

read ahead

share a page in a child's life

Strategies and best practices for being a strong Read Ahead mentor

Remember, your role is as a reading mentor rather than a reading tutor. Read Ahead's goals are to foster children's love and appreciation of reading, to give them encouragement to keep reading and making small steps and improvements along the way, and to build their confidence. Don't worry about bringing the student to the next reading level, as this will happen naturally throughout your time together.

What makes a strong mentor?

- Consistency
- Interest in the student as an individual and his/her personal context
- Engagement, i.e. asking open-ended questions & listening to the answers, building additional questions on previous answers, and continuing the arc of conversation throughout the year
- Tuning in to physical and verbal cues
- Sharing about self as well

Example topics to discuss

- Favorite subjects and what they're learning
- After-school and weekend activities
- Family/siblings/pets/friends
- Favorite movies/shows/games
- Have you seen/read/played _____?
- Trips and where would you want to go in the future
- Ever lived anywhere else? For how long?
- Speak other languages? How did you learn?
- Ideas of what the student wants to be when s/he grows up as well as mentor's job now, other jobs, first job, and friends' jobs
- Continue and revisit topics from prior conversations!

Strategies for engaging your student in reading

- Patience
- Encouragement, enthusiasm, and immediate positive feedback
- Taking turns for who reads out loud
- Considering where you sit (i.e. angling the student's view away from other students or windows if easily distracted)
- Checking on comprehension through predictions, summarizing, sequencing
- Asking questions that tie the book to your own lives
- Discussing of the book's lessons or themes
- Bringing in your own favorite childhood book!

Guidelines for choosing “just right” books

- P.I.C.K. (*Purpose, Interest, Comprehend, Know the words*) and the *five finger test* (the student asks him/herself and mentor asks student about these guiding topics)
 - **Purpose:** Reading for enjoyment and learning—that’s what Read Ahead is all about!
 - **Interest:** Does this book’s topic interest me? If not, why?
 - **Comprehension:** Do I understand and remember what I am reading in this book?
 - **Know the words:** Use the *five finger test* to see. Here’s how it works:
 - Open the book to any page. Have the student start reading at the top and hold up a finger each time s/he gets to a word s/he doesn’t know.
 - If s/he knows all the words, the book may be easier than s/he is capable of reading and you may consider trying a more challenging book.
 - If s/he doesn’t know 4-5 (or more) words on the page, it’s likely too difficult.
- “Just right” books will be age appropriate and slightly challenging but still fun to read.
- We generally recommend that students read books at their reading level or that are slightly more challenging (since you are right there to help!)
- We don’t want students to experience Read Ahead as extra work or class, but we do want to encourage them to be challenging themselves with their reading choices!
- If students are shy or timid with reading or seems uncomfortable reading aloud, try a slightly easier book so they aren’t embarrassed when they don’t know a word or don’t understand something.
- Give lots of praise and encouragement when students are struggling—you don’t want them to want to give up when they’re having trouble!

Finding books students will enjoy and be interested in

- Ask students about the last book they enjoyed reading and look for books that are similar. What did they like about that book?
- What are the students’ interests? They’ll tell you what they like and don’t like, what they want to learn, who they would like to meet, and what they want to be when they grow up—all topics for great books they would enjoy!
- What kinds of books do they like to read? Genres? Subject matter? Favorite authors or characters in a series? If they act indifferent about books, ask about other things that will be helpful, such as what kinds of things they like learning about, types of TV shows or movies they enjoy, etc.
- Children often like reading stories in which they can relate to the main character—one that is the same age, gender, ethnicity, or one who is facing a familiar situation. Readers want characters who they can sympathize with, cheer on, get frustrated with, worry alongside with, love, hate.

Additional Online Resources

- [Help Kids to P.I.C.K. the Right Books \(and the “five finger rule”\)](#), from Scholastic
- [Book Lists & Recommendations \(for various age groups\)](#), from Scholastic
- [Grade-by-Grade Learning Guide](#), from PBS
- [Reading Resolutions for Young Readers](#) (a great “new year” activity!), from Reading Rainbow

Read Ahead Staff Resources

Program Coordinators, vary by school

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