it's never too early to start. “In the first year of life, your baby's brain grows more—and more quickly—than it ever will again. Your little one is absorbing everything from the world around them at an especially rapid rate,” says Ariel Siller, CEO of the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation. “Reading helps your child learn how to understand the world around them, form connections with others, and grow into a healthy and well-rounded person.”

Act it out

It's time to get your Meryl Streep on and really sell it. “By reading aloud and slowly exaggerating sounds, you are encouraging your baby to make sounds of their own. Using silly voices and asking your baby lots of questions as you go along is also a fun way to introduce them to the variety of sounds in language and engage them in a book,” says Siller.

Read the same book again (and again)

If you can recite *The Gruffalo* in your sleep because your kid has requested it so many times, understand there's a good reason they love hearing the same words over and over. “Children learn more vocabulary from that repeated reading and repetition,” says Joanne Cummings, a clinical child psychologist in Toronto. “Repetition leads to mastery, predictability and a sense of confidence.”



70% of parents begin reading to their children before they are one year old, but only 35% start before their baby is three months old.

—SCHOLASTIC/YOUNGOV SURVEY

PRESCHOOLERS

Talk about the story

A key part of reading is comprehension—understanding what's going on in the story and beginning to make predictions about what will happen next. When you pick up a new book, look at the cover and pictures together with your child and talk about what it might be about, suggests Barbara Lepp, a former teacher who now works as an independent education consultant and Manitoba coordinator for the International Literacy Association, in Carman, Man.

Have a book on the go

Show your kids that reading can be done anytime and anywhere. Keep a bag filled with books by the door (be sure to switch them up frequently so your kid doesn't get bored) and take it with you whenever you leave the house, to read whenever you might have some minutes to kill, suggests Lepp. (Obviously, this advice will be more doable when we're leaving the house more frequently than we are now.)

Get your kid a library card

At most libraries, kids can get their own card as soon as they are born. But getting one around the age of four or five is the sweet spot, since at that age they know what it means to be a member of something and can get excited about it, says Diane Banks, manager of children's programs at the Toronto Public Library. As libraries open again, let your kid explore the books on the shelves and take home a few that interest them.

SCHOOL-AGERS

Keep the story-time tradition alive

Many parents stop reading to their kids once they can read on their own, but there's a strong case to be made for continuing the read-together habit, as it allows kids to get enjoyment out of a story even if it's above their reading ability. “If they pick something that is a little—or a lot—above their reading level, having you read it to them can help them expand their abilities. You could even try having them read a few pages and then you read a few pages,” says Siller.

Be a reading role model

Kids are watching what you do, so make sure they see you pick up a book or a magazine as often as possible. If you're reading on your phone or tablet, be explicit that you're looking at a book (and not playing *Animal Crossing*) and explain why you're interested in it, says Banks. Talk to them about stories you've enjoyed, what your book club is discussing or what you've learned from an article you looked at earlier that day.

Remember that reading isn't just books

Reading extends beyond chapter books. From sports stats to the information on Pokémon cards, all reading counts, says Shaw. Lepp agrees: “Don't discount the interests your kid has—they will lead him into books.” The same goes for graphic novels, which parents should never write off as less legitimate than novels (you'll find out why on page 66).

—CLAIRE GAGNÉ AND SASHA EMMONS

What if my kid hates reading?

When it's hard, some kids just want to give up. Here's how to help them persevere.



Some kids learn to read pretty easily but just don't seem to like it. If that's the case in your home, don't give up: Try to find a topic or theme your kid is interested in—even if it's potty humour (sounds like a job for Captain Underpants!). Talk to other parents to find out what books their kids enjoy reading. Let your little one try audiobooks, too—they can act as a gateway to reading, especially if your kid is reading along while he listens.

But if your kid doesn't like reading because it's hard for them, it's important to figure out if there is something getting in their way. Have their eyes checked to rule out any vision problems, and schedule a conversation with their teacher. Your child may benefit from an assessment to determine if something is hindering their reading development, such as a learning disability in reading, also called dyslexia. Around grade two, kids shift from learning to read to reading to learn, so it's important to address any reading challenges early. “That's a watershed year,” says Steve Truch, the Calgary-based founder and director of The Reading Foundation, an organization that runs remedial programs in Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto for students who are struggling with learning. If children are still having a hard time, he says, “parents need to have a serious look at it.”

Experts warn there's also a fine line between awareness of a delay and going overboard in an effort to close the reading gap. Parents sometimes panic and begin pushing their kids, which can backfire. “They use flash cards for word recognition, they drill their children on alphabet letter recognition, and have them practise writing their name,” says Marianne McTavish, associate dean of teacher education at the University of British Columbia and a professor in emergent and early literacy education in the Department of Language and Literacy. “Yes, those are important skills the child needs to develop, but that can also take the joy out of reading altogether, so you get into a situation where the children will resist this idea of what ‘reading’ is.” —LISA KADANE

4 SNEAKY WAYS TO GET KIDS READING

These stealth ways to sneak more reading into kids' daily lives help their skills and confidence grow.



1. Put subtitles on the TV

Modify your settings so the subtitles are always on. Your kid's eyes can't help but be drawn to the closed-captioning flashing on the screen right under *Doc McStuffins*.

2. Leave things to read around the house

Whether it's the funny pages or a book of jokes, leave interesting reading materials out in spots where kids are likely to idly pick them up—at the kitchen table, in the car and even in the bathroom.

3. Offer a movie as a reward for reading the book

Seeing the movie before reading the

book limits kids' ability to fill in the blanks with their imagination. Also, movies can act as powerful motivation to finish the book first. Some recent films that can work as the carrot on the stick: *Call of the Wild*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *A Wrinkle in Time* and *Wonder*.

4. Play word games

Hide reading practice in friendly competition by playing games together based on wordplay. Some kid-friendly options for your next family game night: Bananagrams, Boggle, Taboo, Tick Tock Boom, Scrabble Junior and Apples to Apples Junior.

—JACQUELINE MILLER



The good news about graphic novels

If they're all your kid likes, relax. Graphic novels totally count as reading.

"I used to look at graphic novels as the junk food of reading," says Vicki Fraser, an elementary school teacher in Rosemère, Que. But that changed when she was introduced to a graphic novel biography of French-Canadian strongman Louis Cyr that she couldn't put down. "I was quickly pulled into the story, and the images helped to guide me, keep me focused and make the story more clear," she explains. Now graphic novels are an essential part of her grade five classroom.

Graphic novels help her students become more sophisticated readers. Visual cues, like the font used, can help to communicate a character's emotion, for instance. Graphic novels also teach kids to make predictions about what's to come in the story. "There's a lot of thinking that's required to connect different portions of the text together or even frame to frame," says Sean Henderson, a high school teacher in Toronto who has incorporated graphic novels into his classroom. "A lot of inference skills are needed to read a graphic novel."

And just because these books have pictures doesn't mean the vocabulary isn't challenging. In fact, the vocabulary can sometimes be pretty tough, but kids can rely on the visuals to help them along.

When looking for graphic novels for your own kid, ask staff at an independent bookstore to make some recommendations. Librarians are great guides, too. Keep in mind that even though graphic novels look like comics, they aren't all aimed at children. Before giving a graphic novel to your kid to read, Fraser suggests you flip through the book or read it, since some have mature content. And don't be judgmental about the content—the best books are those that keep kids reading, so let them go for whatever appeals to them. —ALEX MLYNEK

Buy a book, help a child in need

In partnership with Indigo



An Elephant & Piggie Biggie

by Mo Willems
This classic series follows two polar-opposite buddies who teach each other about friendship.



The Grateful Book

by Angela Kohler
Just what we need right now: a children's book that helps kids look at the world around them and give thanks for it all.



Wonder

by R.J. Palacio
We dare you not to tear up after meeting Auggie Pullman, a boy destined to never blend into the crowd.