

Teenagers and Reading

By Patricia Young-Vega



Perhaps the teenagers in your family were once avid readers but now hardly ever open a book, or perhaps they never liked reading in the first place.

As an adult, you know that reading is important and you obviously want to make sure that the teenagers in your life grow into adulthood with all the skills they need to succeed.

In this article, Patricia Young-Vega suggests how parents can help teenagers decide for themselves that reading is important to their lives.

Try to avoid...

Before I list ways to encourage teen reading that work, here are a few tactics that don't:

- **Pressuring, nagging, or bribing.** Encourage teens to read, but don't hound them.
- **Criticizing what teens read.** Explain what troubles you about certain types of reading materials after reading them yourself. Forbid as little as possible. And whenever you can, accept differences of opinion as just that.
- **Lavishing too much praise.** If you catch your teenagers reading, show interest, but don't make a big deal out of it. Teens need to know that they're reading for their own pleasure—not for your approval.

Ways to encourage teens to read...

- **Set an example.** Let teens see you reading for pleasure.
- **Furnish your home with a variety of reading materials.** Leave books, magazines, and newspapers around. Check to see what disappears for a clue to what interests your teenager.
- **Give teens an opportunity to choose their own books.** When you and your teen are out together, browse in a bookstore or library. Go your separate ways and make your own selections. A bookstore gift certificate is a nice way of saying, "You choose."
- **Build on your teen's interests.** Look for books and articles that feature their favorite sports teams, rock stars, hobbies, or television shows. Give a gift subscription to a special interest magazine.
- **View pleasure reading as a value in itself.** Almost anything your youngsters read—including the Sunday comics—helps build reading skills.
- **Read some books written for teens.** Young adult novels can give you valuable insights into the concerns and pressures felt by teenagers. You may find that these books provide a neutral ground on which to talk about sensitive subjects.
- **Make reading aloud a natural part of family life.** Share an article you clipped from the paper, a poem, a letter, or a random page from an encyclopedia—without turning it into a lesson.

- **Acknowledge your teen's mature interests.** Look for ways to acknowledge the emerging adult in your teens by suggesting some adult reading you think they can handle.
- **Keep the big picture in mind.** For all sorts of reasons, some teenagers go through periods without showing much interest in reading. Don't panic! Time, and a few tips from this article, may help rekindle their interest.

Talking to teens about reading...

Adults know how important it is for their teenagers to read. Reading is not just important while teens are in school; good reading skills are essential to future success in the workplace. But making a pitch for reading can be a real challenge. If you are the parent of a teenager who has lost interest in reading or never liked it much, here are some suggestions for connecting with your child about books and reading.

What's in it for your teen? Through reading they can:

- **Become an expert.** An expert on any subject they like—from sports stats to spelunking, coins to carburetors, or anything in between.
- **Live dangerously.** Through reading teens can share the challenges, fears, thrills, and achievements of those they are reading about without the risk.
- **Have a few laughs.** Many teens will enjoy sitting down with a book by their favorite stand-up comedian, a collection of jokes or cartoons, or a humor magazine.
- **See the world.** Without leaving their room, teens can visit places that fascinate them.
- **Travel through time.** Historical fiction and science fiction move a reader back and forth in time.
- **Use their brains.** Teens may enjoy solving a mystery by figuring out whodunit, outwitting a crafty villain, or thinking through a perilous situation.
- **Get some free advice.** Lots of novels feature teenage characters who have problems and pressures similar to those your teenage may be dealing with.
- **Discover new interests.** Through reading, teens may develop an interest in something they knew nothing about before.
- **Find a cause.** Teens can get smart on an issue that matters to them.
- **Escape.** Teens can escape noise, tension, or boredom by escaping into a book.

Helping teens find books that interest them...

What they say is true: the more you read, the better you read. In other words, stepping up the reading you do for yourself will make other reading tasks less of a chore. Here are some ideas parents can share with their teens to find the kinds of books that will most interest them:

- **Decide what you're in the mood for.** High adventure? Romance? Perhaps you enjoyed a recent movie or TV miniseries; chances are it was based on a book you'd enjoy also.
- **Ask around.** Ask friends, a favorite teacher, or your coach to suggest books they enjoyed.
- **Check out the library.** It won't cost you anything, and the choices are virtually unlimited. Don't be shy about asking a librarian a question like, "Do you have any books on rock music?"
- **Browse in a bookstore.** Find the section that interests you—fantasy, cars, computers, or whatever. Treat yourself to an inexpensive paperback, or just have a look around.
- **Consult a list of books other teenagers have enjoyed.** Ask for a book list at your school or public library.
- **Don't judge a book by its cover.** What you see on the cover is not necessarily what you get. Read the short reviews printed inside a dust jacket, or skim the first chapter to find out what a book is really about.
- **Try a few pages.** If the books not for you, put it aside and try another, until you find a winner.
- **Read at your own pace.** Reading isn't a contest. So what if you read slowly or skip words here and there? If you're interested, you'll read to the end, and that's what counts. And you'll probably find yourself picking up speed along the way.
- **Let one good thing lead to another.** When you read something that really speaks to you, you may be sorry to have it end. But the end is never really the end for a person who reads. You can always open another book, and another, and another.