

Succeeding as a Rockin' Reader Volunteer

Strategies for Supporting Readers Kindergarten – Fifth Grade

Rockin' Reader volunteers are a valuable resource for helping students in the Cedar Rapids Community School District to become eager learners. As a Rockin' Reader, you have three roles when working with students— all are equally important:

- First and foremost, you will be a **friend** – a caring, non-judgmental volunteer who is dedicated to helping the student be a successful learner. Reading together will be the vehicle that nurtures that relationship.
- Your second role will be that of **learning facilitator**. During your reading time, you will employ simple strategies to help your reading partner understand the process of reading.
- The last role is that of **mentor**. The mentoring relationship between the volunteer, the student, and the teacher generally grows during the school year.

Below are strategies to incorporate during the 20-30 minutes that you will spend with your reading partner during each visit. These should enhance the effectiveness of the experience for both of you!

READING WITH A FRIEND

- **Find a good book** - One of the first steps is to find a book to read. In some cases, the teacher or media specialist/teacher librarian will choose the books for you. These choices are usually based on the student's reading ability and on his/her learning needs. Many times the books will reflect topics that students are studying in class.

At other times, you and your student partner will be able to select the books yourselves. Although the student's choices may not be as closely suited to his/her abilities, they are more likely to reflect his immediate interests and spur his enthusiasm for reading.

Occasionally your student may select a book that he/she has read before, that's OK, too! It's good practice to reread a familiar book.

When possible, preview the book you have chosen. Best practice is for the volunteer to read the book ahead of time. Try to identify places in the book where you will later pause for reflection with the student(s) to highlight a vocabulary word or phrase or to pose questions such as, "What do you think will happen next?"

- **Find a place to read** - Once you've selected your book, find a spot where you and the student can read side-by-side. The student needs to be able to see the pages of the book, and you both need to be able to visit and read aloud without disrupting others around you.

Be aware--schools today are very active learning laboratories, not the quiet halls of yesteryear! There may not be a really quiet place for you to read, but teachers and media specialists/teacher librarians can usually suggest a place that will work for you.

- **Talk with the student** - One of the program's major goals is for you to develop a comfortable relationship with your reading partner. Sometimes the teacher will provide you with some background about your student. Often, however, personal information simply emerges over time as you visit or read together. Take time to let the student talk about his/her interests, favorite stories, or pets. Look for common interests that you may share. Building this relationship is a key part of the Rockin' Reader experience.
- **Read together** - Reading a story can take several different forms, depending on who actually does the reading.

When you read aloud to your student, you are doing more than simply telling a story. You are providing an interactive learning experience with multiple benefits. You are promoting the joy of reading. You are imparting knowledge, and you are building skills--all at the same time. Seeing a respected adult enjoy reading, motivates students to want to read.

Reading in unison or alternating the task of reading is called "shared reading." This strategy helps a child bridge the gap from being a listener to becoming an independent reader. If the student wants to track the words while he/she reads to you, don't comment. This makes the student able to keep his/her place easier.

Your ultimate goal, of course, is helping a child to become independent—to read on his own. With some books, depending on your child's reading skills, he or she may be able to take over all of the oral reading, while you become an audience and a coach.



FACILITATING READING

Regardless of who performs the reading task, there are several strategies that you can use to stimulate thinking and keep the student actively involved.

- **Preview the book** - Before you begin reading a book, you should take a moment or two to preview the book with the student. Use this time to reinforce key terms such as author, illustrator, and title, and try to personalize the subject for the student.
- **Take a "picture walk"** - If the book is new to the student, start with a brief "picture walk" through the pages. Have the student describe what is happening in the pictures, and see if he/she can predict what the story might be about. Don't belabor these preliminary questions, but use them to set the stage for understanding and for reading with a purpose.
- **Point to the words** - If you have a student in the early stages of learning to read, you may want to have him/her point to the words as they are read. This one-to-one match will help him/her realize that each spoken word matches with a word in print on the page.
- **Read with expression** - Try to read with expression, adjusting your pace as needed to fit the story. Make noises, faces, whispers, etc. This makes the story more interesting and promotes reading enjoyment. You won't look silly and the student will love it.
- **Ask questions** - Ask questions along the way such as: "What do you suppose that means?" or "Why do you think he did that?" These questions will help you know if the student comprehends what you are reading. Don't be unnerved by questions during the reading. Answer a student's questions patiently.



In addition to checking for understanding, try to use questions that let student predict what will happen next or questions that relate the story to familiar personal experiences. All of these strategies to facilitate reading can make your Rockin' Reader session more fun and more interesting for you and for your reading partner.

MENTORING STRATEGIES

As a student reads, he/she will undoubtedly make errors or encounter words that he/she doesn't know. When that happens, you may choose to apply some techniques that will help him/her correct reading errors or learn to decipher words. In other words, your role expands from friend and learning facilitator to reading mentor. Below are strategies you can use to help a student decipher unknown words.

- **Wait for a response** - When the student hesitates, don't automatically supply the word. Give the student a few seconds of wait time and encourage him to apply the strategies he knows before you step in and help. Sometimes a little wait time is all that is needed.
- **Point out consonants** - Use initial consonants and prompt students to look more closely at the printed word.
- **Look for word "chunks"** - Ask the student if he/she knows any parts of the unknown word. If so, have him/her tell what the word part is, and help the student blend the other sounds together to come up with the unknown word.
- **Supply the word** - Sometimes the student struggles unsuccessfully, especially with a difficult word that is obviously unfamiliar. In these cases, you may choose to simply supply the word and its meaning rather than letting the student struggle. Look for ways to help him/her learn the new word and understand how it fits into the sentence.
- **Use repetition** - With some new words, students may need several tries to remember the pronunciation or the meaning. Reinforce their efforts and continue to praise their successes.
- **Anticipate difficulty** - If the student has chosen a book that is too difficult, you may need to read parts of the story to him/her, or you may be able to take turns reading alternate passages. As you read, stop frequently to ask questions to make sure the student understands the story.

CORRECTING ERRORS

As a student reads, he/she will undoubtedly make some errors. Here are a couple of strategies you can use to help the student correct those errors.

- **Point out errors** - In some cases, you may wish to point out an error that a student has made. Provide the correction and explain it to the student before continuing.
- **Encourage self-correction** - At other times you may have the student try to discover the error himself as he/she reads the sentence more slowly. Once the error is discovered, give the student a chance to search for word and picture clues and to fix the error himself/herself.
- **Give frequent praise** - If a student misreads a word but stops to correct it, praise him/her for making the effort.
- **Read for meaning** - Sometimes a student will say a non-word or substitute a word that isn't right. If the student does not notice he/she has made an error, stop and talk about the sentence.
- **Switch roles** - Occasionally, it may help to switch roles. Ask the student to look at the words as you re-read the sentence and then ask if what was read made sense. This will help the student to read for meaning.
- **Re-read the sentence** - And finally, after an error has been found and a correction has been made, have the student re-read the entire sentence. This will help him/her retain the meaning and improve his/her reading fluency.

DRAWING THE SESSION TO A CLOSE

- Try to conclude your Rockin' Reader session with questions such as, "What did you think of the story?" or "What was your favorite part?"
- Ask the student to summarize what has been read or to retell the story in his/her own words.
- As the session draws to a close, take a moment to let the student know that you appreciate how hard he/she tried today. Assure the student that you had fun as well, and that you are looking forward to your next session together.

Creating this kind of positive, on-going relationship is an important component of the Rockin' Reader program—one that leads to increased success and confidence not just in reading, but throughout the student's school career. Thank you for contributing to that success.

Call (319) 558-2124 or email volunteer@cr.k12.ia.us to register as a Rockin' Reader volunteer in the Cedar Rapids Community School District



Non-Discrimination Policy

It is the policy of the Cedar Rapids Community School District not to illegally discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, creed, age (employment only), marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and socioeconomic status (students/program only) in its educational programs and its employment practices. There is a grievance procedure for processing complaints of discrimination. District employees with questions or a grievance related to this policy should contact the Executive Director of Human Resources, 319-558-2000. Students and others should contact the Manager of Student Equity, 319-558-2000. The District mailing address is 2500 Edgewood Rd NW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52405-1015.