

Having good-fit books readily available for your child helps them retain the delights of reading for pleasure. When the joy of reading becomes compromised, it becomes harder to identify oneself as a reader. Here are some tips for home to help choose books that hold the interest of kids everywhere along the reading spectrum.

For Advanced Readers...

Fantasy is your friend. Escaping into another world offers an advanced young reader novel scenarios that stretch young imaginations, and content that might be threatening in realistic fiction often feels less so in a fantastical setting. An added bonus of fantasy books is that many titles appropriate for advanced younger readers are part of a series, so once you’ve matched your child with the first book, you’ll know what to reach for next!

Look for:

- “The Golden Compass” series by Philip Pullman
- “Wizards of Earthsea” series by Ursula LeGuin
- “Keeper of Lost Cities” series by Shannon Messenger
- “The Hobbit” by J.R.R. Tolkien

Creative nonfiction will inform and engage. Nonfiction writing has come a long way from the dry textbooks of our childhood. While expository nonfiction will convey information in a factual tone, narrative nonfiction delivers a story with an arc that more closely resembles fiction, with a lively setting, fully realized characters and plots that are often stranger than fiction.

Look for:

- “The Poison Eaters” by Gail Jarrow
- “Why’d They Wear That?” by Sarah Albee
- “Bomb” by Steve Sheinkin
- “Torpedoed” by Deborah Heiligman
- “How They Croaked” by Georgia Bragg
- “The Next President” by Kate Messner
- “Moonbird” by Phillip Hoose

Put your child on the case. Challenge your advanced reader to crack a code with a puzzling book or solve a mystery that will keep them in suspense. Beyond their wild entertainment value, these books encourage your child’s deductive reasoning, close reading skills, and logical thinking.

Look for:

- “Mysterious Benedict Society” by Trenton Lee Stuart’s series, which features a group of eccentric orphans drawn together on a series of madcap missions with logic puzzles and games along the way (also a series on Disney+)
- “Greenglass House” by Kate Milford, in which a group of strangers snowed in at a remote inn prove to have more in common than they realize(also the start of a series)
- “Under the Egg” by Laura Marx Fitzgerald, a stand-alone mystery where an accidental art discovery leads one girl across Manhattan in search of answers about her late grandfather

For Challenged Readers...

Build their visual literacy. Dismissing graphic novels as “not real books” prevents the important ways in which the format supports readers of all ages and abilities. When plot, character development, and meaning are embedded in the images, readers who struggle with text can rely on other skills to interpret a story, build reading stamina, and improve confidence. Graphic novels span genres to suit a range of reading interests, and nuanced illustrations invite rereading, often conferring additional benefits with each pass.

Look for:

- “Zita the Spacegirl” by Ben Hatke
- “Hazardous Tales” by Nathan Hale for nonfiction with wry honesty
- “Snapdragon” by Kat Leyh
- Jerry Craft’s multiple award-winning “New Kid”
- “Planet Omar: Accidental Trouble Magnet” by Zanib Mian and Nasaya Mafaridik, includes illustrations throughout each chapter for readers who prefer a blend of text and image

Look at alternative formats. If reading has become such a struggle that your child would rather just not, offer an audiobook instead. Studies have shown that listening to a book triggers the same brain functions as engaging with text, so audiobooks aren’t “cheating” and in fact bolster your child’s comprehension and vocabulary as would reading a print book. With the addition of music, sound effects, and reader performances, you may find audiobooks break a challenged reader out of a rut.

Look for:

- “Try We’re Not From Here” by Geoff Rodkey and narrated by Dani Martineck
- “Song for a Whale” by Lynne Kelly and read by Abigail Revasch
- “The Parker Inheritance” by Varian Johnson and narrated by Cherise Boothe

Sometimes size matters. Challenged readers may be sensitive to the fact that the books they’re comfortable reading aren’t as thick as those read by peers. If your child needs the ego boost of a “big kid” book, be mindful of a book’s design as a means of supporting your struggling reader.

Look for:

- Brian Selznick’s books are hefty tomes but often include hundreds of pages of intricate illustrations that advance the storyline.
- Erin Entrada Kelly writes thoughtful and emotionally rich novels that are designed with generous leading (the space between lines of text) and margins, offering readers’ eyes plenty of room to rest on each page.
- Novels in free verse are proliferating (look for works by former National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature Jacqueline Woodson), and there are
- Stories told entirely through strings of text messages (such as those by Lisa Greenwald).