

Beyond Fun and Games: Tips & Resources for Summer Programs

Research shows that a summer without reading causes children to lose some of the learning gains they made during the school year. Summer out-of-school time programs are a great way for tutors to provide ongoing academic enrichment, as well as cultural activities and a safe environment for children during their break from school.

The way you set up your summer literacy program will reflect your program goals. Some programs may simply provide children with books and reading time, such as read-alouds. Other programs may be designed to provide children with more intensive one-on-one tutoring. If you're just beginning a summer tutoring component, some start-up advice can be found at <http://www.nwrel.org/learns/resources>.

Students in summer reading programs are often struggling, and volunteer tutors may need guidance to make the most of their work with such students. Effective programs respond to the individual needs and interests of the children and provide a learning environment that is engaging and intellectually rich.

Also, think about your staffing and the different ways you can group children and structure tutoring sessions—one-on-one tutoring, small groups, read-alouds, reading buddies, etc.

Read on for a selection of tips and resources to help program directors and tutors make the most of summer programming for children.

For Project Directors—Planning Tips

A first step in setting up quality summer school programs is to create a schedule that incorporates program goals and balances activities in blocks of time appropriate for the children enrolled. Here is a sample schedule:

Monday

9:00-9:30	Choice time
9:30-10:00	Quiet reading time
10:00-11:00	Outdoor play
11:00-11:30	Read-alouds
11:30-12:00	Computer lab or board games
12:00 -12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:30	Recess/outdoor games
1:30-3:00	Arts and craft stations

Once the basic structure of the program is established, the schedule can be filled with activities. Planning activities will be easier once the weekly schedule has been established (e.g., three hours/week of computer lab time). Recruiting volunteers is also easier when the need and the time commitment involved are well defined.

Plan program activities carefully to meet children's needs in a fun, safe learning environment. "Creating a Quality Program" in Section 6 of *Making an Impact on Out-Of-School Time* is an excellent resource on the topic of activity planning. It's online at <http://www.etr.org/nsrc/pdfs/nioست/impact/impact.html>.

Schedule time for children to play outside, become involved in service-learning projects in the community, go on field trips, and engage in project-based learning. A quality summer program has a strong educational component, but like all out-of-school time programs, also offers a unique opportunity to use the world around you as the classroom.

Literacy work in a summer program can be active, enriching, and fun. Encourage volunteers to work with groups, try out word games, hold rap and poetry festivals, and create word collages. For example, a summer project or field trip can become a topic for book making. And playmaking or story building is both active and collaborative. Excellent resources on lively and fun drama activities include:

- *Dramathemes: A Practical Guide for Classroom Teachers*, by Larry Swartz
- *Stories in the Classroom: Storytelling, Reading Aloud and Roleplaying with Children*, by Bob Barton and David Booth
- *Drama Structures: A Practical Handbook for Teachers*, by Cecily O'Neill and Alan Lambert

Program Planning Resources and Materials

- *Starting A Summer Reading Program* at http://www.ed.gov/inits/americanreads/resourcekit/toolkit_text.html#summer offers a variety of links. Note in particular the article *Building Effective Programs for Summer Learning*.
- NSRC's library, at <http://www.etr.org/NSRC/library.html>, lends hundreds of books on literacy and tutoring. The following may be particularly helpful:
 - ✓ *Reading Activities & Resources that Work* (R0470)
 - ✓ *Ready-to-Use Reading Activities through the Year* (C0943)
 - ✓ *250+ Activities and Ideas for Developing Literacy Skills* (C1177)

- √ *Count on Reading Handbook: Tips for Planning Reading Motivation Programs* (M0246)
- √ *Ready-to-Use Activities for Before and After School Programs* (W1544)

These Web sites also offer useful information on the following topics:

Literacy:

- √ <http://www.etr.org/NSRC/amreads.html>
- √ <http://www.nwrel.org/learns>
- √ <http://www.bankstreet.edu>

Out-of-School-Time:

- √ <http://www.etr.org/NSRC/index.html>
- √ <http://www.niost.org>
- √ <http://www.ncrel.org/after/>

For Tutors

Working with Children: Helpful Hints

The tutor's first task is to create a learning environment that allows the child to feel comfortable and safe enough to take risks. Remember that the child may need time to get to know and trust you.

Getting Acquainted

- Introduce yourself to the child and mention how excited you are to be working together. Tell the child a little bit about yourself.
- Write your name on a piece of paper that the child can keep and share with her family. Have the child write her name.
- Help your child feel comfortable working with you by establishing a routine. Establish a scheduled day and time to read together as well as a space to work. Discuss the kinds of activities you will be doing together. Consider writing a schedule or making a calendar of the days you will work together for the child to keep in a work folder.
- Spend a few minutes at the beginning of each session chatting about how the child is doing and anything special he would like to talk about; for example, the child might like to discuss a movie he has seen since you last met, a pet, or some other activity he has participated in.
- Start your first session in an inviting and non-threatening way by reading aloud to the child. Bring a few books that can be read in 15 minutes. Let the child look through the books, and choose the one that interests her most. This will begin a discussion about the child's interests.

Selecting Appropriate Books

Research underscores the importance of working with books that students can read with a fair level of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Allington, 2001). For children to experience success, the complexity of the text must match their reading level. The following tips and resources can help you select books that are most appropriate.

- See the LEARNS Literacy Assessment Profile (LLAP) at <http://www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/llap/index.html> for an explanation of

emergent, beginning, and early independent readers, and a list of books appropriate for each level.

- Honor the child's interests in either fiction or nonfiction.
- Try always to bring a selection of books for children to choose between. This actively involves them in their own learning and provides the tutor with an insight into the child's interests.
- Note the child's response to the book. This is an important indicator of whether or not a book is suitable. Sometimes a child's interest in the subject matter, personal experiences, and determination enable him to read a book that might be considered above level.
- Decide if a book is appropriate based on the child's understanding and the number of errors made when reading aloud. (Typically if a child makes more than five errors on a page, the book is too hard.) If the book appears to be too difficult, offer the child an easier book.
- Allow children the time to consolidate their learning, apply new skills, and read with increasing levels of independence. Once children reach a particular level, they need to read many books at that level before moving on.
- See *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*, by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, for another resource on selecting appropriate books.

Teaching Strategies

Strategic readers know how to apply a range of skills and strategies in order to understand what they are reading. As a tutor, your goal is to support children to become strategic readers. Reading is an active process that involves an interaction between the print cues of the text and the knowledge the reader brings to the text. From the outset, we want children to develop the same skills and strategies that fluent readers use, such as making predictions about what they read and confirming or rejecting those predictions based on the reading passage. When they come to something that is unfamiliar, strategic readers rely on several strategies. Help children make predictions using one or a combination of these three cueing systems:

- **Semantics or meaning cues** are based on children's prior and existing knowledge about the type of text (i.e., poem, fairy tale) and the content of the text. Readers draw on this knowledge to interpret and understand new information. Guiding

comments for tutors could be: “What would make sense?” “Look at the picture.”
“ What do you think it might be?”

- **Syntactic or structure cues** are based on children’s understanding of grammatical patterns, language structures, word order—the rules of English. Guiding comments for tutors could be: “What would sound right?” “Is that how we say that in English?” “What is another word that might fit here?” “Can you say it another way?”
- **Graphophonic cues** are based on children’s knowledge of sound/symbol relationships (the sounds that we hear in speech correspond to letters and clusters of letters), how letters are formed, and how punctuation impacts spoken language. Guiding comments for tutors could be: “What sound does that letter make?” “What letter does it start with or end with?” “Did that match?” “Look at the picture. Look at the sound that word starts with. What do you think the word might be?”

Reading fluency and comprehension

To become lifelong readers, children need to be drawn into the world of books. This happens when children are involved in what they are reading, care about the characters and plot, and become fascinated by the knowledge the world of books can open up for them.

Children who read word by word usually miss the essence of what they are reading (Allington, 2001). We can help children become fluent readers by: 1) giving them the opportunity to have repeated experiences with the same book and 2) by modeling phrasing and intonation.

To help children connect and respond to books, begin by eliciting their prior knowledge about the topic. Take a picture walk to activate your student’s prior knowledge about the subject of the story. A great way to start a one-on-one or a read-aloud session, a picture walk is a ‘read’ through a book that involves just looking at the pictures and discussing what is noticed. By looking at the pictures, a tutor can learn what the child already knows about the subject, and gain insights into the child’s thinking based on predictions. In addition, tutors can introduce new and relevant vocabulary from the story. Vocabulary development is addressed in both the picture walk and during the reading of the story. A picture walk discussion sets the context for the reading and increases the child’s confidence and chance for success.

The same principles can be applied for older students reading books with fewer pictures. Begin by activating prior knowledge about the subject, genre, or author of the book. The student can use this knowledge to make predictions about the events, characters, or content of the book. During this discussion, tutors can also introduce any new vocabulary.

We want children to go beyond recalling the events and details of the books they read to having thoughtful conversations about them. To achieve this, adults can model how skilled readers connect the books they read to their own life experiences, to other books they have read, and to universal concepts (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997). For more information on this topic, see the Spring 2001 issue of *The Tutor* at <http://www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/>.

Planning session activities

Children need multiple ways to integrate their learning and reinforce their literacy skills. Games, dramatization, painting, and writing build skills in phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension.

- Create games and activities to provide different and enjoyable contexts in which to integrate students' learning and reinforce their literacy skills. For example:
 - √ A concentration game can address such concepts as letter recognition, matching upper- and lower-case letters, word families and rhyming, vocabulary words from a story, initial consonant sounds, blends, digraphs, and short vowel sounds.
 - √ A comprehension game helps to reinforce the meaning of the story and provides an enjoyable context in which to extend the discussion of the book currently being read.
 - √ For more examples, check out the LEARNS games at <http://www.nwrel.org/learns/trainingopps/games/index.html>
- Invite the child to choose any character in the book and:
 - √ make a simple stick or paper bag puppet representing the character;
 - √ be an actor and role play any scene from the book; or
 - √ role play an interview in which the tutor/interviewer asks the character questions about herself, her motivations, and her feelings.

Reading Aloud

Listening to literature read aloud is one of the most valuable and pleasurable experiences beginning readers and writers can have. It is so important to a child's developing literacy, that you might consider including reading aloud in every individual or small group lesson. Reading aloud offers opportunities to model good reading and thinking strategies and to expose young learners to the rich variety of literature that exists—fiction, nonfiction, poetry, biography, humor, fantasy, etc. Immersing young learners in various types of literature helps them understand the critical features of written language and the varying structures of different genres. When this exposure is accompanied by supportive and relaxed discussions, children are able to extend their world view, and develop important critical thinking skills.

Reading aloud to a single child

- Have the child sit next to you so that the book faces both of you.
- Invite the child to turn the pages of the book.

Reading aloud to a small group

- Have the group sit around you. Sit just slightly above the children so that any children sitting in the back can see the pictures.
- While reading, hold the pages of the book open, facing the children, so that they can see the pictures easily. Children, especially young children, often become frustrated when they cannot see the pictures matching the text being read.

More tips for reading aloud

- If this is a first reading of the book, introduce the book by pointing out the cover illustration, title, and author. Perhaps give an explanation of why you chose this book to read.
- Use plenty of expression when reading. When necessary, change your voice to fit the dialogue of the characters.
- Read slowly enough to allow children to build mental pictures of what is being read.
- Plan enough read-aloud time for children to enjoy the story and discuss what is being read.

- Choose stories or texts that respond to children's interests and experiences. For very young children or emergent readers, choose books with vivid pictures, a strong story line, engaging characters, and evocative language.
- Preview the book so you can anticipate questions or reactions. If possible, practice reading it through so you can decide where to pause for emphasis or to elicit questions, predictions, or reactions.
- Read with expression that reflects the tone of the story or the characters, but not too fast. Vary your pace so you can pause for emphasis, or to allow time for the listener(s) to think about what's happening or what might come next.
- Allow time for children to study the pictures as you read, and to make comments and ask questions about the story.
- Save time at the end of the story to get reactions. Ask open-ended questions that don't have right or wrong answers, and that can't be answered with a yes or no reply. For instance, ask what the child liked (or disliked) about the book, and why? You may ask what the child thought about the characters or how the problem was solved. Find out if the book made the listener(s) think of any personal experiences or reminded them of other books heard or read.
- Share questions you have or parts of the story that aren't clear to you. This way, children can see the strategies fluent readers use when they don't understand something. Point out language patterns that make you feel or visualize something. Invite the child into this conversation.
- Encourage and model discussion about the story. Question children about what's going on, and encourage them to predict what will come next—but be sure not to turn a discussion into a quiz!
- Most important: Have a good time!

Writing

All children can write. By making writing a component of tutoring sessions, we give children the opportunity to tell their stories, to see themselves as authors, and to begin thinking about the qualities of good writing. In addition, allowing young children to write encourages them to listen for the sounds in words and to think about the sequence of sounds (phonemic awareness) and how sounds are represented by letters. Research tells us that allowing young children to use inventive or creative spelling not only increases their phonemic awareness, but supports their acquisition of conventional spelling once formal

instruction begins (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Children's writing gives tutors insight into what children already know as well as the kinds of additional instruction they need.

For a great writing activity, participate in a language experience story with your student. Have the child tell a story and write down exactly what he or she says. This way, children understand that what they say can be written down and then read back. This activity can be done with children of all ages to demonstrate aspects of composition, sentence construction, or punctuation.

Saying Goodbye at the End of the Summer

Summer's end is yet another time when children will have to say goodbye to tutors and friends. This is often a difficult time for children because it brings an end to a more relaxed time of year. Saying goodbye to new friends who may attend different programs and to tutors who work at different sites during the school year may be stressful and sad for many children. Be sensitive to this and to the behaviors children may exhibit at this time. For some children, it might be easier to withdraw or act out than show their sadness about the summer ending.

Children should know in advance when their summer program is going to end. This is a wonderful time to review and celebrate with students all they have learned and all you have done together over the course of the summer. Writing a story about the summer's activities is a way to add closure to your time together. Endings are hard for everyone. We want to send children off with a sense of their academic accomplishments as well as having established a positive learning relationship with you.

Resources for Tutors

Project directors, teachers, parents, and librarians are all great resources for tutors and programs. Not only can they share activity and book ideas, but they may also be a valuable resource regarding learning styles and development of the children you will be working with. The following Web sites also have useful information:

- The LEARNS Web site (<http://www.nwrel.org/learns>) offers downloadable games and word activities; guidelines for reading tutoring sessions; training activities; the LEARNS Literacy Assessment Profile (LLAP), including book lists for the three developmental levels; and *The Tutor* newsletter, both past and current issues. The most recent *Tutor* addresses *Reading Aloud to Build Comprehension*.

- The Bank Street College of Education site (<http://www.bankstreet.edu>) includes a range of resources, services, and research around literacy and other issues related to education, children, and families.
- The Trelease on Reading Web site (<http://www.trelease-on-reading.com>) offers a complete guide to the work of reading expert, Jim Trelease. The site has useful information for parents, teachers, librarians, and anyone interested in children's reading and education. Special emphasis is placed on the importance of reading aloud to children of all ages.
- **Fun sites for kids:**
 - √ <http://www.discoveryschool.com>
 - √ <http://www.insects.org>
 - √ <http://www.enature.com>
 - √ <http://www.zamboni.com>
- **Resources for reluctant teen readers:**
 - √ The Winter 2000 *Tutor* Newsletter: *Motivating reluctant adolescent readers* (<http://www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/>)
 - √ *Rip-roaring reads for reluctant teen readers* and *More rip-roaring reads for reluctant teen readers*, Libraries Unlimited (<http://www.lu.com>)
 - √ *Kids' favorite books* and *More kids' favorite books*, IRA (<http://www.reading.org>)
 - √ High-interest, easy reading: A book list for middle school and high school (<http://www.ncte.org>)

Works cited

- Allington, R.L. (2001). *What really matters most for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs*. New York: Longman.
- Keene, E.O., & Zimmerman, S. (1997). *Mosaic of thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader's workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.