

The Importance of Reading Bedtime Stories to Big Kids

A solid reader still needs storytime, even when your kid can read by herself. Keep the routine going with our advice and book recommendations!

By [Christine Cohen](#)



Remember snuggling with your child, book between you, the scent of baby shampoo under your nose? Most of us think such moments are gone after our snuggler learns to read. But they don't have to be! Save the ritual, and

you can help her become an even better reader than she is right now.

What Kids Gain:

Time with you. By keeping your bedtime routine alive, you and your child get to do something new together — cheer for the good guys and boo the bad ones in the books you read. You also get a peek into how your child sees the world through the comments she makes on the plot, the characters, and the setting. “Because you enter her world through the safe avenue of a third party — a character — you’ll have more insight than you ever would by asking ‘So, how’s life?’ ” says Michelle Anthony, Ph.D., a child psychologist in Denver. And, who knows, you may even find you have opinions in common!

Stronger reading skills. As kids reach the upper-elementary grades, reading demands increase, yet one-on-one reading instruction for competent readers doesn’t. Listening to you read more advanced books shows her strategies that will help her at school. You read aloud with expression. You pause for punctuation. You raise and lower your voice in tune with the action. You speed up or slow down to indicate the degree of tension in the text.

PLUS: THE BEDTIME ROUTINE YOU NEED TO START TONIGHT

New perspectives. Reading aloud with children, especially fourth and fifth-graders, teaches them to analyze and reflect on the text, says Krista Granieri, an adjunct literacy professor at Dowling College in Oakdale, NY, who also teaches elementary school special education classes. When reading to her students, Granieri thinks out loud — commenting on how the text may add to the child’s knowledge of the topic. For example, if you were reading a book with your child about dogs, you might note, “A Pomeranian, just like Aunt Elaine’s dog! But Princess is tan. I didn’t know there were black ones.”

A headstart on the future. Kids who are already fluent readers can do something their snugglebunny sibs can’t: appreciate the author’s craft. If they hear good writing often enough, it develops their ear. They can’t help but replicate it in schoolwork.

PLUS: THE BEST CHILDREN'S READING AND BOOK APPS

How to Get Back in the Routine

So you’re sold on keeping your 8:00 p.m. standing date — but your kid, not so much. To dull resistance:

1. Do it gradually

Start with every other day, and don’t replace independent reading. Instead, read a bit together before or after he’s read alone for a little while.

2. Take turns

Alternate reading pages or chapters.

3. Add a hook

"We're going to read *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, and then we'll rent the movie." Or "Harry's Butterbeer sounds so good. Let's try to make some after we finish this chapter."

4. Don't limit it to bedtime

Shared reading can happen anywhere, anytime. If you do stick to bedtime, consider pushing the time back. He may be reacting more to going to bed earlier than to reading along with you.

5. Switch things up

Sharing graphic novels, e-books, or news articles on your tablet counts. "My 11-year-old daughter and I were reading an article together about Miley Cyrus at the music awards. It started a discussion about whether her performance was appropriate or not and why," shares Linda Doherty of West Islip, NY. That's exactly what you want to happen — open communication and lots of bonding. Perfect!

PLUS: 6 BOOKS SIBLINGS CAN READ TOGETHER

Bring On the Picture Books!

Trust us — all kids love them. You just need to find ones that have more mature topics, and more text, than beginner versions. These make the grade:

Say Something

by Peggy Moss

A girl learns that staying silent when a kid is being bullied is nearly as bad as being a bully herself. We love the watercolor illustrations of the diverse children. *Tilbury House*, \$8.

Melissa Parkington's Beautiful, Beautiful Hair

by Pat Brisson

Tired of being "the girl with the gorgeous hair," Melissa wants to be known for something important. *Boyd's Mills*, \$17.

Enemy Pie

by Derek Munson

Jeremy's dad teaches him how to outsmart his enemy: Make a pie! Jeremy, the new kid in the neighborhood, finds out how to turn his first enemy into his best friend. *Chronicle*, \$16.

Fly Away Home

by Eve Bunting

A boy and his dad live in an airport, moving between terminals to avoid being noticed. After watching a trapped bird escape, the boy dreams up a plan. *HMH, \$7.*

PLUS: GET MORE BOOK SUGGESTIONS FROM OUR 100 BEST BOOKS FOR KIDS LIST

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