

Read any good books lately?

Encouraging the reading habit with middle schoolers

It's no secret that most middle schoolers simply aren't reading enough outside of the regular school day. Yet daily reading time is key to improving comprehension skills and expanding vocabulary – skills your child will need to succeed on important state exams in middle school and beyond. Reading is also an important way for children to expand their horizons, explore interests and form opinions about the world and their place in it.

So what's a parent to do when reading starts to take a backseat to the lure of online chatting, extracurricular events and social activities? Take heart! With a little creativity, even the most resistant middle schooler can be coaxed into reading. What follows are some tips from teachers, librarians and parents who've been there:

- **Read with your children.** Just because they are growing up doesn't mean that they won't enjoy reading with you. **The Read-Aloud Handbook** by author Jim Trelease and **How to Get Your Child to Love Reading** by Esme Raji Codell (also at Web site www.planetesme.com) offer booklists and suggestions for reading with your young teens. If you find that your children resist being read to, find a book that you can both delve into separately and make time to discuss it as you go. The topics they choose may surprise you—many young adult (YA) themes deal with dark topics and heavy issues—but can also help you learn more about your growing children's concerns, friendships and ideas about life.

- **Introduce them to other authors/books in the genre they like.** If your children like science fiction books like *The City of Ember* by Jeanne DuPrau, they'll probably like books from the *Artemis Fowl* series by Eoin Colfer (or vice versa). Local and online booksellers and youth librarians can help you and your children find books that will continue to spark their interests.

- **Help them bookmark online news sites and other Web pages that tap into their interests.** As kids become more technologically savvy, they'll likely read and learn from electronic formats like the Internet and online or e-books as well as paper. Regardless of the format, what matters is that what they read is well written and gets them thinking. There are many kid-friendly, online news sites and entertainment magazines, such as Sports Illustrated Kids (<http://www.sikids.com>) and Time for Kids (<http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK>). Families will also find a good collection of Web sites, organized by subject, at <http://www.ala.org/greatsites>.

- **Subscribe to magazines they'll enjoy.** With resistant readers — those who don't want to tackle the language-arts "classics" or be told what to read — a pleasure read about skateboarding or fashion might be what it takes to inspire the reading habit. Try browsing the YA section of local libraries and bookstores together for a selection of magazine aimed at young teens.

- **Write notes to give your children "real life" reasons to read.** As they move into the middle school years, you may find that you and your children have less time for long talks. To keep the lines of communication open while encouraging them to read, drop a letter in their backpack, tack a note of encouragement to the bathroom

mirror and/or write family news and appointments on a wall calendar.

- **Make the library a regular stop.** School and local libraries have expanded young adult (YA) sections that feature books and other media specifically aimed at young teens. Ask about book discussion groups and other library-based programs for middle schoolers. Youth services librarians can also help steer children toward books that match their special interests.

- **Don't dismiss genres like graphic novels.** Growing in popularity, graphic novels are a lighter form of reading that mix literature and comic book art to tell a story. Many well-known novels and "classics" are now available as graphic novel adaptations. Most graphic novels are written at fourth to sixth grade reading levels — comparable to *Time* magazine. When helping children choose graphic novels, look for age recommendations and advisories. Some books contain violence, inappropriate language and adult situations. A great Web site for reviews of graphic novels appropriate for middle schoolers is *No Flying/No Tights* at <http://noflyingnotights.com/core.html#middle>.

- **Watch the movie version.** With reluctant readers, seeing stories on the big screen may provide the spark needed to pick up the book version — or tackle the next in a series, like the Lemony Snicket tales, Harry Potter adventures or Lord of the Rings trilogy. Movies can also be a fun way for children that have already read the book to experience the story from a new perspective.

- **Establish a nightly reading ritual for the whole family.** Parents can help encourage daily reading time by modeling the behavior themselves. Try carving off a few hours each week when everyone in the family agrees to "unplug" from the television, online chatting and video games. Instead, curl up with a good book, magazine or newspaper and discover how rewarding this can be for everyone!

Reading resources on the Web

There are many wonderful online reading resources for families of middle schoolers. Here is a sampling:

Great middle school reads:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/alscresources/booklists/MiddleSchoolReads.htm>

http://www.reading.org/resources/tools/choices_young_adults.html

Books that boys will love:

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

Starting a mother/daughter reading club:

<http://www.scholastic.com/dearamerica/parentteacher/club/index.htm>

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