

My son doesn't like to read. It's not that he can't read, he's actually pretty smart but he would rather spend his time playing video games, watching movies, or playing sports. Over the years, I've bought him plenty of really good books, that I've enjoyed, but after the first chapter or two my nagging wears out and he won't finish it. I know that reading is important and feel that he is missing out on a nice leisure activity. I need to know what is wrong with him and how to encourage him to read.

– Bill F., Braselton, GA

I had a student named Seth. He was taking a multimedia class with me. How can I put this nicely? Seth was a spaz. His attention span was shorter than a typical commercial and he was continually looking for ways to fuel his desire to be entertained. Like your son, he loved video games. He was also pretty good on the computer. I had no problem keeping him engaged with the type of PowerPoints and videos I was asking him to produce, except when it came time to create a "book report" using PowerPoint. Seth told me he doesn't read. Fortunately, I also had the opportunity to teach Seth Driver's Ed around the same time as this book report project. Twelve additional hours with Seth might give me an opportunity to find a book he can enjoy enough to finish.

Before adjusting the seat and mirrors, I asked Seth what book he had last read. He said Dr. Seuss. He had started a few others but would quickly get bored with all the description and lack of action.

Help your child choose reading material that interest him;
magazines, newspapers, joke books, comics are all forms of reading.

I spent the next hour talking with Seth about his interests. Teenagers like to talk. Parents tell me kids don't talk to them. But teens have a lot of interests, it's just a matter of focusing in on things important to him, instead of the accounting problems your company is currently facing. Same goes with books. Don't try to give a non-reader Shakespeare. If you can find a book he's interested in, he'll be able to read a book two years higher than his current reading level.

Those bored easily by reading often find science fiction/fantasy books appealing because of the frequent action scenes and subject novelty.

Our first break from Driver's Ed was taken at a bookstore where the employees know me. I'm always asking for recommendations, because I hate to waste money and time getting into a book and have it poorly written or not to my interest. When I walked in with Seth, I started asking the cashier questions, trying to find a genre that would best suit Seth. I wanted to find a book that wasn't too long. If he completed a book quickly, he'd have a sense of triumph, instead of giving up.

Start small, with engaging, quick reads to give him a sense of accomplishment.

The girl at the counter recommended three books that met this criteria: action packed, science fiction or fantasy, a teenage boy as the hero, and less than 150 pages. Now it was up to Seth to look through those books and make a decision. He chose one I didn't think was as good of a fit as the other two, but I didn't make a big deal about it and bought him the book. Even though the other one would be a quick read for me, I bought that one for myself.

Don't criticize his choices, level, or speed.

The following day when Seth came into the computer lab for class, he saw me reading the book he didn't choose. He asked if it was any good. I gave him a quick report. It really was a great book, exciting, engaging. The male hero was young and a bit funny, like Seth. I asked Seth how his book was coming along. He said he didn't like it and found it boring. I let him know that sometimes we get duds and it's not worth our time to waste on a bad book. I offered to let him have the one I was reading as soon as I was finished.

Model reading – show him that you too read.

If he doesn't like the book, don't force him to finish it.

That afternoon, Seth came back by my classroom to pick up the book. He was polite and apologized for not liking the book I had bought for him. I told him again not to worry about it. I had finished the book and told him how great it was, especially the twist at the end. Seth asked if I would give him a free pass on the next assignment for finishing the book. I told him no and that he would enjoy the book. There was no need to bribe him to read something entertaining.

Don't bribe or offer rewards for reading; once the reward is removed, the value of a task is decreased.

Seth came to class the next day excited that he had read two chapters. I was excited for him because I knew that those two chapters were probably more than he had read in over seven years. Seth told me that he read most of the first chapter on the bus ride home and then he started reading out loud to his dog. I commended him for his accomplishment and told him that it was a good idea to read aloud to someone who won't put him down for mispronouncing words and continually interrupting him with corrections. Those interruptions only break the flow of reading and he wouldn't be able to pay attention to the plot of the book.

Encourage your child to read aloud to a pet or stuffed animal.

Inanimate objects won't put him down for mispronouncing words.

Corrections, which most parents wouldn't be able to withhold, create self-consciousness for the new reader. Plus frequent

interruptions break the flow, making it difficult for the reader to follow the plot and character growth.

We went driving that afternoon. Usually I talk to the students about their interests, even though they don't necessarily interest me; it makes the time go by. Today, Seth and I talked about the book he was reading. Since I too enjoyed the quick read, it was a pleasure talking about the part of the book Seth was reading now and some of the funny parts that had come up.

Reading the same book as your son will provide opportunity to discuss the book.

The next morning in class, Seth hadn't read much more than those first two chapters but I knew that bugging him about it wouldn't help. Instead, I piqued his curiosity about the ending in hopes that he would finish it up that night.

Don't nag. Who enjoys an activity that someone nagged them about?

Seth came into my classroom before school started to tell me that he finished the book. I treated the accomplishment like he had just scored the winning shot to clutch the Stanley Cup. I raised the book up above my head and put the book up on a high shelf, all by itself.

A book finished is like a trophy and should be treated as such with a special spot on a shelf along with a showing of pride.

After that weekend, Seth came in with that third book he'd thought about buying. He had finished it over two days. He wanted it up on that shelf with his other success. He was looking for my approval and pride. I was overjoyed and cheered his latest success. Then I asked him about his PowerPoint book report and which of the two books he would choose. He wouldn't tell me and also wouldn't let me look at his computer screen the entire week he was working on the report. At the end of the week, Seth surprised me. He had read a 500-page book called *Eragon* by Christopher Paolini. His report was exceptional.

Encouragement, modeling, finding subject matter that's interesting and starting small can have big rewards, ones that last a lifetime.

If you have a question about your child's attendance at school, feel that your child refuses to go to school, or have a question about your child's education, you can Email me at DrJimK@yahoo.com and your question with my answer may be published in this magazine.