

Six Tips to Launch Summer Reading

Reading research indicates that the reading ability of many children declines between the end of one school year and the beginning of the next because they do not read over the summer. You can counteract this summer reading slump by reading as few as four or five books over the summer, according to researcher Jimmy Kim. I, of course, would love for kids to read more than this small number of books! Freed from the mandates of school reading, summer break is a marvelous time for readers to explore topics and books of their own interest. While it is challenging to require or monitor students' summer reading, here are some suggestions for launching a school-wide summer reading initiative.

Provide lots of opportunities for students to recommend books. Hang recommendations on the walls in the hallways and in the library. Present book commercials over the announcements and in school newsletters. Provide student-created lists or podcasts on the school website. Discussing books students might read over the summer sends a message that you expect them to read and gives students titles to consider.

Encourage children to make lists of at least four or five books they would like to read over the break. Explicitly setting the goal to read at least a few books sends students off for the summer with a reading plan and some specific titles they have self-selected to read. You can consolidate students' lists and share them with an entire class or grade level as recommended reading.

Hold a book swap. Invite students to donate old books in exchange for a ticket. During the book swap, students may select another book for every ticket they hold. We have held a book swap for many years at my school on the last Saturday before school ends. Our teachers and the librarian cull personal and classroom collections, too, and often donate their tickets to kids who don't have books. If you have extra books at the end, find a local charity, hospital, or children's organization that could use the books.

Open the school library for a few days a week all summer. Talking with my students, I discovered that their primary sources of books were school and classroom libraries. When school closes for the summer, many students lose access to reading material. Consider opening your school library for a few hours two days a week. Invite parents and staff to volunteer for at least one shift over the summer and talk with your librarian about how to monitor the books over the break. We opened our school library for two hours one afternoon and two hours one morning every week for most of the summer.

Host a library card sign up event. Librarians are a wonderful resource for children who need book recommendations. Many libraries offer summer reading programs, author visits, and other events to entice children to read more over the summer. Invite

librarians or volunteers from the local library to attend a PTA meeting or Open House and explain the library's summer programs. Encourage families to sign up for library cards.

Advise parents to set expectations for their child to read every day. Reading for 15 to 30 minutes a day keeps students' vocabulary and reading ability growing during the summer. It can be a wonderful activity for rainy days, household errand running, and long waits in the car or the airport. Stress to parents that students must practice their reading skills over the summer.

I discourage you from creating required reading lists and offering incentives over the summer. Research shows that such programs demotivate most children from reading and benefit children who have strong home support for reading over those children who don't. If you do offer a reading incentive, create an incentive that feeds more reading. Consider books, bookmarks, or bookstore gift cards as incentives instead of t-shirts or pizza coupons. Look for ways to include parents and children in your summer reading initiatives and you will have more buy-in and motivation to participate.

I encourage teachers and librarians to participate in my yearly summer reading challenge, Book-a-Day, where readers pledge to read one book for every day of summer break. The Book-a-Day Challenge can kick-start your reading habits and help you connect with other readers through our Twitter hashtag, #bookaday.

About the Author: Donalyn Miller



*Donalyn Miller has worked with a wide variety of upper elementary and middle school students and currently teaches fifth grade at O.A. Peterson Elementary in Fort Worth, Texas. In her popular book, *The Book Whisperer*, Donalyn reflects on her journey to become a reading teacher and describes how she inspires and motivates her middle school students to read 40 or more books a year. In her latest book, *Reading in the Wild*, Donalyn collects responses from 900 adult readers and uses this information to teach lifelong reading habits to her students.*