

## Tips on Raising Readers

Paul H. Ricks, a professor of education and children's literature specialist, suggests four tips to help children fall in love with reading while also increasing their capabilities and reading stamina. His article was focused on helping parents—so by all means use them with your own kids and grandkids—but his suggestions can be adapted to our R.E.A.D. program, as well, and they can enhance your own “tool box” of skills and ideas for engaging the kids you are working with.

When screens and TikTok trends vie for every moment of attention, cultivating a love for reading has, for many, become an uphill battle. Ricks says that succeeding requires both intentionality and practice.

“Reading helps children understand how they fit into the world,” he says.

We know the well-documented benefits of reading: children who have early reading experiences activate brain function and accelerate cognitive abilities. But there is a disturbing trend—more and more evident for not just children, but all humans—who are immersed



in just digital media, including narrower vocabularies, shortened attention spans, and less reading stamina.

Thanks to the gifts of our animal companions and the skills of our handlers, the R.E.A.D. program has been doing an amazing job of helping children fall in love with reading by making

it fun and engaging, not mere drudgery.

But there is always more we can do! Turn the page for Ricks' four tips:

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*“[R.E.A.D.] is a simple idea, but so amazing. The dogs were an instant success. My students improved in ability, attitude, and attendance, and now they're eager to read.”*

*- Brian Daly, teacher for 20 years at Rose Hill Elementary in Kirkland, WA*

**1** Often in library programs, we encounter kids who are younger than our typical 4-8 target range. With a pre-reader, or a child who is very shy or hesitant, feel free to **read out loud** often with them. Research shows that children who are read to regularly acquire thousands of new words to build their vocabularies. “Parents should start reading to kids right from the beginning and not stop,” Ricks says. “As they grow, encourage them to join in and read aloud with you. Reading out loud creates all sorts of connective tissue.”

**2** *Let children see you reading yourself.* Children are more likely to develop a love for reading when they see their parents read. “Just as you wouldn’t tell your children to eat their vegetables while you’re munching on a bag of chips, modeling your own enjoyment of reading sends a powerful message. Reading begets reading,” says Ricks. At the very least, R.E.A.D. handlers can talk with enthusiasm about the books they love. Enthusiasm is contagious.

“Reading helps children understand how they fit into the world.”

– Paul H. Ricks

**3** Celebrate reading in any form. Each child is drawn to different topics and books, but whether it’s a comic book or a chapter book, any reading should be recognized and applauded. “Never shame kids or push them toward a certain genre of reading if they’re not interested,” Ricks says. “There are things of value in a host of different texts. Expose them to a wide range of possibilities—comics, nonfiction, fantasy, whatever. This will help them discover things they really like.” We should endeavor to help kids see reading as playtime (having a dog in the scene certainly helps)! And never shame or judge them for their preferences. Helping kids find pleasure in reading is the goal.

**4** *Allow kids to put down books they’re not enjoying.* Encouraging reluctant readers to push through a few more chapters is rarely effective. Forcing a child to finish a book they’re not interested in makes reading into a dreaded chore. Instead, say, “Not enjoying this one? Let’s find something else.” Give children the opportunity to explore different books and subject matter.