

School's out

Keeping the reading bug alive



By Ellen Schwartz

“No more pencils, no more books
No more teachers' dirty looks!”

WHILE THIS joyous cry of freedom may ring across the land on the last day of school, the reality is that children's reading skills tend to drop during the summer months. Research shows that children who don't read during the summer, especially reluctant readers and at-risk students, can lose up to three months of reading progress.

The good news is that summer reading loss can easily be prevented. Reading as few as six books over the summer will help young children maintain their reading levels. And the more children read, the better readers they become.

The keys to success, say experts, are letting kids know that reading is important,

making time to read together and providing plenty of reading material for them to dig into.

Here are some tips for keeping your children engaged in books all summer long.

Be a model. Experts agree that this is the most important thing parents can do. Children who observe their parents reading become eager readers themselves. Discuss the stories you like and why you like them.

Use the library. Make sure your children have a library card, and check your local public library for summer reading programs and clubs. See the sidebar for more information.

Link books to summer activities. Taking in a baseball game? Suggest that your child read a story about baseball or a biography of a famous player. Going on a family camping trip? Put your child in charge of reading about the area and planning a tour.

Pair books with movies. Read the book, pop the popcorn and watch the related film as a family. When watching TV, turn on the closed captioning feature to give kids reading practice.

Match your child's interests with a nonfiction book. From cooking to sports, crafts to pet care, nonfiction books not only provide information but also give kids the chance to try things for themselves.

The Costco Connection

Costco carries a variety of books, including *I Can Read!* titles, along with workbooks, to keep young readers—from toddlers to teens—busy during the summer months.

ILLUSTRATIONS: PHOTODISC

HELPING KIDS SAY, "I CAN READ!"

WHAT DO Fancy Nancy, Amelia Bedelia and Frog and

Toad have in common? They're all beloved children's-book characters and they're all part of HarperCollins' *I Can Read!* series.

The series kicked off in 1957 after a Boston librarian called a friend at the publishing company and told her about the dearth of books children could read themselves. The first book in the series was Else Holmelund Minarik's *Little Bear*. *Danny and the Dinosaur*, by Syd Hoff, followed in 1958, with hundreds more added over the last four decades. Titles in the series, aimed at children between the ages of 4 and 7, are broken into five levels and ranked from the first stage, "Shared Reading," to "Advanced Reading."

The books in the series are known for telling stories that have a proper beginning, middle and end; good verbal and visual clues to help children figure out unfamiliar words; and "fantastic illustrations." (*Little Bear* was, after all, illustrated by Maurice Sendak.)

For activities and information for parents and educators, visit www.icanread.com.

—Stephanie E. Ponder

Give kids time to read. Even summer schedules can be jam-packed, so be sure to set aside time for reading. Suggest that kids bring along a book to the beach or cabin or on driving vacations.

Provide variety. Graphic novels, poetry, novels written in letter or email format, magazines, newspapers—the possibilities are endless. And let kids choose their own books. Ninety-one percent of children say they are more likely to finish a book they picked themselves.

Check local programs. Some schools send home recommended reading lists for the summer; kids check in at the beginning of the school year to see if they have met their reading goals.

Encourage kids to read aloud. They can read to grandparents or younger siblings. Try turning down the lights and reading aloud as a family. Who doesn't succumb to the pleasure of "Once upon a time ..."? 📖

Ellen Schwartz is the author of 15 books for children, ranging from picture books to teen fiction. Her latest, *The Case of the Missing Deed*, is a culinary mystery that combines recipes with a mystery story.

