



Parent
Educational
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Center

School-Age Literacy

By Tony Trott

Literacy skills are necessary for children to succeed in school. This is true for all students. Programs to assist students without disabilities in learning to read are widely available. However a quality literacy program for students with disabilities is much harder to find. Equally hard to find are tips for parents to use when working with older children.

Literacy websites tend to give parents ideas about how they can foster a love of reading and books in infants and young children, but there is a noticeable drop in information about how to teach children from 4th through 8th grades. It is important to continue to encourage a love of the written word. With a little bit of creativity, you can use many of the same strategies that are recommended for younger children.

Many children, and even slightly older children, enjoy listening to others read to them. But while you might read Dr. Seuss books or *Pat the Bunny* to a younger child, you could read *Sports Illustrated*, the newspaper, or *Harry Potter* to an older child. Using your child's own interests is a powerful tool for nurturing a love of reading. Let your child's interests lead you in choosing what to read. The *Goosebumps* series by R.L. Stine may be too scary for a child when she is third grade but attitudes change and these books may be the greatest for a fourth grader.

Older children who are struggling readers or who don't read are often reluctant to participate in any reading or writing activity. Here's an idea if your child

watches television. Use favorite television shows to discuss ideas, characters, and story lines. As your child grows older, you may even find that you both enjoy the same shows. Watch them together and discuss them afterward. Talking and discussion can help your child develop a better understanding of the program and be a springboard for other creative activities.

**Computers do
have a motiva-
tional use in
reading instruc-
tion.**

*National Reading
Panel*

Try making your own TV show. Have your child look at the TV when it is turned off, or just a blank wall. As you read, encourage your child to create mental images of what you are saying. This helps children to attach meanings and pictures to words. You can, of course, vary the content of what you are reading so that it is at the correct reading level for the child and it piques her interest.

Another thing you can do is to encourage your child to write letters or email. This shows that writing has a purpose. When the letter is answered, it will reinforce that reading is for more than just some books at school. (As an added bonus, this can help draw appreciation from the correspondent, such as a grandmother!)



Writing a letter or an email are two of the optional activities available in the LiteracyAccess Online (LAO) project. LAO is a project being developed by PEATC and the Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities (KIHD) at George Mason

University. One of the purposes of the project is to offer support to parents or others when they are teaching a student with disabilities to read.

Parents are a child's best teacher but they, many times, do not feel adequately prepared to take on that role in academic subjects. LAO has been developed to help them feel adequately prepared. LAO is a support system that attempts to offer "just-in-time" ideas, teaching methods, and hints when you or your child is frustrated.

The LAO Story Bank contains different stories with built-in activities to help your child learn to read. There are prereading activities such as a Picture Walk and postreading activities such as a wordfind. There are also many activities that you can choose to use with a story that was not selected from the LAO Story Bank.

One of the most recent additions to the LAO website is the Story Builder tool. It allows a student to build a personal story on any chosen topic by using pictures and written content from different websites. A student can also use her own pictures and her own writing to create a biography.

The LAO website is located at www.literacyaccessonline.com and it is free. Registration is required so that we can provide you with specific information and to help you keep track of your student(s).



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