

Keeping Reading Cool over the Hot, Hot Summer!

by Penny Castagnozzi

Everything about summer is enjoyable to kids – staying up later, swimming with friends, playing baseball, going to the playground, reading books...SCREECH! Well, maybe children don't run to every activity with the same enthusiasm. As a reading tutor for twenty years, and, maybe more importantly, a mother for even longer than that, I know that there's nothing like a little motivation to make any task more tolerable and more enjoyable. You won't always have to plan motivating activities to get your children to read at home. As reading becomes an easier activity, and it becomes a habit to read on a daily basis, you'll find that they'll continue reading for its own enjoyment, no longer needing your games and promised rewards. For now, though, to help reading compete with all the other cool activities available to children this summer, try one or two of the ideas below to keep your child on track with the reading progress he or she made this year, and to give you one more activity to share with your child.

1. Getting Colder - Go to a craft store together and buy some craft (popsicle) sticks and colored construction paper. To get you started, cut twelve rectangles (sized and shaped like popsicles, if you can) out of the brightly colored papers. You'll also need to buy a box of ice cream bars (popsicles, fudgesicles, creamsicles, etc.) saved especially for this activity. (There can be no sneaking out of this box, even when the kids are in bed!). Decide together how many books your child will have to read to earn a frozen treat, maybe planning on your child earning 2 to 3 of these treats per week. Write that number on a small piece of paper and stick it onto a cup. All summer long, whenever your child finishes a book, write the name of the book on a craft stick. Have your child draw a picture on one of the colored paper popsicles, glue it onto the stick, and put it into the cup. Whenever the number of loose paper popsicles in the cup equals the number printed on the cup, put an elastic band around that group and reward him with the cool treat! Kids reading longer books, or those who are very slow readers, might be better off receiving a frozen treat for every book they read (or possibly even every chapter) so they don't become frustrated or lose interest because it's too long between rewards.
2. Reading Lighthouse – Take an empty half gallon milk or juice container (the kind that looks like a tall house made of cardboard - not the clear plastic type). Cut the very bottom off of it, wash it out thoroughly, then cover the outside with white paper and draw on a 3" x 1" door on one side and a small window somewhere above that. Go outside together to gather small, flat rocks in a bucket that you can label "Reading Rocks." Every time someone in the family finishes reading a book, glue (rubber cement works great!) one of the flat rocks onto the outside of the milk box, gradually building your stone lighthouse. Even in its unfinished state, display the lighthouse

where all can see it to challenge or encourage them to read more to finish the project. You can place a flashlight inside the lighthouse to let light come out of the spout when it's completed.

3. **Bucket of Books** – If possible, go to a nearby beach, pond, or lake together and collect a bag full of flat shells (or go to a craft store and buy some clam shells). Every time your child reads a book, have him paint something from that book (it can be simple – a face, a bug, a basketball, a boat, etc.) on the inside of the shell and put the shell into a beach pail or a basket that he's going to fill over the summer. Occasionally, you may want to go through the pail of shells (with a plastic shovel?) and pick out one to see if either of you remembers what that book was about.
4. **Sweet Reading Pointers** - It usually helps young readers to point to the words as they read, helping them keep their place on the page or line, as well as focusing their attention on the words and letters. Instead of pointing to the words with a pointer finger this summer, though, try having them point to the words with something more fun! Buy a bag of small lollipops that will be available only for this activity (to keep the reader motivated). Whenever your child begins a new book, he is given one of the lollipops so he can use the end of it to point to each word as he reads it. Only when he's done reading that book does he get to unwrap and eat the lollipop. If it takes him several days to finish the book, he can use the stick of the lollipop as a bookmark. If your child is reading several books a day, change the rules to be that he gets to eat the lollipop after reading 3 or 4 books. (Otherwise, your child will certainly be a great reader, but he won't have any teeth left!) Try to select very small lollipops (like Dum Dums) or purchase sugar-free lollipops to limit the amount of sugar your child is eating. Instead of lollipops, you could have your child point to the words with Bugle Corn Chips, which are cone shaped corn chips that fit perfectly on little fingers!
5. **Dynamic Reading Duo** - A great way to encourage reading with those who are struggling, frustrated, or slow readers is to share the task with them. To make this activity more entertaining, tell your child that the two of you are going to read some books just like the famous stars do – right into microphones! Explain that you'll be a reading duet, meaning that the two of you will be taking turns reading the pages, and possibly even reading some sections together. Although it's not necessary, there is added benefits to using a real microphone, one that can be plugged into the speaker system of your computer or a similar device. The magnification of your child's reading voice will not only make it feel more like a star performance, but it will also help him hear and focus better on what he is reading and saying. If you do not have access to a real microphone, this activity can still be a great motivator. In this case, you can make a microphone out of construction paper, wedge a tennis ball into a

paper cup, or use just an ordinary pencil, ruler, or hairbrush for your pretend microphone. That's what I always used to use as a chubby teenager who loved to belt out songs in front of the bedroom mirror! (How's that for a visual?) Whether it's real or pretend, your microphone will be passed back and forth between the two of you as you each take turns reading a page to your (pretend) audience. This is one fun way to promote and enjoy oral reading.

Once you've decided on one or two ideas and have planned your summer reading adventures, go get a tall glass of iced tea, find a cool chair, and treat yourself to few relaxed minutes with a grown-up book or magazine. Don't feel guilty - one of the best motivators to read is wanting to be just like Mommy or Daddy!

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