

the secret

reader

By Mary Ashby-Green *

Rather than structured reading practice with your child these holidays, now's the time to think creatively and keep your child reading without them even knowing it!

ages and stages

under-5s

The benefits of reading aloud to young children are well-known. At an early age, they can learn how to hold a book, turn the pages themselves, 'read' the pictures, and discuss what's happening in the story, which gets them involved in the process of reading.

5- to 8-years

Choose a 'family story' that you can read a couple of chapters from each night.

9- to 12-years

Biographies are a great way to introduce children to other genres. They are often marketed as ideal Christmas presents, and I am sure that Richie MacCaw's new book will be a huge favourite this year - it doesn't matter that they can't read all the pages, the point is to turn the kids onto being interested in life stories.



When the holidays arrive, some children breathe a sigh of relief that they can have a break from the formal structure of reading practice; while for others, the holidays mean they have all this free time to read and their parents can barely keep up with the demand for more books.

As parents of a reluctant reader, you may be torn between wanting to give formal reading practice a break, but worrying whether or not you should be doing something to keep their reading up. Conversely, parents of avid readers often worry about whether their children spend too much time reading books, to the detriment of other activities.

Whether you have a reluctant reader or a keen reader, you can use the holidays to introduce a new genre of reading material, or even a new experience.

technology angle

Many parents report that downloading a book onto the iPad or an e-reader can provide new motivation for the reluctant reader. An e-reader may be an expensive Christmas present, but the novelty of it is tremendously appealing. With its low backlight, and the facility of changing the font size, the child can create a more relaxed reading experience.

You'll hear some people say they don't like them because 'there is nothing like the feel of a book.' For them, a book offers comfort and solace. The reluctant reader however, can often feel anxiety

and pressure when they pick up a book, and so the e-reader offers them a more comforting experience. A big plus is that you can download books from the library. They usually have a 3 week borrowing period. Ask your local librarian for more information.

movie tie-ins

Think about the things that have set you off on a new tangent in reading material. One of the most common triggers is seeing a movie and wanting to find out more. The 'Harry Potter' phenomenon is a perfect example of this. Or look for movies that are based on true stories. Comparing books to movies is a great way to encourage critical appraisal of both book and movie. There are so many open-ended questions that both adults and children can discuss: did the producers do a good job of translating the book onto the screen? What would you have included/excluded? What other books would make a good movie? Why? Don't make it all about the children's choices – let them know your choices and opinions as well.

family story time

Even good readers love the ritual of being read to – especially if it's by a parent or family member who doesn't usually take that role. Use the holiday time to get stuck into a particularly long chapter book that you mightn't normally have time to tackle during the school term. Remember, reading aloud doesn't have to only be done at night-time;

relaxing under a tree after a picnic lunch or snuggled up together after breakfast on a lazy morning are also great times.

board games

Old favourites like Scrabble, Upwords and Boggle are great for engaging the mind in different ways. If you want games that address reading and spelling skills specifically, go to my website www.phonics.co.nz and look at the 7 Steps programme. Parents report that holidays are the ideal time to set it up.

family research project

Holidays often involve connecting with different branches of family members, and there are often stories to be unearthed. Get the whole family involved in making a family tree. The example you are providing of researching can open new doors for your children.

For example, a friend recently entertained us all with her story of what happened when she wanted to improve her children's manners. Her boys were disgusted at the idea that they should hold open a door for their sister, and they were incredulous that their mother would even suggest such a thing. Not one to be defeated, this mother then tried another tack. She collected a few articles from the internet about the history of manners and etiquette. Her children were intrigued and entertained by the customs from the 'olden days' and other countries, and the reasons why they developed. They came to see that something as

simple as shaking hands is performed differently in other cultures. Because their mother had presented the concept of manners in a much larger framework, the children unconsciously became more aware and observant of how people interact with each other. Talking about their own manners then became a natural extension of what they had been investigating.

holiday travel

Take the time to find out background information about the places you are travelling to or even just passing through. Stop to pick up information guides, and read out the parts that you think they will find interesting, or let them read to you instead.

family quiz night

Adults love quiz nights, and children love them too, if you can structure it so they can read out the questions. It's a simple way of encouraging them to do some extra learning in their own time before the next quiz. Charades is also always a favourite and it works because every age group can be involved.

** Mary is a former Acting Principal, who specialised in teaching children with learning and behavioural difficulties. Today, she trains teachers in Jolly Phonics, and she works individually with children who have anxiety about learning, using her NLP training. For more information, go to www.phonics.co.nz*