Winter literacy traditions

Keep your youngster’s language arts skills strong during winter break. Fit reading, writing, speaking, and listening into family traditions with these activities.

Celebrate reading
Give books a starring role on special days by holding read-a-thons while you sip hot chocolate. For instance, you might read winter-themed books on the first day of winter (December 21). Or on December 31, read about different ways people celebrate New Year’s Eve around the world.

Share news
Help your child launch an annual family newsletter. He could ask relatives to submit short articles about important events during 2019 and then write an article or two of his own. Have him add headlines, draw illustrations, and write captions to complete the first edition!

Tell stories
Swapping family stories during gatherings builds your youngster’s speaking and listening skills. Pull out photos to spark ideas, perhaps ones taken at a wedding or reunion, and invite your youngster to contribute details as everyone reminisces. What songs were played at the reception? What games did he play with his cousins?

Inspired to write
Fill a basket with items that will give your child writing practice. Here are ideas for creating an “inspiration station.”

- Greeting cards. Let your youngster cut cards in half and turn the fronts into postcards. She can write messages on the blank sides and mail the cards to relatives.
- File folders. Ask your child to glue a magazine picture on one inside panel of each folder. Help her write a story about the picture and glue it on the other inside panel. She could add a title on the front.
- Homemade writing paper. Have your youngster decorate the borders of plain white paper with stickers or stamps. Use a ruler to draw lines she can write on.
100 “magic” words

Did you know that just 100 words in the English language account for about half of the words beginning readers encounter? Ask your youngster's teacher or search online for a list of these high-frequency words, and use them to play the following games.

Word search. Arrange Scrabble tiles in an 8 x 8 grid, spelling several of the words vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. Give your youngster a list of the words you bid. Can she find them all?

Fun with Words

Spot the comma

When you’re out and about with your child, try to spot as many commas as possible! You’ll help him learn where commas belong and what jobs they do.

See a comma? Read the words it goes with, and tell why it’s there. For example, your youngster might read “lettuce, tomato, and cheese” on a restaurant menu and say that those commas separate words in a series. Or maybe you’ll spot “December 12, 2019” on a newspaper (a comma goes between the date and year). Can he find a place where a comma should be or a comma that’s used incorrectly?

Parent to Parent

Five-finger retelling

At school, my son Noah retells stories that he reads so the teacher can see how well he understands them. He recently learned a new retelling strategy that we’re enjoying at home: the five-finger retelling.

We read a story together, and Noah holds up each finger as he retells a different part. For his thumb, he introduces the main character. Then, he holds up a second finger and describes the setting. When he holds up his third, fourth, and fifth fingers, he explains what happened in the beginning, middle, and end of the story.

This has really helped Noah retell stories in sequence, and it works for more than books. We’ve used five-finger retelling to talk about everything from Noah’s day at school to sporting events we’ve attended.

Q & A

Reading at the “right” level?

Q My daughter often wants to read books that are too hard or too easy for her. Shouldn’t she stick to books at her reading level?

A Reading levels help teachers select books that challenge kids just enough to make them better readers. But your child can also enjoy and learn from books that are above or below her level.

When she reads easier books, she gains confidence, becomes a more fluent reader, and develops a love of reading. More difficult books challenge her vocabulary and comprehension skills and give her a sense of accomplishment—even if she doesn’t “get” everything.

Encourage her to explore any book she’s excited about. If she struggles with a book, offer to read it aloud. She’ll be more motivated to read, and the more she reads, the stronger her skills will grow.