## How to Create a Literate Home

What exactly is a “literate home?” It is an environment in which:

* Adults encourage children to learn to read and write
* Many reading and writing materials are available
* Reading and writing are daily habits for the family

Transforming your home into a literate home is simple and inexpensive. You need to consider what kinds of materials to have on hand and how to arrange materials so your child will use them. More importantly, you need to interact with your child in ways that foster literacy development.

### What You Need

* **Books**
A wide range of books is appropriate for first-, second-, and third-graders. Children at this age need to have books that they can read on their own. They also need to have more difficult books—informational books as well as fiction—that their parents can read aloud to them to help them continue to increase their vocabulary. Look for bargain children’s books at used bookstores and yard sales or purchase books at great prices through monthly book clubs offered through school.
* **Writing Materials**
At this age, your child may enjoy having her own special books—whether it is a journal, a diary or a spiral-bound notebook. She may enjoy using a variety of different kinds of pens and pencils, including glitter pens and pens that can write in several different colors. First-, second-, and third-graders also enjoy making cards for various occasions, so keep a stock of colored paper, glue, glitter, ribbons and other materials that can be glued on a card.
* **Computer**
For children this age, the newest model of computer is not necessary—a computer that can support a basic word processing application is sufficient. If you have a computer with a CD-ROM player, there are many programs designed to help first-, second-, and third-graders read, spell and write.
* **Videos**
Videos are a good way to continue to expose your child to vocabulary, general information and varied story structures. Most early school-aged children enjoy watching long, complex videos of children’s literature and enjoy watching and discussing them with a parent or sibling. Watching a video, reading the same book and comparing versions can be fun activity for children this age.
* **Games**
There are many games for children this age that facilitate reading development. Word games, such as Scrabble, Jr., Boggle, Think-It Link-It and WordXChange, are good ways for readers and writers to practice their reading and spelling skills. Games such as The Harold and the Purple Crayon Game, Clue, Jr. and Guess Who help children practice problem-solving skills and will help them in reading comprehension. Look for used games at school sales, used children’s clothing stores and yard sales. Just check to make sure that most of the pieces and the directions are included.
* **Reading and Writing Materials for Parents**
When children see the adults around them using reading and writing in their everyday lives, they’re more likely to become readers and writers themselves. Simply having a bookshelf full of books, reading the local newspaper, and reading alongside your child as he does his homework shows your child that reading and writing serve valuable everyday purposes.

### What You Can Do

* **Help your child pick independent reading books.** Ideal books for independent reading should be ones that children can read both accurately—by correctly identifying nearly all the words—and fluently—by reading smoothly and with good expression. To test out a book, have your child read a page or so aloud to gauge her accuracy and fluency. Teachers and librarians can also assist you in finding appropriate books for your child.
* **Foster your child’s independent reading.** Reading a lot at this stage is important. One way children become better readers is through reading. You can encourage your child’s independent reading by helping him establish a daily quiet reading time, by making sure that he is reading books that are at a comfortable level, and by talking with him about the books he reads.
* **Read aloud to your child.** Even when children are able to read by themselves, they still benefit from hearing an adult read complex material aloud to them. This way, your child will learn new vocabulary and increase her fund of general information.
* **Listen to your child read often.** Ask your child to read aloud to you from his favorite part of a book. Try reading with him so that you read a page and then he reads one. Hearing your child read aloud will allow you to hear his progress. It also gives you a chance to praise him.
* **Help your child to correct her own reading errors.** When you are reading with your child and she makes a mistake, ask her if what she reads made sense, encourage her to reread a part or help her cover up part of a word to help her figure it out.
* **Talk about things that interest your child.** First-, second-, and third-graders continue to learn a great deal of information through talking with parents. Discussion also helps them to clarify their own thoughts and feelings. Make yourself available to hear about what interests your child, whether it is her baseball game, ballet class or a lizard she found outside. Ask her genuine questions, listen to her answers and ask some questions that focus on how or why—not just what.
* **Play games with your child.** Playing games contributes to your child’s literacy development. Word games obviously help your child to read and spell, but card games and logic games help him to learn patterning, categorizing, and problem-solving skills that are related to reading comprehension.
* **When he begins getting homework, help your child to create a homework routine.** You can help by making sure that he has a clean, quiet space in which to work, that he works in the same place every time, and that he has the necessary supplies. Help him find an ideal time, when he’s neither too tired nor too hungry to focus, to do his work each day. If your child has trouble completing his work in a reasonable amount of time, try helping him to budget time by talking about what he will do first and how long he thinks each task will take.
* **Help your child with her homework, but don’t do it for her.** If your child has questions, you can certainly answer them. If she can’t think of what to write, you can help her brainstorm her ideas aloud before she writes. However, if you find that your child is relying on you for answers, if you think you may be giving too much support, or if your child is very frustrated on a regular basis, it’s a good idea to talk with your child’s teacher.
* **Try incorporating reading into family activities whenever possible…see the next 6 pages for ideas!**

**Reading Activities in Front of the TV**



The television and computer can be great teaching tools for your child if you connect what your child sees on them to real life experiences. You can also teach your child good T.V. viewing habits and computer skills.

**Make a T.V. Schedule.** Help your child make a plan for television viewing. First, decide what shows your child can watch.  Then tell your child that together you can make a television schedule. Explain that a schedule tells you when something happens. Remind her of other schedules she has seen, like bus schedules. Give her paper and markers or crayons. Review the shows she can watch. Invite her to write down the name of each show, what channel it is on, and what time it is on. Then hang the schedule up next to the television.

**What Was It About?** After your child watches a T.V. show or movie, talk to her about the story. “What happened at the beginning?” and “What happened at the end?” Give your child plenty of time to think about these questions and give clues to help her remember. Did she like the way the show ended? Why or why not? If she could change the ending how would she change it? Give her paper and markers or crayons and she can write her own story.

**Where Can I Find It?**  The internet has many educational sites for children. Teach your child to use the computer as a resource, a place to find information she needs or wants. Is she interested in sports, animals, or people in other countries? Help her choose an interest, and then use a search engine like google.com to help her find some information for children on that topic.

## Reading Activities in the Bath



Many children love bath time because it gives them the chance to play in water in their own way.  When children play in water they are also “doing science” and they can learn a lot about liquids and solids. Bath time is often a relaxed time for parents and children, and part of a daily bedtime routine.  That makes it a perfect time for learning and playing with your child.

**Water Stories.** With a few simple objects, your child can use her imagination to create her own story. These objects may be anything in the tub- a rubber duck, a washcloth, and even her own body!  Her knee can be a mountain, her hand can be a wave-maker, or her foot can be a rock in the water. You start the story by saying “Once upon a time there was a rubber duck that went mountain climbing.” Encourage your child to make up the next sentence. Take turns making up sentences for as long as you both want. Then make an ending for the story. As your child gets practice, she will create more and more of the story by herself.

**Boats Afloat.** Talk about what it means to float. “It’s when things stay on top of the water.” Give your child small plastic plates and cups to use as “boats” in the tub. Then play a rhyming game with your child. “A boat will float! What about a coat? Will a coat float?” Take turns thinking of other funny rhymes like “Will a goat float?” When the cup fills with water it will start to sink. “Sink is when things go under the water.” Invite your child to make up a funny rhyme. “Will a drink sink? What about the color pink?” Give your child time to explore float and sink using many different objects.

**How’s the Water?** As your child becomes more independent at bath time you will want to teach her tub safety rules. At the same time, you can introduce the idea of water temperature. Explain that temperature means how hot or cold the water is. Show her how to turn the water on carefully and test the temperature before she gets in the tub. Introduce words like cool, warm, and tepid. Use comparison words like cooler/colder and warmer/hotter. If she is very interested you can use a thermometer to figure out the most comfortable temperature for her bath!

## Reading Activities in the Car



Most of us ride in a car, or on a bus or train, as part of our daily routine. This can be a nice “together-time” for you and your child. Children love to look out the window. They also like to feel the motion of the car, bus, or train. Turn riding time into talking, singing and playing time!

**Ride and Chat.** Riding time can be a wonderful relaxing time to chat with your child and share thoughts and feelings with each other. Ask your child questions that invite him to share his ideas and feelings, like “Why do you like the color green so much?” or “How do you feel about your new teacher?” Listen to his ideas and share your ideas and feelings too. “I’m tired today. Work was difficult. I had a lot of work to do.”

**License to Ride.** Children like to look at license plates and find ones from other states. Play a game with your child and look for the most interesting license plates. Talk about what you like on each one- the color? the design? the letters and numbers?  “What state are those people from?” If possible, show a map to your child. Explain that a map is a picture or diagram of what a place looks like. People use maps to see where a place is, or to figure out how to get there. On a long ride, bring paper and crayons. Your child can create his own license plate. “What letters and numbers will you write on your license plate?”

**Ride and Read.**  Bring a couple of books for your child to read while you ride. Encourage your child to read out loud to you as you drive. As he reads, ask him questions about the plot, or the story, and the characters. “Is that the same guy who helped his friend at the beginning?” Ask for his opinion about the story. “What did you think about the character of the uncle?” Ask him to compare this book to other books. “Have you read any other books by the same author?” Talk about the type of book it is. “Is this a mystery?”

## Reading Activities at the Grocery Store



Shopping for groceries is a routine activity that is sometimes boring for children. You can make it interesting by asking your child to help you pick out items, put them in the cart, and check them out at the register.

**Describing Food.**  The grocery store is a good place to learn specific names and words that describe things. For example, many children love pasta and there is rigatoni, linguini, macaroni, spaghetti, tortellini, and many more. Talk with your child about what is the same and what is different, using descriptive words. “The spaghetti and linguini are long and skinny compared to the macaroni. The macaroni is like a small tube.” It’s also a fun way to practice rhyming. “Macaroni and rigatoni are rhyming words; so are linguini and tortellini.”

**Food Labels.** Help your child choose items by reading the labels on the containers. “We need low-fat milk. Let’s see which one says low-fat on the label.” As your child has practice, let him try it. “We need light mayonnaise. Can you get it for me?”  Explain that the label also gives nutrition information about the food inside. Show your child the list of ingredients on the label. “This has too much sugar. Let’s find one with less sugar in it.”

**Is It on the List?**  Let your child carry the shopping list as you shop. She can read off the names for items you need. If you give her a pen, she can also cross items off the list as you put them in the cart. If you don’t have a shopping list, your child can use the receipt in the same way.  While you put each item away at home, ask your child to find the name of the item on the receipt and cross it out.

## Reading Activities in the Neighborhood



When you and your child walk and ride in the neighborhood, your child learns about his community. He also learns about the people who live and work there. When he meets people who work in the neighborhood, he can learn about different jobs and careers. In the process, he learns social skills and how to have conversations with people.

**Nature Detectives.** When you and your child go outside, take a notebook and pencil with you. Tell him that you can be “Nature detectives.” You will use the notebook to record things you see. Encourage your child to look for living things, or evidence of living things. These may be things like a hole in a leaf, an ant hill, or a half-eaten nut. When you find something, encourage your child to write it down, or draw a picture of it. You take a turn drawing and writing something too. Later, during a family conversation, invite your child to show your pictures and talk about what you both found. Everyone can help solve the mystery. “What animal did that or made that?”

**Using a Map.** Drawing a map is a fun and challenging activity. First, explain to your child that a map is a diagram, or a picture of a place or location.  It shows places where people want to go, and the roads and streets that go to those places. People use maps for directions. Talk to him about other maps he has seen. Suggest that you make a map of your neighborhood. Take a walk and get the information you need to make a simple map. “There are five houses on our street, and the store is on the same side as our house.” Back at home, give your child a large piece of paper and some crayons. Help him draw your street. Then, let him decide what places to put on his map. Next time you walk, take the map with you for directions!

**A Trip to the Library.** The library is full of interesting things to find out about. Take a walk around the library with your child and lookat the book collections. In the children’s section, read the signs on the shelves. Look for words like fiction, non-fiction, biography, history, and geography. Help your child discover what a few of these words mean. “Let’s look at some of the books to find out.” On another day, encourage your child to talk to the librarian. For example, ask her to show you how to search for library books on the library’s computer system.

## Reading Activities at the Mall



A trip to the mall can be exciting for your child. It can be even better if you have time to window shop. Specialty shops are good places to learn a lot about categories of items like clothing, shoes, jewelry, and books. Shoe stores are really good because the shoes are displayed on shelves. That makes them easy to see and compare. When you read a shoe store tip, think about how you can use it in any store.

**Using the Map.** Before you start to shop, look at a diagram of the mall. This is often located right inside the front door. Explain that this is a map or diagram of the mall. Remind your child of other maps that he has seen. First show your child the dot that indicates where you are. Then look for the store you want to go to first. Use your finger to trace a line from where you are to the store. “We will have to walk straight down this hall until we get to the corner. Then we will take a right turn and we will be there.”

**Measuring Feet.** In the shoe store look for the foot scale. Explain to your child that this is a kind of ruler that measures your foot. “It measures the length and width of your foot so you will know what size shoe to buy.” Encourage your child to put her foot on it. Show her the number at her toe that indicates the correct shoe size. “You wear a size 5 now. Your feet are growing!” If you don’t know how to use the foot scale, ask someone who works at the shoe store to help you.

**Fun with Books.** For a special treat, go shopping for a book at the mall bookstore. Before you go, share some ideas with your child. Do you both like poetry, or stories about sports, or animals? Does he want to find information, for example, about the trees at the park?  When you get to the store, find a salesclerk. “Can you help us? We are looking for a book about ….” Invite your child to look at some books and choose his favorite one. When you get home encourage your child to write his name inside the front cover. “This book belongs to Jack.”

**What to Do When Your Child Hates Reading**

By Amy Mascott, [www.pbs.org/parents](http://www.pbs.org/parents)

Would your child rather empty the dishwasher or fold laundry instead of reading a book? Do you have to beg your child to sit down and read—for school *or* for pleasure? When you see other kids with their noses in books, do you wonder why you never see your *own* children doing the same? It’s hard to know how to react when your child hates reading, and even harder to figure out how to motivate children to read. Try these simple, but meaningful steps to help move your reluctant reader toward a book-filled future:

 **Zero in on the child’s interests.** Before you do anything, take a step back and examine what interests, excites or intrigues your child. Knowing what interests him can help you pinpoint what types of texts he may enjoy reading.

 **Start small.** Just because your child likes to ride horses doesn’t mean he needs to start by reading *The A-Z History of Horseback Riding*; that may be intimidating—especially for a reluctant reader. Instead, consider watching a horse race with your child. Talk about the jockeys, the scores, the owners and the trainers. The next day, read the box scores in the newspaper or watch a movie about horses, like *Seabiscuit*. Then, closely examine the box scores or find a short nonfiction article about a related topic, like the Triple Crown or famous jockeys like Red Pollard or George Woolf. An interactive, reliable, and safe resource online, such as [American Experience: Seabiscuit](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/seabiscuit/), can also be an engaging and interesting bridge toward books for reluctant readers.

If the topic of interest doesn’t lend itself to watching a related program or movie, start small by finding a magazine or graphic novel at the library that relates to the subject. Reading doesn’t need to begin with a chapter book; many other texts and various genres can be worthwhile for these readers.

 **Practice shared reading.** Shared reading or reading as a collective experience could entail taking turns reading pages, sections or chapters, or you and your child silently reading the same book. Shared reading can vary depending on your child’s age and needs.

Shared reading is an often-overlooked and underappreciated technique for engaging reluctant readers. Most kids really want to spend time with their parents, but once children reach seven or eight years old, many parents don’t view reading together as an option; they think that’s reserved for preschool or early elementary school days.

For the ideal shared reading experience, choose texts that are rich, engaging and sure to lead to discussion. Part of the “sharing” in shared reading involves talking about the book. Perhaps several of your child’s friends and their parents can [start a book club](http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/reading-language/reading-tips/book-clubs-for-kids/) where texts read through shared reading are discussed in a welcoming environment. If book groups are not an option, find a reliable, child-safe website where your child can post a review of that book or encourage him or her to start a book review journal.

Reluctant readers are often struggling readers, so creating safe, comfortable environments where fluent reading is modeled and where children are set up for success is key. Though there is definitely not an easy answer, with a little focus and direction, you can help give your child the reading boost he needs. It’s not magic, but every little step helps.