

“No matter how busy you may think you are, you must find time for reading, or surrender yourself to self-chosen ignorance.”

– Confucius

Are You Encouraging Your Child to Hate Reading?

by F Kelly

As educators and parents we all know the value of reading – but how many of us are in fact encouraging our child to hate reading, even though we are desperately trying to establish a reading habit that is going to last a lifetime?

Even with the best will in the world, our efforts to establish a reading habit can have completely the opposite effect. But don't worry – we have five simple tips for you so that all your hard work is not wasted.

● *Tip 1 Match the palate*

Reading tastes are like food tastes – we reject food we don't like and regardless of how much we know about the negative side of eating fast or junk food, we often indulge.

Think of reading as feeding the mind, so why not appeal to what is liked rather than constantly offering something that is strongly disliked?

A good example of this is the comic book. If your child likes reading comic books, encourage them, after all, isn't it better to be reading comics than not reading at all? And this advice is not as silly as it may at first seem – did you know that you can now buy Shakespeare and many of the classics as manga-style comic books? Check out the website <http://www.mangashakespeare.com/> to see some examples of these.

So do you still think all comics are bad?

● *Tip 2 Make it fun!*

Let's be honest, if you were given something to read that you were going to be grilled on and nagged about, how much would you enjoy reading it?

If you give your child a book, let them get on with reading it. Don't set passages to be learnt by heart, don't grill them on the content and then criticize their 'mistakes' and last, but by no means least, don't pick books way above your child's reading ability.

Reading should be fun – your child should feel comfortable picking up any text and settling down with it. It's not important if a text is too easy or too difficult – if they are interested in it, they will read it. If you take the fun out of reading, your child is going to become very reluctant to read as they get older. Do you want to hear that dreaded comment, 'Reading is boring! I hate it!'

● *Tip 3 It's okay to dislike a book!*

There is a very common perception that some books are above any kind of criticism – the classics, for example. This is quite illogical – after all, has everyone loved reading Bleak House by Dickens? Of course not!

Encourage your child to have an opinion on what they read and to be able to explain why. If they use the words 'boring' or 'interesting' to describe a book, ask them to give reasons why it was 'boring' or 'interesting'. And remember, a discussion is when people are allowed to have different opinions, it is not a Q & A session.

● *Tip 4 Forget about dictionaries and highlighters*

How many times have you opened a library book only to find that someone has highlighted all the words their child did not know! For me, such vandalism of a book is utterly despicable. But in terms of reading, it probably ranks at the top of how to make a child an ineffective reader.

If you read with your child and stop at every word they do not know, highlight it, check it in a dictionary and then write it down in a notebook, your child is not reading; they are simply decoding sounds in words so that they can pronounce them. They then sit and learn reams of 'new' vocabulary out of any meaningful context.

Children must learn to use context to work out the meaning of unfamiliar words. As they get older they will be given reading comprehension passages and will eventually need to be able to access this information under exam conditions. Students who score well are effective readers – they use context to help them understand what the text is about.

Of course dictionaries are an invaluable resource, but they are sadly often misused. A better way to use a dictionary would be to ask your child after they have been reading if there were any 'difficult' words and did they manage to guess their meaning while they were reading – i.e. did they use the context of the text to help them guess the meaning? They can then check in the dictionary to see if their guess was right. This is a far more productive way to use a dictionary. The goal is to build up this skill so that your child can eventually do this by themselves. Perhaps begin with two words they identify as being problematic and then do the above process together. Make it fun and praise the guesses made. When they are confident about doing this, encourage them to do this alone.