

# ***The Family CURRENT***

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## **Helping Your Homeschooler Learn to Read**

***by Isabel Shaw***

### **Beware Experts' Advice**

If there is one area that causes concern for even the most experienced parent, it's helping our kids learn to read. And with good reason: We are told reading is an area best left to the experts, who advise us about what age our children should begin, what method to use, and how long it should take. We're told tests and reports are vital to the learning process. The trouble is, most of this advice is simply not true.

### **The Right Age to Read**

By kindergarten, most schooled children are working their way through "reading readiness" programs and are expected to know and understand basic concepts of reading. But is this really the best age to start reading? It's not, according to Louise Bates Ames, director of research at the Gesell Institute of Child Development and author of more than 15 books on childhood development and behavior. In *A Developmental Approach to Reading Problems*, Ames states that "a delay in reading instruction would be a preventative measure in avoiding nearly all reading failure." This view is shared by Dr. Raymond and Dorothy Moore, considered by many to be the grandparents of the modern homeschool movement. In *Better Late Than Early* and *School Can Wait*, the Moores present well-researched arguments that children aren't physiologically ready for formal reading activities until the age of 8 or 10. Waiting helps children develop maturity and logic skills and prevents frustration and discouragement.

### **A Combination of Methods**

Another misconception that confuses all parents, not just homeschoolers, is that one teaching method should be used. For years controversy flared in the schools about "whole language" vs. "phonics." Results from whole language programs fell short of expectations. Straight phonics is more effective, but involves books and worksheets many kids find boring. Smart parents are discovering that incorporating both methods based on their child's individual learning style works best.

### **Tests and Reports**

Finally, there's the idea that reading tests and written book reports are a necessary part of the reading process. In *Teach Your Own*, John Holt tells the story of two fellow teachers who decided to "stop asking the children questions about their reading, stop grading

them, stop tracking them, and just let them read." Holt notes, "The students very soon read much better, even those who had been very poor readers." Reading becomes a chore when your child knows that as soon as he completes the passage (or page or book) he will be drilled and tested and scored. The joy of being swept away in the pages of a book is lost.

### **What You Can Do**

- Read to your children every day. *The Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease is a classic. Trelease explains how reading aloud stimulates your child's imagination and leads to the desire to read independently.
- Take time to read yourself. A child learns by watching his parents. If your child sees you making reading a regular part of your life, chances are he will do the same. If you sit in front of the TV for hours, don't be surprised when your child wants to do it, too.
- Don't start the learning process too early and don't push if they aren't ready. There should be no tears or reluctance. Allowed to learn at their own pace, homeschooled children often don't begin to read until 8 or 9 years old. Mary Griffith, author of *The Homeschooling Handbook*, says that late reading (even as late as 12) is not much of a handicap to homeschoolers. "Because schools rely so heavily on text-based instruction, we tend to forget there are other ways to acquire knowledge" Griffith writes. "The late reader frequently blossoms suddenly into a capable and independent reader and the late-reading homeschooler remains an eager and interested learner."

### **Where Do I Begin?**

For those who want a direct, step-by-step approach on how to teach your child to read, *Reading Reflex: The Foolproof Phono-Graphix Method for Teaching Your Child to Read*, by Carmen and Geoffrey McGuinness, is one of the best reading books on the market today. Another highly recommended book is *Let's Read, A Linguistic Approach* by Leonard Bloomfield and Clarence Barnhart. But don't feel you have to follow a reading manual to be successful. Reading is a process that unfolds slowly in some children, quickly in others. What worked for your friend's child might be wrong for your son or daughter. The trick is to discover what method is best for your child. Here are some ideas to get you started.

### **Follow These Steps**

#### **One: Sounding Out**

Learning the alphabet, and the sounds each letter represents, is the foundation of reading. The next step is for your child to learn simple words that can be mastered easily. I wrote the names of items in our house on index cards, then pinned or taped the card to that object. It became a game to name all the objects. When these words were memorized, the cards were removed and made into silly sentences. (The chair sat on the cat.) Because we're on the road a lot, my girls' first reading words were the names of gas stations (Shell was an easy starter), then stores, then road signs. As we drove, we'd work on word-sounds in silly rhymes and variations of alphabet games. Phonics workbooks are helpful at this point, but don't overdo it. Along with studying the letter sounds and blends, we made

flashcards of reading words that my daughter stumbled on and reviewed them frequently. I'm not a fan of flashcards and used them with a light hand, but she didn't mind and they were really effective.

### **Two: Finding Great Beginner Books**

Two wonderful books for your beginning readers are: *Ready...Set...Read!* and the sequel *Ready...Set...Read And Laugh!* by Joanna Cole and Stephanie Calmenson. These colorfully illustrated collections feature authors Arnold Lobel (*Frog and Toad*), Peggy Parish (*Amelia Bedelia*), Marice Sendak (*Where the Wild Things Are*), and Robert Lewis Stevenson (*A Sea-Side Poem*), just to name a few. These books are responsible for carrying my daughters from the conceptual stage of reading to the "I got it!" stage. Be sure to provide a variety of easy-to-read books on whatever subject your child shows an interest. Soccer? Space Travel? Animals? Clouds? Make sure your child learns that books are a source of pleasure and knowledge. When my girls were learning to read, we had wicker baskets in every room filled with age-appropriate books from the library. Putting the books back in the baskets each night was a small price to pay as I watched their reading skills grow. Not sure what books are best? *Great Books for Girls and Great Books for Boys* by Kathy Odean make choosing books a snap.

### **Three: Chapter Books and Magazines**

Once my daughters could handle the easy readers, they were now ready for chapter books. A librarian suggested *The Boxcar Children* by Gertrude Chandler Warner as a good starter series. My daughter loved these books about four resourceful children and their adventures. Another good chapter book series is *The Magic Tree House* by Mary Pope Osborne. *The American Girl* series (different authors) provides an exciting introduction to history. And who could resist the *Nate the Great* books by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat, great mystery books about a boy detective and his dog Sludge. Magazines can be a good source of reading material. My daughter eagerly awaited the monthly arrival of *Highlights*, *Ladybug*, *National Geographic World*, and, from the National Wildlife Federation, *Ranger Rick* (*Your Big Backyard* is the version for younger kids). She felt very grown up getting her own magazines and we'd read each one as soon as it arrived. I chose these particular magazines because they contain no advertisements, and are exceptionally well-written (especially *Ladybug*, ages two to six, and later *Spider*, ages six to nine).

### **Additional Resources**

Don't forget that your computer is a great resource for encouraging your young readers. FamilyEducation.com has games, printouts and teaching tools to help spark your kids' interest in reading. You might want to look at Reading and Writing Skill-Builders.

### **Problems?**

Suppose you've waited until your child is older and read to her daily, but she's still not reading. What then? For those homeschoolers who suspect there may be serious reading or comprehension problems, I recommend a consultation with a reading specialist. Homeschooling families are often able to have their child tested for free through the

public-school system. One friend found her child's reading specialist listed in the phone book. Your child will be tested and you'll receive recommendations on how to correct any problems. Also visit our resource page, Rough. What a privilege it is to share the mysterious code of reading with your child. Making reading a joyful experience now will create a love of reading that will last a lifetime.

<http://school.familyeducation.com/home-schooling/reading/38692.html>.

## **Research on the Importance of Reading for Children**

*By Rebecca Capuano*

Author Aldous Huxley wrote, “Everyone who knows how to read has it in their power to magnify themselves, to multiply the ways in which they exist, to make their life full, significant, and interesting.” Although most homeschoolers have an awareness of the importance of reading for children, it is always helpful to review the evidence that backs up our feelings. With the cooler weather coming, fall is the perfect time to take a fresh look at why reading is such a critical factor for children’s success, as well as get reinvigorated toward making reading one of the foundations of the homeschool curriculum (and part of everyday family life). There is a multitude of research that demonstrates the efficacy of reading. Here are just a few studies, which underscore just how fundamental reading is for children’s development and well-being:

1. **Literacy changes lives** – This compilation of research by the National Literacy Trust illustrates multiple benefits of reading, including the fact that individuals with improved literacy are less likely to receive state benefits, more likely to own their own home, and are more involved in democratic processes. The research also traces the profiles of literate families and literate communities.
2. **Role of environment in literacy** – A 2010 study of twins, published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, found that although both genetics and environment impact children’s beginning reading skills (such as word and letter identification), a child’s *environment* is almost completely responsible for development in reading skills such as words, letters, and sounds. That environment, according to the study, includes not only school instruction, but also things such as parental care for the child, frequency of being read to, and even nutrition.
3. **Children better prepared for school** – According to this research review by the Archives of Disease in Childhood, young children have improved language and reading skills if their parents have read to them, and they are also more likely to develop a love for reading. The research reveals that one program in Boston improved low-income children’s language skills simply by increasing the number of parents who read to their children.
4. **Parental involvement and literacy achievement** – The National Literacy Trust put together this review of research literature, which demonstrates a variety of benefits from

parental involvement with their children's reading. Some highlights: Pre-reading and reading activities within the home are the strongest predictors of children's attainment scores on preschool entry tests; parental reading is a predictor of later literacy; children (ages 6-8) of parents who listened to them read showed significant learning gains; and reading at home enhances children's language comprehension and skills in expressive language.

5. **The words children know determine later success** – University of Kansas researchers published a longitudinal study called *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*, of students from all different socioeconomic levels, in order to determine the driving force behind which students performed well academically and those who were academically behind. The study found that it was the children's vocabularies that made the most significant impact on their performance in school. By age 4, children from professional families knew about 45 million words, those from working class families knew 26 million, and those from families on welfare knew 13 million words. It was the activities within the home which promoted word acquisition (such as reading and talking) that made the greatest difference in the children's later school success.
6. **Reading is necessary for English acquisition** – Although many languages, such as Greek and Finnish, have a one-to-one correspondence between letters and their sounds, English does not. Because of that, for English speaking children, “having someone read to you frequently as a child – explaining what the meaning of words are and playing around with the letters – makes a big difference as to whether you will become a good reader”, according to research from the University of Alberta.

The evidence is clear: reading is about as good as it gets for the optimal development of children. Fortunately, homeschoolers are in the perfect position to infuse a reading-rich environment into their children's lives. So pull out the books and spend time in the pages of some great literature, knowing that you are doing one of the best things possible for your child's success.

<http://www.thehomeschoolmom.com/research-on-the-importance-of-reading-for-children/>

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### *QUOTES ABOUT READING*

“It is not enough to simply teach children to read; we have to give them something worth reading. Something that will stretch their imaginations—something that will help them make sense of their own lives and encourage them to reach out toward people whose lives are quite different from their own.”

*Katherine Patterson*

“To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark.”

*Victor Hugo*

“A book is a gift you can open again and again.”

*Garrison Keillor*

“It is books that are the key to the wide world; if you can't do anything else, read all that you can.”

*Jane Hamilton*

“A person who won’t read has no advantage over one who can’t read.”

*Mark Twain*

“Just the knowledge that a good book is awaiting  
one at the end of a long day makes that day happier.”

*Kathleen Norris*

“A bookstore is one of the pieces of evidence  
we have that people are still thinking.”

*Jerry Seinfeld*

“We read to know we are not alone.”

*C.S. Lewis*

“So it is with children who learn to read fluently and well:  
They begin to take flight into whole new worlds as  
effortlessly as young birds take to the sky.”

*William James*

“There are many little ways to enlarge your child’s world.  
Love of books is the best of all.”

*Jacqueline Kennedy*

“Read, read, read.”

*William Faulkner*

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.”

*Richard Steele*

“There is no such thing as a child who hates to read;  
there are only children who have not found the right book.”

*Frank Serafini*

“You may have tangible wealth untold; caskets of jewels  
and coffers of gold. Richer than I you can never be.  
I had a mother who read to me.”

*Strickland Gillian*



## FREE TEMPLATES & DOWNLOADS!

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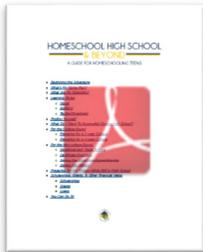
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### Homeschool High School Report Card



### Homeschool Credit Planner for College Admissions



### Homeschooling High School & Beyond: A Guide For Homeschooling Teens

*and more!*

High School Students and Parents! Visit LetsHSHS.com for more information about curriculum, planning, record-keeping, and post-graduation options. In addition, they offer networking and sharing opportunities via forums and social networks. Check out their free resources and downloads, and get the information you need to more confidently homeschool through the high school years!

Need help finding HS curriculum? Check out their Curriculum Directory - the web's most comprehensive directory of high school homeschool curriculum. Searchable and filterable.

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California Achievement (CAT) K-12	\$37.00
CAT Survey (CS) 2-12	\$37.00
Markable CAT (MC) K-3	\$50.00
Basic Achievement Skills Inventory (BASI) 3-12	\$37.00
TerraNova 1st Edition(T) 1-12	\$30.00
TerraNova/CAT6 2nd Edition (TN) K-12	\$40.00
Practice Tests (PT) 1-3	\$3.00
S&H for Test Orders (Cont.US)	\$5.00

## TEST PREP

Spectrum Test Prep (STP) 1-8	\$9.50
Test Prep grade 9 or 10 (TP9 or TPHS)	\$9.50
Test Prep Grade 11/12 (TP11/12)	\$9.50
GED Prep	\$9.00
S&H (if ordered without test)	\$3.00

*(NOTICE: As of January 1, 2015 WA customers will pay sales tax on test preps and shipping costs associated with them. Tax rates can be found on the WA Dept. of Revenue website: <http://dor.wa.gov>.)*

## ASSESSMENTS\*

Checklist (CSL) K-12	\$30.00
Freestyle (FAF)	\$30.00
(No S&H charge on these items)	

\*These reports are completed by parents and evaluated by a Washington State certified teacher to document the child's academic progress according to state standards.

If you are unsure of the homeschooling laws in your state, go to [www.hslda.org](http://www.hslda.org) or [www.homeedmag.com](http://www.homeedmag.com) for specific state information.

"Educating the mind without educating  
the heart is no education at all."  
~ Aristotle

# KID'S PAGE

## Bird's Nest Cookies



(Makes approximately 2 dozen cookies)

### **Ingredients:**

11 oz butterscotch chips

1 cup creamy peanut butter

12 oz chow mein noodles

Cadbury mini eggs

### **Directions:**

In a large saucepan over low heat, stir the butterscotch chips until melted. Remove from heat, stir in peanut butter until smooth. Add chow mein noodles and stir until the noodles are thoroughly coated. Drop by spoonful onto wax paper, shaping into nests. Top nests with mini eggs.

That's it. Simple and delicious. Enjoy!

## BOOKS

Academic Homeschooling: How to Give Your Child an Amazing Education at Home  
- Tracy Chatters

Suddenly Homeschooling: A Quick Start Guide to Legally Homeschool in 2 Weeks  
- Marie-Claire Moreau, Ed.D.

Learning Styles: A Guide for Teachers and Parents - Barbara K Given

A Child's Garden: Enchanting Outdoor Spaces for Children and Parents  
- Molly Dannenmaier

## ONLINE RESOURCES

[www.edhelper.com](http://www.edhelper.com) - free downloadable lessons

[www.time4learning.com](http://www.time4learning.com) - economically-priced curriculum

[www.kaboose.com](http://www.kaboose.com) - free lessons and craft projects

[www.mentoringminds.com](http://www.mentoringminds.com) - books & CDs to purchase

[www.besthomeschooling.org](http://www.besthomeschooling.org) - articles about homeschooling

[www.homeschoolfacts.com](http://www.homeschoolfacts.com) - state laws and support groups

[www.schoolexpress.com](http://www.schoolexpress.com) - free lessons and membership for a fee

[www.lessonplancentral.com](http://www.lessonplancentral.com) - free lessons

[www.sightwords.com](http://www.sightwords.com) - games, activities, curriculum, lesson plans, and teaching tips to  
prepare children for learning to read

<http://friendoflearning.com> - over 200 free, online worksheets

[www.communitycollegereview.com](http://www.communitycollegereview.com) - free, detailed profiles of community colleges in the  
USA

If you have found a particular book or resource to be helpful,  
and it is not on this list, please send it to:  
[martha@familylearning.org](mailto:martha@familylearning.org).

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