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Count Reading In: How to Build Reading into Your Child's Summer

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Left to right: Max Rittman, Annalise McKenzie, Tommy Richards, Hailey Richards Photo Sophie Braccini

After a long and rainy winter, the sun has finally decided to bless Lamorinda with its first radiant week. In every neighborhood kids are basking in their sudden freedom from teachers and schoolwork, and parents are finalizing summer plans. As families pencil in vacations, 4th of July picnics and days at the pool, they should also consider making time for a less stereotypical activity: summer reading.

A three month break from required reading can be too long for young students, especially those that are struggling. By the fall semester, many have regressed, and teachers must spend the first weeks of school reviewing material. Summer reading can help your children maintain their skills and enhance their work in writing and spelling.

Some parents worry that their kids will burn out without ample time to recover from the school year. However Jill Mary, a literacy expert from Purdue University, believes that as long as children are engaged by what they read, summer reading is beneficial. In a 2005 interview with the news website newswise, Mary advises: "Have fun, relax, enjoy yourself, read a book or two, and don't worry about the upcoming [...] school year." In addition, research suggests that as few as six books can prevent young readers from losing the skills that they labor to develop during fall, winter and spring.

Use these ten great tips to encourage reading, discussion and fun in your home this summer.

1. Teach your children that reading is an important part of family life by taking regular trips to the library.
2. Never stop reading aloud! You read at a higher level than your child, and he or she will benefit from listening to you and discussing words or ideas that he or she doesn't understand.
3. Host a book club. Reading is more fun if all your friends are doing it, too! Allow each child (or parent-child pair) to select a book to read and discuss. Ask the children to summarize the story, talk about their favorite or least favorite parts and hypothesize why the main character acts the way he or she does.
4. Keep a list on your refrigerator of all the books each family member has read over the summer. You and your child might even agree on a goal; race to see who can finish five books first, or plan an outing as a reward for reading ten books.
5. Never force your child to finish what they start reading. If the material doesn't appeal, ask your child why they dislike the book and encourage them to choose a different one.
6. Remember that children can benefit from reading a variety of materials. For example, if you and your child make cookies, you might ask him or her to read each step in the recipe aloud.
7. Bring audio books on road trips or long car rides. While these can be expensive to purchase, many can be rented from any of the Lamorinda libraries. Consider listening to books that relate to your destination. For example, if your family is camping in Yosemite, you could listen to a children's book about wild animals on the drive up.
8. Try to read something with your child every day. Set an example - read the cereal boxes together in the morning and reserve a half hour for family reading in the afternoon.
9. Get involved with your local bookstore. Some bookstores offer fun summer reading programs for kids.
10. Talk to your local librarian! The Lafayette Library and Learning Center, Moraga Library and Orinda Library offer a bevy of summer activities that encourage students to engage in summer reading. For example, the summer reading program for children (ages 2-10) requires your child to pick up a reading log, which contains a series of footprints. A footprint can be colored in after your child reads for 20 minutes; when all the footprints are full, there are a variety of spectacular prizes available, including Round Table Pizza coupons and tickets to the Lawrence Hall of Science.

With such a wide array of strategies and strong local support, there are a myriad of opportunities to help students learn to love reading this summer.

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