

5 Tips from 1907 on Turning Your Child into a Reader

Last week we shared [several recommendations](#) on how to turn a student into a good writer. One of these suggestions was to regularly read high quality literature.

How can you ensure your child is reading high quality and worthwhile material? Author Walter Taylor Field offers several relevant tips in his 1907 work entitled [Fingerposts to Children's Reading](#):

1. Don't Rely Solely on Your Child's Teacher

As parents, it's easy to leave book selection to the "experts" at your child's school. But as Field notes, a parent is a teacher's secret weapon in ensuring that a child gets a good education:

*"Perhaps you think this story-telling business should be done by the child's teacher. It may be that she is doing it, sympathetically and with appreciation of what the stories mean. If she is a good teacher she certainly is, but ... then, maybe she is not telling them at all. **Talk with your child about it. Find out what he is learning in school or kindergarten, and supplement the teacher's work. You cannot afford to let her entirely supplant you in the intellectual training of your child. She needs your help as you need hers.**"*

2. Add Weekly Reading Dates to Your Family Calendar

Today's families are quick to schedule in sports, music lessons, and any number of other activities. But how many of us have ever considered scheduling regular weekly reading sessions with our children?

“It is well to have a definite plan for the children’s reading. Set aside an hour after dinner on two or three evenings of each week, or even on one evening if more cannot be spared. Let it be a regular appointment. If the children are of widely differing ages, divide the time between them. Devote the hour of each to the reading of a good book suited to his needs and interests, and suggest other books which he may take up by himself during the intervals between the readings.”

3. Use Books to Strengthen A Child’s Weak Points

Instead of always allowing a child to read about the subjects which he enjoys, Field recommends introducing books which build his knowledge and interest in other areas as well:

“If the child lacks imagination, fairy stories will help to arouse it. If he knows little about nature, tales of the woods and fields will quicken an interest and open to him a new world. ... He should at first be given the books he likes, provided only that they are good and wholesome, for every worthy book read by a child is a round in the ladder upon which he mounts to an appreciation of stronger and greater books....”

4. Don’t Discourage Re-Reading Favorite Books

While it’s good to encourage children to branch out and explore new topics, Field suggests that it’s also beneficial for children to be thoroughly acquainted with a few select works of literature:

“Indeed, the strong intellects of history are those which have been nourished in childhood upon a few good books – read and re-read until the thought and style became a part of the reader’s permanent possession. Today we have too many books, and we dissipate the intellectual force of our children as

well as of ourselves by trying to spread it over too wide an area. ... On the whole, we think them quite useful and instructive, but in reading them we are losing the opportunity of becoming thoroughly grounded in a knowledge of the world's great books."

5. Never Stop Reading With Your Children

Many parents regularly read to their children when they are small, but stop once a child learns to read on his own. Field believes that parent-child reading times should continue to adulthood:

*"It may be asked at what point the parent should cease reading to the child. At no point whatever. As the child becomes able to read, the parent may read **with** him rather than **to** him, but the reading is best done aloud, and the feeling of association should be continued as long as possible. I know a father who is reading a course in history, several nights each week, with his sons, now young men. It is difficult to express the sympathy, the joy, and the inspiration that they are finding in this work. ... There are few fathers who cannot spend an hour each Sunday evening reading to their children, and there is nothing else which will so strengthen the bond of sympathy between them."*

Eager to take a more active role in your child's reading habits, but unsure what to have them read? Check out some of Field's classic and age-appropriate suggestions [here](#)!