

## Reading to Learn: Upper Elementary Reading Skills

The main goal in grades 3 to 5 is for children to become enthusiastic, independent readers who can use their skills to learn new material in all subjects — from history to math. Put simply, children focus on learning to read through second grade. After that, they "read to learn," as well as read for pleasure. The National Research Council, the National Reading Panel, and the National Institute for Literacy identified these skills as key for kids to become strong, independent readers who enjoy reading:

**Fluency:** Fluent readers recognize words automatically so they can focus their attention on making connections among the ideas and their background knowledge. Readers who have not yet developed fluency read slowly, word by word. Because they are focusing their attention on figuring out individual words, it's hard for them to grasp the overall meaning.

### Reading milestones:

- Instant recognition of words
- Reading out loud with expression
- Reading quickly and accurately

**Comprehension:** To get the most out of reading, your child needs to read with a purpose — whether she's reading directions to a game, a textbook to learn about the first Thanksgiving, or a mystery for fun. Your child also must read actively, constantly thinking and questioning. Good readers conduct an internal dialogue: "Did that make sense? What's going to happen next? Why did this character say that?"

### Reading milestones:

- Putting events in sequence
- Articulating the main idea
- Summarizing a story orally or in writing
- Monitoring his comprehension — for example, saying to himself, "I don't get this sentence about ecosystems. I better go back and reread this section."
- Understanding the structure of texts, including the table of contents, index, chapters, titles, and subtitles
- Using pictures and diagrams to help understand and remember what she's reading
- Creating story maps that show the structure of stories including the characters, problems, different events in the story, and themes
- Relating what he reads to his own background experiences
- Using reading as a tool to learn from textbooks

**Spelling and writing:** The focus in the upper grades is learning to spell correctly and write more sophisticated compositions with organized paragraphs and correct punctuation. Your child learns how to find information from a variety of sources including, books, articles, and Web sites.

### Milestones:

- Using a dictionary to look up words he doesn't know
- Researching and composing a simple report using a variety of sources
- Revising compositions with help from his teacher to make them more clear and understandable
- Checking his work for errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation
- Beginning to understand and use figures of speech — "as cold as ice"

**Vocabulary:** Your child still needs to be aware of subtle differences in speech sounds that distinguish words from one another, such as "goal" and "gold," "fresh" and "flesh." She also needs to learn prefixes and suffixes to master new words. For example, she learns that "un" means "not" (unbelievable) and "less" means "without" (hopeless).

### Reading milestones:

- Figuring out word meanings from clues in the text
- Using synonyms and antonyms
- Using different parts of speech correctly, including nouns, verbs, and adjectives
- Knowing that some words have more than one meaning