

Build Background Knowledge with Summer Learning Excursions



Make Summer Learning Meaningful and Fun

Last month we explored whether it's possible for a reader to understand text about a topic s/he knows little or nothing about. In short, it's not; background knowledge and vocabulary are essential for reading comprehension.

Summer is the ideal time for families to discover new worlds, new ideas, and new words. Parents can leverage summer fun into meaningful learning whether they leave town or not.



Launch Summer Learning at Your Public Library

A library card is your family's passport to summer learning adventures. Visit your library now to sign up for state and local reading incentive programs and special events. Don't focus only on the *number* of books your child reads. Instead, dive more deeply into favorite topic/s. Dinosaurs? Baseball? Drawing? Immerse your family in nonfiction and fiction books, magazines, websites, movies, and pictures about the subject.



Plan Fun Family Outings Full of Teachable Moments

Aim to plan at least one low-cost learning excursion this summer. Ask if your library offers free or reduced price passes to museums and other attractions. Make the most of your outings with before-you-go planning tips from Reading Rockets. Reading can inspire a field trip; a field trip can spark further reading. It's a win either way!



Focus on and Talk About Hands-on Experiences

Children gain facts, information, and skills by having different kinds of experiences. Help them understand the world and make sense of what they read by engaging in everyday activities together. Talk about what you are doing as you cook dinner or do the laundry. Take them places where they will see, hear, taste, touch, smell, and think about new things. Have fun together at a festival, parade, picnic, farmer's market, concert, museum, zoo, ball game, or the beach.



Create Connections, Build Networks

Children expand their knowledge by making connections. Human brains create networks that link ideas, vocabulary, images, and other information. When new words are connected to background knowledge and related words that your child knows, it is easier to learn the new word. Building knowledge networks, or associations, with vocabulary words is key to reading comprehension. It helps readers to expand, refine, and retrieve their understanding. Work together to create a word web about the topic/s you're exploring. Add new words and ideas every day. See how many new connections your child can make this summer!



Write All About It

Encourage your child to record their summer experiences. S/he can draw and label a picture, create a collage of words and images, compile a dictionary of new vocabulary words, assemble a scrapbook, keep a journal, write book summaries and reviews, or make a video. Challenge your child to incorporate newfound words and ideas in their projects.

Would your child enjoy a pen pal? Invite a friend or relative in another state to correspond online or by letter. Children love sending and receiving mail! To be paired with a pen pal in another country, visit these child-safe websites: [PenPalWorld](#) and [GlobalPenFriends](#).

Icons retrieved from [The Noun Project](#).



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