

EDUCATION



Combating illiteracy Get children reading early

Illiteracy is an unfortunate problem that affects too many Americans. Combating this situation involves teaching children to read when they are young. When parents, guardians, siblings and educators instill positive reading practices in youthful learners, the chances that these students become life long readers increases.

The National Reading Panel recommends five components of literacy: comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, decoding and phonemic awareness. Comprehension is having the ability to understand and synthesize information within a text. Fluency is being able to read like you're speaking. Decoding is sounding out words, which is related to pronunciation. Phonemic awareness is the sounds of letters and how they blend together, otherwise known as phonics.

Each component of literacy builds upon the other. Phonemic awareness leads to decoding. Being able to identify sounds makes it easier to pronounce them. Building vocabulary with the ability to decode promotes fluency. When kids know the meaning of words and are able to enunciate them, there is more flow in their reading. Comprehension is easier when people

read fluently.

Parents can work on literacy with their kids in the following ways. Take turns reading aloud. Have students repeat what is said. Stop twice a page to check for understanding. Talk about what is going on and predict what will happen next. This helps with comprehension. If students have difficulty with fluency, re-read pages instead of stopping. Once the fluency is achieved, comprehension will follow.

Using a variety of texts of high interest keeps reading interesting, especially for uninterested or unmotivated readers. In addition to reading books, encourage readers to get involved with magazines, newspapers and information from the Internet.

How can students be inspired to read? Why are some students reluctant? What factors contribute to this scenario?

Families need to read regularly. Just as dinner is assigned a set time, so should reading. Parents who read to their children find more success in pro-

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ON THE CHALKBOARD



moting the desire to read. Once kids learn how to read, they take turns with their parents during scheduled reading time. Providing the opportunity for children to choose their reading material empowers them with decision making. Both parents and kids should share the responsibility of choosing reading material in order to meet everyone's interests and introduce new subjects.

When students are reluctant to read, they usually find it time consuming as a result of experiencing difficulties with one of the five components of literacy as presented by the National Reading Panel. Introducing reading material involving topics of interest is one way to begin the battle of the resistant reader. Offering an incentive or reward for their time reading also helps in this situation. Most importantly, regardless of

busy and demanding schedules, make time to read with kids.

People who read are better writers. Famous authors, such as S.E. Hinton, known for her tale of rebellious and misguided youth in *The Outsiders*, says that she became a better writer by reading. She read everything, including food labels. The point is the more you read, the better your writing will be.

People who claim they don't read because they are not good at it enable their inability. These folks should begin with material that is shorter in length. Books can be intimidating in size at times. Short stories and magazines are a great starting point until confidence is achieved. When comfort levels grow, take on the challenge of conquering a book. Join a book club or follow the critique of a friend. Although we are instructed to not judge books by their covers, it's okay to do so when perusing a bookstore.

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