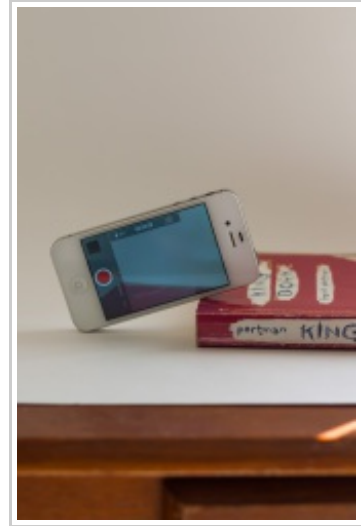


Practice Reading by Getting into Character!

Lots of fourth graders plow through their reading without stopping to understand the finer points of character development. Sure, it's fun to be able to zip through a big text, but as an experienced adult reader, you know: the real joy of literature comes when you can slow down, take it apart, and savor all the pieces. Here's an activity that will help your child dig into a text and see how the words can come alive. It's a great way to understand character and practice oral reading skills. And if your child is struggling at all with understanding the story, this is an ideal way to help.



What You Need:

- Your child's independent reading book
- Optional: video camera

What You Do:

1. Ask your child what book she is reading independently. Ask him to tell about the characters in the story. Have him explain which character is his favorite and why.
2. Now volunteer to read a section aloud with your child--especially if he's struggling to understand what's going on. When you get to a section with dialogue, stop and point it out to your child. Read it once together, and take a minute to talk it over yourselves. How are the characters feeling? What clues lead us to understand this character better? This is where you can point out ways in which we better understand character: how a character says something and what the character is doing (body language, for example).
3. Once you've pinpointed these clues with your child, practice reading the scene together (your child will read one character's lines, and you will read the other). As you read, omit the parts that describe how a character is saying something or what they might be doing. Getting rid of this extraneous information will force your child to really think about the text clues and act like the character using her voice and body language to emulate this person.
4. As you read, give your character a particular tone and manner of speaking. Have some fun here! Does the character have an accent? Like to bob her head? Invite your child to do the same with his character, too.
5. After practicing your dialogue together, present your reader's theater to the rest of the family. When you're finished, see if your audience can explain how each character was feeling based on your performance. This can lead to a wonderful family book talk. Don't forget to take a bow! Or, if you've got a video camera and a few minutes of free time, try filming yourselves for a performance that everyone can enjoy again and again. This approach has yet another added benefit: you will be boosting your child's confidence in presentation skills, another key part of fourth grade.