



**YouthFriends®**  
VOLUNTEER READING GUIDE

A photograph of a woman and two children sitting at a table, looking at books. The woman is in the center, smiling. A young boy is on the right, looking down at a book. A young girl is on the left, also looking at a book. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

**MY BOOK!**

**I did it!**

**I did it!**

**Come and look**

**At what I've done!**

**I read a book!**

**When someone wrote it**

**Long ago**

**For me to read,**

**How did he know**

**That this was the book**

**I'd take from the shelf**

**And lie on the floor**

**And read by myself?**

**I really read it!**

**Just like that!**

**Word by word,**

**From first to last!**

**I'm sleeping with**

**This book in bed,**

**This first FIRST book**

**I've ever read!**

**~ David L. Harrison ~**

**(from *Somebody Catch My Homework*)**



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# ALL ABOUT READING

Reading is one of life's greatest pleasures and learning to read one of life's most important achievements. Part of the joy of growing up is connecting with words on a page – words and sentences that inspire, transform and open the gates to knowledge. How well one makes that connection is an important predictor of how well one does in school and life.

## What Adults Should Know

Most adults take reading for granted, assuming that somehow children will automatically learn to read by the time they're in the third grade or even earlier. Not so. According to national reading statistics, four in ten children have real difficulty learning to read and some are at risk of never learning at all. According to data collected through the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, one in seven people in the United States is functionally illiterate meaning that he or she can barely read a help wanted ad or write a letter.

## Ways to Support Young Readers

Struggling readers as well as those just starting out need all the help they can get to master the basics and improve comprehension. Families and friends can help by exposing children to books at a young age, reading aloud to them, listening to them read, taking them to the library, respecting books and supporting teachers. YouthFriends can help in much the same way. Include reading activities in weekly mentoring get-togethers or elect to become a YouthFriends Reading Pal tutor whose sole focus is helping young readers practice and improve their reading skills. Reading Pals attend an additional hour interactive training session, which is available through participating school districts.

## About This Guide

This guide is for every YouthFriends volunteer who wants to foster reading enjoyment by helping both younger and older students improve their literacy and comprehension skills. It includes background information on how students learn to read as well as how volunteers can enhance this fundamental endeavor so crucial to a student's future success. Information is drawn from the America Reads Initiative, LEARNS, National Service Resource Center, Bank Street College of Education, the National Reading Panel and the experiences of thousands of YouthFriends reading volunteers.

"Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers."

~ Charles W. Eliot ~

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD READER?

Comprehension and fluency are keys to reading success. Comprehension is quite simply decoding letters to make sense of the text, and fluency is the ability to read with speed and accuracy. Reading comprehension is a complex process that typically begins with a knowledge of the alphabet and an understanding of phonemics, our language sound system, which combines to form syllables and words, and phonics, the connection between letters and sounds. Good comprehension is also determined by how well one understands vocabulary, context and semantics. There are many approaches to literacy development by professionals in schools, but the goals are the same. Whatever the teaching method, students need practice, encouragement and reading mileage if they are to succeed.

"To read is to empower  
To empower is to write  
To write is to influence  
To Influence is to change  
To change is to live."  
~ Jane Evershed ~  
*More than a Tea Party*



## ROLE OF READING VOLUNTEERS

Reading volunteers are not reading teachers. Their role is to support teachers and literacy efforts by providing students with support and opportunities for reading enrichment. Like coaches, they provide encouragement and offer opportunities to practice and perfect newly gained skills. This guide provides a broad range of strategies, activities and tips to help you in your role as a reading volunteer. Most important to your success are patience, friendliness, respect for your students, caring, a sense of humor and a love of reading.

# TYPES OF READERS – WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

Depending on where you volunteer, your students could be in elementary, middle or high school. Some may be brand new to reading, others might be struggling with literacy, have learning disabilities or perhaps be unfamiliar with the English language.

## Grades K-3

Readers in the early grades generally fall into three categories, although not all children move through these stages at the same pace.

- **Emergent Readers**

*Preschool – First Grade*

Children who are just beginning to be aware of the basics of reading

- **Early Readers**

*First and Second Grade*

Children who understand the basics of print understand content and are able to grasp meaning from books and stories

- **Fluent Readers**

*Second Grade and Older*

Students who are able to read silently and aloud with increasing speed, accuracy and comprehension

"There should be a little voice in your head like the storyteller is saying it. And if there's not, then you're just lookin' at the words."

~ LaKeisha (student) ~

## Grades 4-7 (and beyond)

Reading abilities of students in grades 4-7 can vary considerably depending on how well they've mastered early reading basics. Ideally these students should not only be fluent readers but be what is termed 'active and flexible' as well.

- **Active and Flexible Readers**

These students have mastered the basics and are gaining a real sense of involvement with the material. They monitor their own comprehension, are aware when something does or doesn't make sense and can pace their reading speed on the difficulty of the text. They are also beginning to understand plot structure and character development.



# GETTING STARTED AS A READING VOLUNTEER

## Before You Begin

• If possible, meet with the teacher and determine the reading level of your students. Find out if the teacher has any special areas on which you should focus. Developing partnerships with teachers and librarians can go a long way toward supporting your mentoring efforts.

• Ask for ideas on what kinds or books would be appropriate to the student's interest and reading level. Ask if those books are available in the classroom or library. *See Reading Suggestions*

## What Should You Bring?

Besides books to read (particularly if you are volunteering with younger students) consider bringing some of the following supplies to enrich and vary the sessions. *See Games and Activities*

### Sample Supplies

- Notebook with lined paper
- Blank paper
- Sharpened pencils with erasers
- Colored pencils, crayons or markers
- Folder or large envelope for your student's work
- Other art supplies
- Stickers

"Oh, magic hour, when a child first knows she can read printed words!"

~ *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* ~

## First Meetings

The first few meetings provide a great opportunity to establish a friendly and trusting relationship with your students that encourages them not to feel self-conscious about their reading abilities. *Note: Some of the following suggestion may be more appropriate for younger students.*

- Break the ice by asking about school, hobbies, special interests. (This helps choose future reading selections.)
- Wait for the answers to each question.
- Encourage the student to ask questions about you.
- Have the student draw a picture of his house, pet or family. Suggest for future meetings that each of you bring a special picture or object to share and discuss.
- Let the student know you are there to help with her reading – that you are not a teacher, but a helper, a coach. Give her some idea of some of the things you might do together, i.e. read to each other, draw pictures about things you read together, play games and have fun with books.
- Consider not asking the student to read to you at the first meeting, unless he volunteers.
- In early meetings, plan activities in which the student can succeed. This helps build self-confidence. If the student lacks confidence, you may want to work with familiar books over and over again. Be patient and flexible during these first meetings.

# NEXT STEPS – MAKING READING SESSIONS WORK

Every session should include Reconnection and Wrap-Up. Other activities in the session should include at least two from the following list.

- Reconnection
- Reading Review (Familiar material)
- New Reading Material (New book or chapter)
- Reading Aloud
- Related Literacy Activity or Game
- Wrap-up

## • Reconnection

Take time to catch up on the week and go over your previous meeting – material read, vocabulary words, pictures or written material. (Keep in a file folder or envelope.)

## • Reading Review

Have younger students reread a familiar book or selection from a previous meeting. If students are reading chapter books over several sessions, have them talk about what's happened so far. Then have them read aloud passages from the last chapter. These reading warm-ups of familiar material help improve fluency and increase reading confidence.

## MOTIVATING YOUR STUDENT

- Be positive and encouraging.
- Set a child up for success by selecting skill and age appropriate reading materials and activities.
- Let her know you value her opinions.
- Give honest praise as well as helpful feedback.
- Help your student feel a sense of progress. Let him know his reading is improving.
- Accentuate the positive. Eliminate the negative.
- Keep a log of your student's selections read together so he can see how much has been accomplished over the time spent together.

## • New Reading Material

Introduce a new book or preview an upcoming chapter. Experts suggest the following pre-reading strategies for preparing a student to read a new or unfamiliar book.

• **Activate the young person's background knowledge.** Discuss information she already knows about through her daily life, interests and interaction with family, friends and community.

For example if a book is about fish, ask her to tell you what she knows about fish: where they live, what they eat, varieties or if she's ever gone fishing. These discussions help students make sense of what they read and make connections with what they already know. If your student is totally unfamiliar with the topic and seems disinterested, consider selecting another book.

• **Encourage predicting.** Have the student look at the title and cover and ask him to tell you what he thinks the story might be about.

• **Take younger students on a picture walk of the material.** Go through the text without reading it and talk about the illustrations. This helps early readers gain an understanding of the story in advance and helps them predict what might happen.

• **Discover prior knowledge.** Discuss what the student already knows about the subject matter and what he wants to know more about.

After these steps, have the student begin reading. For encouragement, take turns reading pages aloud to each other.

## • Reading Aloud

Never underestimate the value of reading aloud to children. According to research, it's one of the most pleasurable and important experiences young people can have. Here are some suggestions.

- At first select passages or books that connect with students' interests. Then vary the material to broaden their perspectives.
- Introduce the book including title, author and illustrations.
- Read with expression.
- Encourage students to look at the pictures and ask questions.
- Be aware of your student's reactions. You may have to change your plans, the book or your reading style if your student becomes bored or inattentive.
- Get reactions when you're finished. Ask open-ended questions that promote discussion. "What did you like (or dislike) about the book and why?"

## On Reading Aloud

"Here is a chance to model good reading and thinking strategies and expose young learners to the rich variety of literature that exists – fiction, non-fiction, poetry, biography, humor, fantasy; to help them understand critical features of written language."

~ *Bank Street Literacy Guide* ~

## • Related Literacy Activity or Game

Writing is key to literacy development and adds dimension to reading sessions. Encourage student to write something related to what he's read. It can be a word, a sentence or a paragraph. Younger students enjoy drawing pictures connected to the story's content. Games help students with word recognition and vocabulary development. See *Games and Activities*.

## • Wrap-Up

Ask the student what his favorite part of the session was; what he liked best. Discuss favorite parts of the book/story and compare to other things he's read. End by giving the student positive feedback about his effort. Let him know he's improving. Be enthusiastic about the next session and let the student be involved in its planning.



# STRATEGIES FOR READING MENTORS

Experts offer the following suggestions for tutors and mentors working with new and struggling readers.

**Take an interactive approach.** Asking open-ended questions engages the reader and encourages critical thinking. For example, ask your student what she thinks of the characters and their actions. Would she have done something else? Is the story believable? Other questions for older readers might include:

- Who are the main characters?
- What's the main theme of the selection?
- When and where does the selection take place?
- How does it apply to you?
- Would you tell the story differently?
- What would you change?
- What would happen if...?
- Was there anything that didn't make sense?
- Which character do you like the best and why?

**Make personal connections** with the student's experiences and the text to stimulate and sustain interest. "Has anything like this ever happened to you?" "How would you feel if you were (character's name)?"

**Take time to listen** to their responses. Be attentive to their questions.

**Point out punctuation marks** and ask what they mean. Encourage your student to read with expression guided by punctuation, which helps with comprehension and makes reading more fun. Read expressively when it's your turn to read aloud.

**Consider wordless books.** These are useful to engage emergent readers in using pictures to create and organize stories. They

can also be used with fluent readers to stimulate writing. Ask your younger student to look through a wordless book and tell you the story using the pictures. (For a second-language learner, or a very emergent reader, you may need to model this a few times before asking the child to do it all.) You may also want to write down the student's dictated story for use later as a reading text.

**Keep a log of books** read during your time together. Visit [youthfriends.org](http://youthfriends.org) to download reading logs. Have younger students place a sticker next to the books they've completed.

**Be patient and encouraging.** Have fun.

"The more that you read,  
the more things you will know.  
The more that you learn,  
the more places you'll go."  
~ Dr. Seuss ~



# READING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

## When Your Student Is Stuck

Even fluent readers can run into stumbling blocks from time to time. Accuracy comes with practice and confidence grows as students develop increasing knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Here are some suggestions to help students when they come across a word they don't know or frequently miss.

- Have the student re-read the sentence or phrase containing the word.
- Connect the word to the context. If she's read the word incorrectly, ask her if it made sense in relation to the rest of the words or the story so far.
- If that fails, ask if she recognizes any letters or sees familiar endings.
- Ask her to break the word into parts and sound each one out.
- Encourage her to skip over the word and read to the end of the sentence or phrase. One source suggests substituting a grunt in place of the mystery word. "She didn't (grunt) how to tie a bow."
- Offer clues and ask leading questions for encouragement. "This word rhymes with ...." Or, "Have we seen this word before?"
- Supply the word if it's particularly difficult or an unfamiliar proper noun. Have fun with making the mystery word rhyme with another word to trigger later recognition.
- Don't let a student agonize over a single word. Help him out and move on. Remember reading is about understanding the text not just translating letters into words.
- Write down challenging words to review later. Or have the student write them on cards for a future game. See *Games*.

If you work with a student whose first language is not English, here are some hints for your sessions.

- Let your student know you appreciate her ability to speak two languages. Help her take pride in that skill.
- Your student may be very quiet at first. Be patient, encouraging and use simple reading selections with many pictures of familiar objects.
- Pick reading selections with simple, natural language that your student can clearly understand and use.
- Choose reading selections that introduce new words and use pictures to enhance comprehension.
- Discover a book in English your student likes and read it aloud to him, then gradually let him read it over and over to build confidence.
- Reward and focus on what your student knows.

*Note: Contact the student's teacher or the school's ESL (English as a Second Language) or ELL (English Language Learner) departments for further suggestions and recommended reading materials. Also check out the YouthFriends ESL Volunteer Training.*

"To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark."

~ Victor Hugo ~ *Les Miserables*

# GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Literacy activities and games add to the student's enjoyment of the reading session and are valuable learning tools. They add variety when a student's attention wanders.

## Games

Games can be created on the spot to help students with word recognition and word meaning in the materials they are reading. Be inventive. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- For younger students make flash cards of high frequency sight words.
- Read simple poetry books to your student and see if she can fill in the rhyming words.
- Make flash cards of vocabulary words from the reading selection. Have your student go through the cards as quickly as possible until they recognize and remember all the words. Reward with a sticker.
- Use a word from the reading selection in a game of Hangman. Let your student challenge you with a word of her choice as well.
- Write the same word on two cards, shuffle them, turn face down and play Concentration whereby each player tries to pick up two cards that match. If the cards match, the player gets to keep the cards and take another turn. If not, the cards are returned to their locations on the table face down and the second player takes a turn. The player with the most cards wins.
- Use the cards to play matching card games like Old Maid or Go Fish.
- Variations on these games can include using cards with matching sounds like run/fun, song/long , etc.

## Activities

Check with the teacher for suggestions on literacy activities. The following are some ideas used by other volunteers.

- Provide drawing paper for a student to illustrate an experience. Have him provide a caption explaining the content.
- Encourage her to write a few sentences about her week. Have her read them to you and elaborate.
- Cut out pictures from magazines and have her make up stories around the content.
- Have him tell you a story that you record. Print the story on several pieces of 8 ½ x 11 inch paper to form pages of a book. Print a few sentences at the bottom of each page. Over the course of your weeks together, have him illustrate the pages. At the end of the session, put the pages together in a book with his name on the front as author and illustrator. Present it to your student and encourage him to read his book to others.

"Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."

~ W. Fusselman ~

For more volunteer information visit

[youthfriends.org](http://youthfriends.org)

## SELECTING BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

Teachers and librarians are invaluable in helping select enjoyable and appropriate books that match their reading abilities and interests of young readers. The list on page 12 is compiled from their recommendations. Visit [youthfriends.org](http://youthfriends.org) for a more extensive list of recommended books.

When choosing a book for your student consider selections that:

- Have strong stories and understandable language
- Have memorable characters
- Stimulate the imagination
- Provide new ideas
- Relate to his/her interests
- Rhyme or have rhythm that invites participation (younger children)
- Are fun



"It is not enough to simply teach children to read; we have to give them something worth reading. Something that will stretch their imaginations – something that will help them make sense of their own lives"

~ Katherine Paterson ~

# READING SUGGESTIONS

## Books to Read Aloud to Emerging Readers

Aardema, V., *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*  
Bang, M., *Wiley and the Hairy Man*  
Cameron, A., *The Stories Julian Tells; Julian, Secret Agent* deReniers  
Freeman, D., *Corduroy*  
Keats, E. J., *Whistle for Willie* (and others)  
Marshal, J., *Fox and His Friends* (and other stories)  
McDermott, G., *Anansi the Spider*  
Mosel, A., *Tikki Tikki Tempo*  
Seuss, Dr., *The Cat in the Hat*  
White, E. B., *Charlotte's Web*

## Wordless Books

Day, A., *Good Dog Carl*  
Mayer, M., *A Boy, A Dog, and a Frog*  
McCully, E., *The First Snow*

## Poetry

Adoff, A., *All the Colors of the Race*  
Clark, A.N., *In My Mother's House*  
Greenfield, E., *Night on Neighborhood Street*  
Silverstein, S., *Where the Sidewalk Ends*

## Predictable Books

Aardema, V., *Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain*  
Bang, M., *Ten, Nine, Eight*  
Carle, E., *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (and others)  
Galdone, P., *Henny Penny*  
Galdone, P., *The Gingerbread Boy*  
Keats, E.J., *The Snowy Day*  
Shulevitz, U., *One Monday Morning*  
Zemach, M., *The Little Red Hen*

"Only a generation of readers will spawn a generation of writers."

~ Steven Spielberg ~

## Books for Students To Read Emergent Readers

Alborough, J., *There's Something at the Mail Slot*  
Carle, Eric, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*  
Eastman, P. D., *Are You My Mother?*  
Guilfoyle, E., *Nobody Listens to Andrew*  
Hoff, J., *Who will be my Friend?*  
Hutchins, P., *Rosie's Walk*  
Kalan, R., *Jump, Frog, Jump*  
Mayer, M., *What Do You Do With a Kangaroo?* (rhyming, repetition)  
Sendak, M., *Chicken Soup With Rice* (rhyming, repetitive refrain)  
Seuling, B., *The Teeny Tiny Woman*  
Seuss, Dr., *The Cat in the Hat* (rhyming)

## Early/Early Fluent Readers

Arkhurst, J. C., *The Adventures of Spider*  
Averill, E., *The Fire Cat* (short chapter book)  
Brown, M., *Stone Soup*  
Cameron, A., *The Stories Julian Tells; Julian, Secret Agent* (chapter book)  
Cole, J., *The Missing Tooth*  
Cresswell, H., *Ordinary Jack* (fluent, grade 5)  
Fitzhugh, L., *Harriet the Spy* (fluent, grade 4)  
Hale, J., *Mary Had a Little Lamb*  
Lindbergh, R., *What is the Sun?*  
Mayer, M., *There's a Nightmare in My Closet*  
McGovern, A., *Too Much Noise*  
San Souci, R.D., *The Talking Eggs*  
Schecter, E., *Sim Chung and the River Dragon*  
Shulevitz, U., *One Monday Morning*  
Steig, W., *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*

## Fluent Readers

Ada, A., *The Gold Coin*  
Cowcher, H., *Rain Forest*  
Ehrlich, A., *Leo, Zack and Emmie*  
Gipson, F., *Old Yeller*  
Jukes, M., *Like Juke and Me*  
Williams, V.B., *Cherries and Cherry Pits*

## Resources for Volunteers

[www.edu.gov](http://www.edu.gov) (America Reads)

[www.bankstreet.edu](http://www.bankstreet.edu) (Literacy Guide for Volunteers and Tutors)

[www.nationalservicerresources.org](http://www.nationalservicerresources.org)

[www.nationalreadingpanel](http://www.nationalreadingpanel)

[www.nwrel.org](http://www.nwrel.org) (LEARNS)

[www.timewarner.com](http://www.timewarner.com)

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America Reads

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LEARNS

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