

How to Create a Literate Home: First Grader and Reader & Writer



A "literate home" for children at this stage contains several kinds of materials, helps children to establish a reading habit, and helps them to establish systems and tools for reading and writing independently. By the end of first grade, most children know how to read. By the end of third grade, most children can read smoothly and fluently. At this age, your child uses writing both to communicate his thoughts and feelings and to deepen his understanding of what he reads. Therefore, a "literate home" at this stage is one in which there are many reading and writing materials available and children are encouraged to make reading and writing a habit.

What You Need

- **Books**

A wide range of books is appropriate for first-, second-, and third-graders. Children at this age need to have books that they can read on their own. They also need to have more difficult books—informational books as well as fiction—that their parents can read aloud to them to help them continue to increase their vocabulary. Look for bargain children's books at used bookstores and yard sales or purchase books at great prices through monthly book clubs offered through school.
- **Writing Materials**

At this age, your child may enjoy having her own special books—whether it is a journal, a diary or a spiral-bound notebook. She may enjoy using a variety of different kinds of pens and pencils, including glitter pens and pens that can write in several different colors. First-, second-, and third-graders also enjoy making cards for various occasions, so keep a stock of colored paper, glue, glitter, ribbons and other materials that can be glued on a card.
- **Computer**

For children this age, the newest model of computer is not necessary—a computer that can support a basic word processing application is sufficient. If you have a computer with a CD-ROM player, there are many programs designed to help first-, second-, and third-graders read, spell and write.
- **Videos**

Videos are a good way to continue to expose your child to vocabulary, general information and varied story structures. Most early school-aged children enjoy watching long, complex videos of children's literature and enjoy watching and discussing them with a parent or sibling. Watching a video, reading the same book and comparing versions can be fun activity for children this age.
- **Games**

There are many games for children this age that facilitate reading development. Word games, such as Scrabble, Jr., Boggle, Think-It Link-It and WordXChange, are good ways for readers and writers to practice their reading and spelling skills. Games such as The Harold and the Purple Crayon Game, Clue, Jr. and Guess Who help children practice problem-solving skills and will help them in reading comprehension. Look for used games at school sales, used children's clothing stores and yard sales. Just check to make sure that most of the pieces and the directions are included.
- **Reading and Writing Materials for Parents**

When children see the adults around them using reading and writing in their everyday

lives, they're more likely to become readers and writers themselves. Simply having a bookshelf full of books, reading the local newspaper, and reading alongside your child as he does his homework shows your child that reading and writing serve valuable everyday purposes.

What You Can Do

- **Help your child pick independent reading books.** Ideal books for independent reading should be ones that children can read both accurately—by correctly identifying nearly all the words—and fluently—by reading smoothly and with good expression. To test out a book, have your child read a page or so aloud to gauge her accuracy and fluency. Teachers and librarians can also assist you in finding appropriate books for your child.
- **Foster your child's independent reading.** Reading a lot at this stage is important. One way children become better readers is through reading. You can encourage your child's independent reading by helping him establish a daily quiet reading time, by making sure that he is reading books that are at a comfortable level, and by talking with him about the books he reads.
- **Read aloud to your child.** Even when children are able to read by themselves, they still benefit from hearing an adult read complex material aloud to them. This way, your child will learn new vocabulary and increase her fund of general information.
- **Listen to your child read often.** Ask your child to read aloud to you from his favorite part of a book. Try reading with him so that you read a page and then he reads one. Hearing your child read aloud will allow you to hear his progress. It also gives you a chance to praise him.
- **Help your child to correct her own reading errors.** When you are reading with your child and she makes a mistake, ask her if what she reads made sense, encourage her to reread a part or help her cover up part of a word to help her figure it out.
- **Talk about things that interest your child.** First-, second-, and third-graders continue to learn a great deal of information through talking with parents. Discussion also helps them to clarify their own thoughts and feelings. Make yourself available to hear about what interests your child, whether it is her baseball game, ballet class or a lizard she found outside. Ask her genuine questions, listen to her answers and ask some questions that focus on how or why—not just what.
- **Play games with your child.** Playing games contributes to your child's literacy development. Word games obviously help your child to read and spell, but card games and logic games help him to learn patterning, categorizing, and problem-solving skills that are related to reading comprehension.
- **When he begins getting homework, help your child to create a homework routine.** You can help by making sure that he has a clean, quiet space in which to work, that he works in the same place every time, and that he has the necessary supplies. Help him find an ideal time, when he's neither too tired nor too hungry to focus, to do his work each day. If your child has trouble completing his work in a reasonable amount of time, try helping him to budget time by talking about what he will do first and how long he thinks each task will take.
- **Help your child with her homework, but don't do it for her.** If your child has questions, you can certainly answer them. If she can't think of what to write, you can help her brainstorm her ideas aloud before she writes. However, if you find that your child is relying on you for answers, if you think you may be giving too much support, or if

your child is very frustrated on a regular basis, it's a good idea to talk with your child's teacher.

- **Communicate with your child's teacher regularly.** By doing this, you can discuss successes and concerns, gain a better understanding of the curriculum, and gain ideas for what you can do at home to support your child's literacy development.