

May 20, 2024
Heidi Darby
Buffalo County Extension
For Immediate Release

Summer Break – Set a Reading Goal

The beginning of summer can be so exciting. The last day of school is here, and kids are getting ready for lazy mornings, hanging out with friends at the pool or riding bikes. Although we all look forward to that extra time out of school, we really can't lose focus on education. This is a great time to set a summer reading goal. I know, I know, what kid wants to spend the summer reading books. I think it's really all in how you present it to them. There are ways to make it fun for both parents and children.

When we were kids, I would spend hours reading. It's just who I am. As a parent, I tried lots of approaches to "make" my kids love reading. Unfortunately, forcing the issue isn't always the best approach. So, I asked a local librarian for some tips. She gave me some great tips and they made it much easier for all of us.

Tip one, find what they are interested in and then find books to match. It doesn't matter if a book is a Pulitzer Prize winning novel or a Newberry award winner. If the topic doesn't fit your child, they won't read it. This is where your local library comes in handy. With so many books and magazines to pick from you are sure to find something that interests your child. Also, understand their preferences are likely to change over the years or even months. Here were some of our family favorites over the years. Usborne books has a series, written by Heather Amery about the adventures of Poppy and Sam. Those farm kids have a lot of tales to tell. They had a "runaway tractor", a "new pony", their "pig got lost" and even a story about a "grumpy goat". This series starts as small wooden picture books and grows to early elementary school. I know that my kids both loved all these books. In upper elementary school, our son really liked "The Adventure of Hank the Cowdog" by John Erickson. If you have farm boys or girls, this series is super entertaining to them as well.

Now that you have found topics of interest, it's time to set some realistic reading goals for your children. This was tip number two. As an incentive, establishing a reward for completion makes it even more fun. You could set a goal of 30 minutes a day or a set number of pages per week. Just be realistic based on your child's reading ability and how busy your family's schedule is. I liked to put up a chart for the kids to document their progress. This just keeps everyone on task and helps encourage them to meet their goals. When looking at rewards, it doesn't have to be anything big. Again, tailor it to what they would find rewarding. It could be a trip to grab ice cream together or even a night out of doing their chores. You might be surprised how much they want to get out of washing dishes or folding laundry. Sometimes it means more to them to get an extra 15 minutes in the tractor with Dad or even to pick what you have for supper as a family. If it's something they want, they will work hard to reach their goals.

Tip three was the one I most needed to hear. You must understand that it isn't what they are reading that is important, as long as they are reading. As an example, at one stage, our son loved reading about fishing and hunting. He didn't need to sit and read chapter books for hours, reading articles out of a fishing magazine was just as beneficial. I would take him with me to the store or library and he would select a few that he liked. Instead of logging pages, he logged minutes and that worked best. Our daughter liked to read chapter books and logging pages read was more important to her. I had to be ok with whatever worked for them. This alleviated a lot of pushing and shoving to get them to read. Anytime you can make it fun, it is much easier on both sides.

If your child is imaginative, you could suggest they write their own story. I have a favorite book that our daughter and her best friend wrote when they were in third or fourth grade. It's a story about a horse who had to move to a new home and make new friends. It is the sweetest little story. The best part is that it is written in their little printed handwriting and includes hand drawn illustrations. I took their pages and had color copies made and asked a print shop to add a cover and bind them for me. It

was very inexpensive but made a huge impression. The girls loved them! So did us moms. They made great gifts for grandmas, aunts, and others too.

If setting up a summer reading plan or goal for your children is something you would like to do, follow the above tips to make it more fun. Find a topic they love, set a realistic goal with established rewards, and understand that all reading is good, whatever the media or topic. If your child does write a book, check in to printing them as gifts. If your older kids take them time to read to others, that could be an activity to document in a poster or scrapbook. Those projects would fit at the County fair as a project under Human Development as an "Activity with a younger Child". If you have any questions on this project or others, please contact your local Extension Office. If needing suggestions on books, ask your child's teacher or make a trip to your local library and see what you can find. Have fun reading with your children but also remember to find time to sleep in, laze around at the park and have fun with your friends, after all its Summer Time!

Heidi Darby

4-H Extension Assistant

Nebraska Extension in Buffalo County

1400 East 34th St. Kearney, NE 68847 308-236-1235