Inquiring readers want to know

Strong readers ask themselves questions—and answer them—while they read. Bring out your child's inquisitive side and boost her comprehension with these questions that will encourage her to think deeply about books.

“What would I do?”

Your youngster can connect with the story by comparing herself to the characters. Say the main character decides to follow a unicorn into a forest. Your child might consider if she would have done the same thing and why or why not. This strategy will help her better understand characters' motives.

“What will happen next?”

It's fun to predict the next plot twist or turn. Suggest that your youngster pay attention to details that hint about what's to come. She could write her predictions on sticky notes and add check marks to the ones that come true. Note: If her predictions are way off base, she can look back to see if she missed a detail or was confused by a section—or if the author just threw in a surprise!

“What do I wonder?”

When your child finishes a book, have her list questions that it raised for her. She may wonder whether a fictional invention could work in real life or if the characters really loved each other. Then, she could use her answers to write a prequel or sequel.

Listen closely

Teacher instructions, class presentations, book discussions—a lot of information comes to your youngster through his ears. Share these tips for listening so he learns as much as possible.

● Make eye contact. Your child will catch more of what is said if he looks at the person talking. Watching the speaker makes it easier to pay attention to the words rather than to other things in the room.

● Listen with a goal. If your youngster is listening to a classmate's report on George Washington, for example, his goal could be to listen for three facts he doesn't already know.

● Avoid interrupting. Good listeners wait for the speaker to finish before sharing their thoughts.
Bright, shiny descriptions

Vivid writing paints a picture for the reader. Encourage your youngster to practice making up detailed descriptions with these fun ideas.

Imaginary creatures. Have your child invent a character and use similes (comparisons that include the word like or as) to describe him or her in a story.

Example: “A caterpillar is as red as a tomato. Its body is as furry as a caterpillar.” Your youngster could draw his creature to use as inspiration and write a story about its adventures.

A sensational expedition.

Uh-oh! Your child is suddenly two inches tall. Have him write about a journey from one side of the room to the other.

Suggest that he get down on the floor and crawl along, noticing things he would see if he were two inches tall. (“A pair of dirty socks formed a mountain blocking my path. I wrinkled my nose at the sweaty smell and decided to hike around them.”) Looking at the world from this vantage point can help him include details he might not ordinarily notice.

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Use interests to find nonfiction

This year, my fiction-loving daughter has to read a lot more nonfiction. In fact, about half of the books in her monthly reading log need to be nonfiction.

To get ideas for nonfiction she would like, Claire and I went to the library. The librarian had a simple suggestion: She told Claire to list her three favorite things and look for nonfiction books on those topics.

Claire named playing the flute, sea creatures, and ancient Egypt, and it wasn’t hard for her to find interesting books for each. She ended up checking out a biography of a famous composer, a how-to guide on setting up a home aquarium, and a book describing what archaeologists have found in Egyptian pyramids.

My daughter still loves to read fiction, but it’s nice to see her finding nonfiction that she enjoys, too!