

Getting a jump on 4th grade (without losing the joy of reading)

Loving reading – Perhaps the biggest advantage a student can have is a love of reading. Getting to choose their own books, seeing the people around them reading for the pure joy of it, talking with others who are excited about books, all contribute to creating this special relationship.

Readers get something from just about everything they read, including exposure to new vocabulary, to the variety of ways whole stories and individual sentences can be put together, and to the problems people face and how they deal with them. Fiction as well as nonfiction provides a glimpse of life in different places and time.

Reading fluency – Reading fluency is the ability to read text fairly quickly and smoothly with few errors. Like most things, reading gets better with practice. Readers gain the most from material that is just a bit more challenging than what they've read in the past, so they learn something new, but not so challenging that they get frustrated and lose the sense of the story. If the reader encounters more than a few words on the page that they can't figure out, it's probably not a good choice for them. If the child is really interested in a book that is beyond their reading level, this might be a good book to read aloud to them, or have them listen to on a recording. You might also encourage them to make a note of this title to go back to later.

Comprehension – Of course it does no good to read unless you understand what you're reading. Our expectations of how deeply a child interacts with text increase as they get older. In fourth grade, students move from retelling everything that happened to picking out the more important information and giving a more concise summary. Students have deeper conversations about what characters are like and what their motivations are for the things they do. They think about what characters learn over the course of the book and what message the author might be trying to get across. They spend more time reading nonfiction texts and learn that we read nonfiction differently than we do fiction, reading and rereading in search of information rather than simply starting at the beginning and continuing to the end.

Reading or be read to? Many fourth-graders still enjoy having someone else read to them, or trading off reading aloud with an adult, sibling, or friend. Having an adult continue to read to the child is a great opportunity to model expressive reading, explain new vocabulary, and create an opening to talk about the book together. If the child takes a turn reading aloud it's a great opportunity for you to hear how they are reading. (Don't be concerned about small errors that don't change the meaning of the sentences or that the child notices and self corrects. This isn't unusual for good readers who are used to reading independently.) If your child prefers to read independently, you can still be involved by chatting with them about what they're reading.

Some specific skills we study - If your child loves reading and is in the habit of thinking and talking about what they read, that's a huge head start. Some things we study in fourth grade like adverbs and prepositions probably aren't going to come up

naturally in a conversation about books and you'll probably just want to leave that for us to study in class (unless you want to try some of the online activities on www.elcerritowire.com/4). But talking about new words that come up in stories can be tremendously helpful and it's great if your child feels comfortable asking you what words mean. (It's really OK if they don't look up everything themselves; that's not how people learn most of the words in their vocabulary!) You may want to take advantage of any opportunities to explain the meaning of idioms (phrases like "a piece of cake" where the meaning is completely different than the words imply) you come across, about words that can have more than one meaning (like "bat" can be an animal or a piece of sports equipment and "fan" can be something to cool you or someone who really likes something), and perhaps how you can use prefixes, roots, and suffixes to figure out word meanings. You might also want to talk about genres such as fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, fairytales, myths, fables, etc.

Connections to other subjects:

Writing – In fourth grade students work on different ways to organize longer writing passages, but you probably don't want to spend the summer insisting they write essays. You might, however, help them get more comfortable with writing frequently. Perhaps they like the way a certain story is written and want to try that style themselves, would enjoy typing a story and making a special cover for it, or having a journal or diary to write in. Resist the urge to give too much guidance or feedback unless they seem to want it! If they feel comfortable writing and have a chance to do it the way they want, they'll be over a big hurdle when it does come time to do a specific writing assignment at school.

Science and social studies – In fourth grade social studies we study California history and geography. The science topics are ecosystems, Earth science (rocks and minerals and changes to the Earth such as erosion, earthquakes, and volcanoes), and electromagnetism. Summer is a great time to visit historical sites, parks, and science museums, and do experiments. Even if you don't rush out and get books in connection with these activities, they'll give your child some great background that will help them when it comes time to tackle their fourth grade science and social studies texts, which most children find more challenging to read than fiction. Of course their interest may be piqued enough that they'll want to read up on a place they've visited or a particular topic. Remember reading can be in the form of pamphlets, plaques, magazines, and websites, too, not just books.

For fun online activities to practice most fourth-grade skills:
<http://www.elcerritowire.com/4/>

Questions? Please feel free to email bbuginas@hotmail.com