

# Get Reading!



What are the benefits of children spending their time reading rather than watching television or playing computer games? Find out from our expert panel.

Many local schools are lacking in literacy-based education, yet there are many educators here who are hoping to change that and get children reading.

## Meet the Experts



**MELANIE HOLLOWAY**  
Publisher of My Little Paper, Daily7 and Daily10 newspapers.

My Little Paper (for ages 2-5), Daily7 (for ages 5-8) and Daily10 (for ages 8-11) are English language newspapers that offer new content each day (except for Sundays). To find out more visit [www.daily7-daily10.com](http://www.daily7-daily10.com)

### OLIVIA HUNGERFORD

Director of British Tutors, an English language tutorial center which employs top, native tutors to create bespoke lessons for students in their homes on either a short or long term basis.

Visit [www.britishtutors.com](http://www.britishtutors.com) for more information.



**SERINA CHEUNG** Director of The English Assessment Centre Hong Kong (TEACH). TEACH was established in 2006 by EFL teachers passionate about improving standards of English and language teaching in Hong Kong through a wide range of courses and assessments. Visit [www.hktech.com](http://www.hktech.com) to find out more.



**CARMEN WONG** Supervisor of Storyland (one of the 5 Hans Andersen Club centers in Wong Tai Sin).

HAC is a non-profit organization which promotes reading by offering storytelling programs in schools and public libraries for parents of children aged three-six. Storytelling sessions are very involved so children learn in an active way through communicating and asking questions. The organization also goes into schools and gives training to teachers, as well as training parents to become storytelling teams. Programs are either free or at a low cost.



## The importance of reading

Most educational experts agree that reading is an essential part of a child's development and can help to expand not only their vocabulary, but a whole range of other life skills that you may not expect. "As well as developing key language skills: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension and creativity, it is important for exposing children to different ideas, people, emotions, events and places, all of which they may not otherwise discover," says Olivia Hungerford of British Tutors. "Children learn key critical thinking and analytical skills which will help them in the higher stages of learning," she adds.

This crucial life skill equips us with a survival tool for use in schools and universities, and opens up the world to us in adult life. "Reading gives children access to accumulated knowledge of mankind and ideas of the past and present. As they are influenced by and imitate the world around them, when they read stories, the characters, events and images come alive in their mind, expanding their imagination and

unlocking their creativity, thus opening their minds to possibilities, allowing them to try out new experiences and test new ideas with no negative consequences to their lives. They develop an understanding and concern for all humanity; kindness to animals and respect for the environment," explains Serina Cheung of TEACH. She adds that reading can also be good for a child's physical development, as it stimulates the muscles of the eyes, heightens their senses, and turning a page aids in fine-tuning motor skills.

## Reading and being read to

Our experts agree that parents should begin reading with their children when they are just a few months old, especially as part of a regular routine—even though they can't understand the story, listening to your voice and sitting close can be instrumental in parent-child bonding as well as contributing to quality time spent together. Additionally, the more young children are read to, the greater their interest

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in mastering reading", says Cheung. "Reading out loud exposes children to proper grammar and phrasing. It enhances the development of their spoken language skills and their ability to express themselves verbally. Also by making connections between pictures, print and spoken words, children can increase their vocabulary and improve their pronunciation." Hungerford says it is very noticeable who has and has not been read to from an early age—"those who have



never been read to are generally less focused when listening as well as having reduced vocabulary and a lesser understanding of how to write creatively. They also tend to have a narrower knowledge, struggle with taking in information and often need to re-read passages a few times over."

Once children learn to read by themselves, shared reading can help their social skills and improve their interactions with others. "In modern homes, the TV has taken over from a good book. A diet of violent

cartoons can have a detrimental effect on children's development, whereas carefully chosen stories with a positive influence can encourage children to be cooperative and share with others," says Cheung. "It is also a great opportunity for children to learn how to sit quietly for a group activity, thus improving their concentration skills and the amount they will take in."

### Supporting your Child

Being able to read and understand what they are reading plays a huge part in children's confidence and self-esteem so it's important to make reading fun and not put too much pressure on children. Carmen Wong of HAC's Storyland suggests building a habit of looking at books about things your child is interested in. She stresses that it is important to set a good example by letting your child see you reading and also making sure you have accessible resources at home and take children to libraries to encourage good reading habits. "If kids enjoy reading and have fun with it, the rest will follow" she says. "Don't focus

on the technique, but try to develop a good attitude to reading."

"Children who struggle to read may find books intimidating," says Melanie Holloway of My Little Paper, The Daily7 and Daily10. "We try to keep the language and sentences as simple as possible, easy to read and clear. We have bright, colorful graphic illustrations with labels and small bites of information as well as a dictionary that explains difficult words and helps children to build their vocabulary. And to make reading even more fun, there are jokes and cartoons which all the children love." It's never too early to start encouraging literacy in children. My Little Paper, launched in February, is suitable for two to five-year-olds, allowing parents to sit with their children and complete the fun exercises. There are also stories, poems, songs and craft activities which they can do together.

"Research shows that the more a parent is involved in a child's early education, the greater chance that child has of achieving," says Holloway.



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## Reading with your child (compiled from all our experts)

Use the words and illustrations in books to revise colors, letters and numbers. Make games out of it by asking question: "how many birds are there in the picture?" "How many different colors can you see?" Ask them to draw their own pictures of what they think the characters look like or pretend that they are one of the characters and describe themselves.

Add drama by adopting different voices for dialogue and varying your pitch and intonation.

Read out loud. Model how words are pronounced and how sentences are spoken using correct stress, intonation and pitch. This exposes children to proper grammar and phrasing, and enhances the development of spoken language skills and the ability to express themselves verbally.

Practice letter sounds and point out the letter patterns in words. Isolate certain sounds (stress the beginning or end sounds, exaggerate the vowel

sounds). Play rhyming games and make up funny words by substituting vowel sounds in familiar words. Describe the visual images you see in your mind as you read the text and use pictures so your child can make connections between vocabulary and meaning.

Follow up on reading with fun outings. For example, if they like animals, go to the zoo or watch a movie at the cinema with talking animals to show the relevance of books and make it real for kids. Go on the internet and do further research.

Make reading into a game—spell out words using fingers, parts of your body, letter, stamps and stickers.

Point out words when you are out and about by reading signs, billboards, and bumper stickers.

Choose predictable books with repetitive patterns (The House that Jack Built), familiar concepts (fairy tales), texts with lots of illustrations, rhyme and rhythm (The Gruffalo, Room on the Broom) and cumulative

patterns with a predictable climax (The Gingerbread Man).

Discuss the stories you are reading together, ask your child to predict events and answer simple comprehension questions.

Do reading projects with your children. After reading all about the Egyptians do an extension activity such as making a papier mâché figure of a mummy or pyramid. Or get children to write a diary entry as one of the of their favorite story characters.

Encourage them to read newspapers and discuss interesting news articles over dinner. Get them to keep a scrap book with newspaper cuttings.

## Recommended Reading List from British Tutors

### PRESCHOOL

What the Ladybird Heard  
**Julia Donaldson**  
Doctor De Soto  
**William Steig**  
Where The Wild Things Are  
**Maurice Sendak**

### AGE 5-7

The Church Mice Adrift  
**Graham Oakley**  
Mercy Watson  
**Kate DiCamillo**  
My Naughty Little Sister  
**Dorothy Hughes**

### AGE 7-9

Charlotte's Web  
**E.B. White**  
Molly Moon's Incredible  
Book of Hypnotism

**Georgia Byng**  
Kensuke's Kingdon  
**Michael Morpurgo**

### AGE 9-12

Goodnight Mr. Tom  
**Michelle Magorian**  
Silverfin  
**Charlie Higson**  
Journey to the River Sea  
**Eva Ibbotson**

### AGE 12-16

Millions  
**Frank Cottrell Boyce**  
My Family and Other Animals  
**Gerald Durrell**  
Balzac and the Little Chinese  
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