

# Developing Life-long Readers: Using Conversation to Connect Children to their Reading

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## What We Know About Children and Reading

Everyone likes stories, but not everyone loves to read. Many children who do not like reading have never found a book they liked and have never explored beyond the plotline, which is just the beginning of the reading experience. When kids start reading independently, parents need to become more, not less, involved. Parents must play a key role in helping their older children select books that capture their imagination and interest.

## How Do Children Become “Good” Readers?

Children need to read books that are appropriate in terms of reading level and emotional readiness. All children, even reluctant readers, become “good” readers when we offer them books they can read with enough ease to get into the story. Children also need books that speak to their emotional maturity. In [Reading Together](#), you will discover ways to help children find what to read and then, through conversation, show them how to find meaning and pleasure in their reading. Let there be no doubt: children who get more from the books they read are children who love to read.

## The Art of Conversational Reading

Read a book—ask a question—start a conversation. Finding meaning in a story calls for guessing, speculation, and pondering; it’s less about what you know and more about what you think. Conversational reading is making comments and asking questions—it is talking with children about the stories they read. Conversational reading promotes active literacy, nurtures a child’s curiosity, and instills a love of exploring and learning.

## Conversational Reading Tips

*A Few Examples from Reading Together*

- Start a conversation with a good question— a question that takes you someplace in your thinking
- Try listening. If you ask children a question, you have to wait a little while and allow them to think and respond.
- “What if” is a powerful tool to get your imagination working.
- Follow Winnie the Pooh’s advice on conversation: “It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn’t use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like ‘What about lunch?’”

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## Conversation Starters For Any Story

### *A Few Examples from Reading Together*

- Tell the story just by looking at the pictures.
- What character would you like to be your friend?
- Is there a character you dislike?
- What would you do in this situation?
- What are you curious about at the end of the story?

## Subject Conversations

These questions, on some of the many challenges of childhood that parents want to help their children understand, build conversations that are richer and more satisfying. Talking about what matters to children, whether it be inside a story or outside story, gives them the language they need to shape their thinking—it teaches them how to think. As E. M. Forster said, “How can I know what I think till I see what I say?”

### *A Few Examples*

#### **Friendship**

“A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. Before him I may think aloud.”

#### **–Ralph Waldo Emerson**

- What are some qualities you look for in a friend—loyalty, trust, compatibility, respect, sincerity?
- Are your friends similar to you or different from you?
- Do you like to have lots of friends or a few close friends?

#### **Popularity**

“The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about.”

#### **–Oscar Wilde**

- Is being well liked, accepted, and admired the same as being popular?
- How important is it to be popular?
- Who decides who is popular?

## Building a Community of Readers

Teachers, librarians and reading specialists can work together to build an integrated reading program. Practicing and modeling conversational reading, a comprehension strategy that promotes active literacy, will build a school-wide community of readers. Working together, we can engage students in conversations about the books we read, whether it is in the classroom or library, during assembly time, or online in a blog. We must find ways to talk about how books are meaningful and why they matter. The purpose is to make talking about a story a habit—talk is essential and the more meaningful and substantive the better.

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