



Book Week

For over 75 years, the Children's Book Council of Australia has promoted Children's Book Week®. Book week isn't just about finding a costume for the parade (and hoping that this year your child doesn't want to dress up as Captain Underpants again), it's about celebrating books. Australian authors and illustrators are particularly celebrated, as classroom teachers and librarians in schools and public libraries create displays, run activities, and tell stories relating to each year's theme. This year, Book Week is this week (Aug 19-25), and the theme is Read, Grow, Inspire.

This article isn't about Book Week though. It's about why books and reading are so important for our kids that we should be celebrating books every day, not just one week a year. In this article I'll also describe how you can help your child to get more out of their reading. And lastly, I'll give you some tips on what to do when your kids don't seem to want to read.

The science

It is never too early to start a habit of reading with your kids. A meta-analysis (a study that synthesises the results of lots of other studies, in this case 99 other studies) found that when children are exposed to book reading from an early age, it begins a 'causal spiral'; being exposed to books stimulates language and reading development, and in turn children who are more proficient in comprehension and reading skills choose to read more. Significantly, this study looked at every age from preschool to university and found that the gap between readers and non-readers widened every year, culminating in greater academic success in university. There is also some evidence that people who read more live longer, and that reading fiction boosts social skills such as empathy.

Getting the most out of reading

Reading is good, regardless of how it's done or what is read. But there are a few things we can do to help our children enjoy the benefits and satisfaction it offers. Here are three ideas:

- (i) Have your child read to you. Children don't even need to be able to read to do this. Babies enjoy lifting up flaps and turning pages. Toddlers love pointing at the pictures in their favourite books. Preschoolers may even memorise the words to a well-repeated story. Then as our children learn to read independently, they tend to be really excited to read to us if we can find the time to slow down and turn reading into an activity to share.
- (ii) Read to your child. In addition to bonding, reading to your child helps them to learn about expression, pacing, and the different ways we can experience books. Please remember, when you read to your child, to read slower than you think you should. And for younger

children, pause and ask them questions about how they'd feel, what the characters are feeling, and what they're thinking about the story. (It can be hard to stay awake, I know! But it's worth it.)

- (iii) Have FART time regularly. FART stands for Family All Reading Together. Perhaps once or twice a week, let everyone know it's FART time. Grab some treats. Have everyone select a book. And sit together in the living room while you read those books together, either aloud or in silence.

What to do when your child doesn't want to read

Not everyone loves reading. However, kids who lack motivation for reading are usually struggling with a small handful of challenges. They either (i) have a reading disorder such as dyslexia, (ii) feel disconnected and want connection with someone, (iii) don't feel competent, or (iv) are feeling controlled and want more choice in what they read. Each of these will reduce intrinsic desire to read. Our role as parents is to help them overcome those boundaries. We can do this by:

- (i) Helping them find appropriate support. With time, patience, and the right structures in place, anyone can learn to enjoy reading. Being dyslexic doesn't prevent that; in fact, one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, F. Scott Fitzgerald, is believed to have had dyslexia.
- (ii) Reading together – them to us and us to them. There are few things cosier than snuggling up together with a good book
- (iii) Finding books that are at a level that stretches them but not so much that it's demotivating, and
- (iv) Offering them as much choice as possible in terms of what they read... even if that means reading Captain Underpants again.

One more important point: never bribe your kids to read, unless the bribe for reading one book is the chance to choose another one!

Reading isn't just about academics, just as Book Week isn't just about winning the award for Best Dressed. Books provide a doorway to the world; through them our kids can climb mountains, experience new cultures, and travel through time and space. As Barack Obama once said, "Reading is important. If you know how to read, then the whole world opens up to you."



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