

# Parent & Teacher

RESOURCE GUIDE



# Learn To Read Apps

Children gravitate toward devices, so why not put that curiosity to good use? There are many great apps to help children learn to read — and learn to love reading.

## TYPES OF APPS

There are many ways to use apps for learning to read — from phonics and memorizing sight words to exploring new books and tracking reading minutes.

One great way to help children learn to read is to be sure they are read to often — ideally for at least 20 minutes a day while they're learning to read. It's a great bonding experience between parent and child and a great part of any child's bedtime routine. These days, parents and teachers also can get some help from technology. Many libraries offer MP3-type devices that read books to children. It's a sort of modern audiobook.

An e-reader also is a great way to give children access to a variety of digital books.

## APPS FOR EARLY READERS

Bookster will read a story to children and allow them to record themselves reading and then play it back. It keeps children engaged with interactive features and adjusts to the child's reading level.



Super Why Phonics Fair employs characters from the popular PBS children's TV show to help kids get a grasp on the letters of the alphabet and, later, spelling, all while playing games.

Bob Books, the popular line of learn-to-read books that introduces sight words to children, offers apps that feature its simple artwork that slowly comes alive with color as children learn to read and spell.

Starfall.com's accompanying

app uses games, videos and songs to help children master vowel sounds and begin to read mini books.

LightSail works with a school's library to let children check out digital books and reports readers' progress with reading comprehension to their teachers.

## SETTING LIMITS

As with all things digital, it's important to keep tabs on children's use of reading technolo-

gy. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children ages 2 to 5 view 1 hour or less per day of "high-quality programs" on screens.

In a 2014 report, Common Sense Media warned that the research about digital reading and e-reading hasn't kept pace with the technology and researchers don't yet know the effects of taking children's reading experiences into the digital realm.

Common Sense Media sug-

gests that research should consider whether digital reading reduces parent-child interaction during reading, whether it encourages children to read and whether children are adequately engaged in the story.

These are important considerations to keep in mind when deciding how much of a role screens should play in a child's learn-to-read experiences. After all, there truly is no real substitute for cuddling up with a good book.

# Math Resources

The biggest news in math over the past several years has been Common Core standards.

While there's plenty for parents and teachers to learn about Common Core math, there are some elements of math education that simply never change.

Common Core standards have been voluntarily adopted by 42 states in order to assure that when students graduate from high school, they are ready for college-level material. The standards are intended to outline in great detail what students are able to do by grade level. For parents, it can mean that their children's math homework is quite different from what they might expect.

Learn more about Common Core standards at [www.core-standards.org](http://www.core-standards.org), a website published by the National Governors Association. There you can learn about your state's status with adopting the standards, find the text of all the standards and read FAQs and myths and facts about Common Core.

## COMMON CORE HELP

At [www.illustrativemathematics.org](http://www.illustrativemathematics.org), parents and teachers can find free resources for teaching Common Core math. Available resources include professional development tools, plain-English explanations of the standards, teaching

tools and Illustrative Mathematics, a free math curriculum for grades 6-8.

At [www.learnnc.org](http://www.learnnc.org), the University of North Carolina School of Education offers explainers of the Common Core math standards, as well as extra resources such as videos and links.

At [www.PTA.org](http://www.PTA.org), Parents'

Guides to Student Success include key knowledge children should learn, at-home activities, advice for working with teachers and college and career planning tips.

At [www.achievethecore.org](http://www.achievethecore.org), the nonprofit organization Student Achievement Partners offers a wealth of math and English language arts profes-

sional development and classroom resources for teachers of Common Core.

[Khanacademy.com](http://Khanacademy.com) offers a map of Common Core standards by grade level, with links to its free online core-aligned lessons.

## MATH FACTS

Despite the changes in math

education over the decades, flash cards remain as relevant a tool today as they were 50 years ago. Go the old school index card route, or take your flash cards digital. At websites such as [quizlet.com](http://quizlet.com) and [www.cram.com](http://www.cram.com), you can make your own digital flash cards or access other users' flash card sets. It's math facts for the modern era.



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# Use Your Local Library

There's much more than just books available for checkout at your local library. From engineering workshops to museum tickets, see what kind of fun — and learning — you can “check out” today.

Think about what you remember about your local library growing up. You could fill your tote with books on a range of topics, and during the summer, you could keep track of the books you read for the summer reading program. Today, libraries are hubs of technology, culture and learning.

According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 91 percent of Americans ages 16 and older say public libraries are important to their communities. Only 22 percent, however, said they are familiar with the services their libraries currently offer.

## DIGITAL OFFERINGS

Log on to a public computer to check email and surf the web. Search the library's digital catalog and access educational videos and other online resources.

If you use a tablet or e-reader for your reading, see if your local library offers “check-outs”



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of a wide range of digital content. You might even be able to borrow a digital device.

## CLASSES

From interacting with reptiles and building with Legos to getting ready for school or a new job, public libraries are centers of all types of learning. Learn a new language or sign up for a weekly storytime.

There are so many ways to learn at your public library.

## TICKETS AND EVENTS

Libraries often play host to meetings of public organizations, such as political or hobby groups. Check the online calendar of events to get involved.

Many people don't know that libraries offer discounted or even free tickets for all types of

attractions, such as museums, sporting events, cultural performances and educational exhibits. The tickets might be available on a limited or “check-out”-type basis, so ask an employee for details about how to take advantage of these opportunities.

## LOCAL FLAVOR

Your local library is in tune

with what your community wants. Areas focused on sustainability might feature a LEED-certified building or an outdoor “reading trail.” They also might feature exhibitions of local artists, encourage up-and-coming local authors or promote local agriculture with a farmers market. See how you can get involved in your community.

# Finding Homework Help

It happens to every student at some point. What seemed to make perfect sense during the lesson at school is suddenly more nuanced and challenging.

Even parents can get stumped trying to help students do their best work on their assignments.

Knowing where to turn for homework help can make all the difference.

## TEACHER RESOURCES

In the age of digital textbooks and online learning tools, many teachers offer their students a variety of resources for pushing through homework roadblocks. A teacher who includes these resources on her website sets students up for success.

Ideal resources include videos and games that accompany the classroom textbook. Many textbooks are available in digital format, making them available online even if the student left his book at home.

Some schools and districts subscribe to online services or 1-800 numbers that students can use as resources.

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Some states offer homework hotlines. Libraries also often provide after-school home-



work help sessions for students. After-school programs, such as the Boys and Girls Club, also usually see it as a main part of their mission to help students stay on top of their homework, as well as have fun.

## HELP ON THE WEB

The internet is, of course, chock full of learning opportunities for children, including homework help. Sites such as [www.khanacademy.com](http://www.khanacademy.com), [www.studygeek.com](http://www.studygeek.com) and [kids.nationalgeographic.com](http://kids.nationalgeographic.com) are great places to start.

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## HOMEWORK CHALLENGES

A child who repeatedly leaves her materials at school might be struggling with organizational skills. It might be worth making an extra effort to help her understand how important it is to take responsibility for her own learning.

Parents should ask themselves if their child is struggling with a particular subject or task on a regular basis. Touch base

with the teacher to see if there are any other available resources, such as extra help at school or even referrals for testing for learning disabilities, if needed.

## HOW MUCH HOMEWORK?

If your student seems to be struggling under a mountain of homework, and you've ruled out an issue with the student getting behind on classwork because of a behavior or other issues, it's possible his homework load is just too large. The National Education Association

and the National Parent-Teacher Association recommend that students be assigned no more than 10 minutes per grade level per night of homework. A 2015 study by the American Journal of Family Therapy, however, found that elementary school students are sometimes assigned three times that amount. If you are concerned about how much homework your child is assigned, speak to the teacher or principal about your concerns.

# Homeschooling Basics

Parents who homeschool are often enthusiastic about sharing their reasons for choosing homeschooling and their families' educational experiences.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2013 about 1.7 million children — or about 3.4 percent of the school-age population — were homeschooled, up from 850,000 in 1999.

According to MarketWatch, the adoption of Common Core standards by most states has made it easier for families to homeschool. The growth in numbers of homeschoolers also has spurred the creation of social and co-op groups, which help meet students' social and educational needs.

## LEGAL ISSUES

Every state has different requirements for homeschooling families, varying from simply submitting a letter to the school district to registering as a private school and having children take standardized tests on a regular basis. The Home-school Legal Defense Association offers families help with meeting their state's legal requirements as part of an annual membership.



## CURRICULA

It can be a daunting challenge for families to select and afford their homeschooling materials. This is one area where the growth in homeschoolers' numbers has contributed to a wide selection of educational materials becoming available in the marketplace.

In some school districts, homeschoolers qualify to receive free curriculum materials. K12.com, for example, offers free programs for students in the city of Chicago through an agreement with the city's government. Check to see if any free local resources are available to homeschoolers in your area.

## FIND A GROUP

Getting support is crucial for homeschooling families. The Home Education Council of America tells parents on its website, "You will question yourself many times. This is normal. Find a fellow homeschooling friend — even if it's only online. Support each other."

Local and state homeschooling organizations, along with social media, are great ways to find other local homeschooling families.

You'll likely also find co-ops that pool resources in your area, as well as groups that organize social, sports and cultural events for homeschoolers.

# Enrichment Activities

For students or entire classes that need more depth than the regular curriculum allows, enrichment activities are a way of engaging their minds to think deeper about what they've learned.

Because gifted education is regulated by states, the availability of services to gifted children varies widely across the United States.

In some states, gifted students receive services much the same as the individualized instruction guaranteed by federal law to students with disabilities. In other states, schools are not required to identify or provide special services to gifted students.

Fortunately, for the engaged parent or teacher, there are many resources available to help broaden the horizons of voracious learners.

## AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Many after-school programs encourage students to apply their knowledge and dig deeper into their areas of interest. Robotics clubs, math clubs and service organizations are just a few of the



many opportunities you might find in your community. If you can't find what you need, why not look into starting an after-school program yourself? Chances are there are others in need of the same kind of challenge.

## GIFTED AND TALENT SEARCH PROGRAMS

If your school doesn't offer a gifted program or you're working with a student who needs a further challenge still,

look into gifted programs run by colleges and universities.

For example, Northwestern University's Evanston, Ill.-based Center for Talent Development offers online and in-person courses for gifted students, as well as workshops for parents, summer programs and service learning opportunities.

The university's Midwest Academic Talent Search program offers above-grade-level testing for students, to help

their parents and teachers better understand their needs.

For older students, the Summer Institute for the Gifted offers summer enrichment camps to expose gifted children to Ivy-league college campuses, strengthen their skills and interests, and explore new areas, along with their gifted peers.

## ONLINE PROGRAMS

Online programs for high

achievers abound. Stanford Online High School offers an accredited diploma-granting school for gifted students in grades 7 through 12 using interactive courses. The school even offers clubs and encourages students to get to know each other.

The Art of Problem Solving is an online school for gifted math students that aims to challenge their ability to apply math skills to complex problems.

# Apps for Schools and Parents

What's for lunch today? When does Thanksgiving break start? Is there a math assignment tonight? These questions and more can be answered via smartphone when schools and parents communicate via apps.

There are many apps available, with varying degrees of customization and integration with other technology. All of the apps aim to increase parent engagement while helping teachers save time. Below is an overview of a few available apps.

## CLASS DOJO

This app is a sort of social media platform for schools and their families. Once a teacher adds a student to her class, parents use a special code to sign up for access. Teachers can post photos and videos from class and school activities, award and subtract points for behavior and send private messages to parents. Older students can access the app with their own account, where they can share their work in an online portfolio. Parents can comment on and like teachers' posts and check for homework assignments and school or class announcements.

## REMIND

Remind touts itself as the end of the days of sorting through a jumble of papers sent home from school announcing everything from picture day to fundraisers to parent-teacher conferences. In fact, its marketing tagline is "School communication shouldn't be so hard." The app focuses on messaging, with the ability to send text



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messages to any phone and translate messages into 70 languages. Messages can include attachments such as PDFs, voice files or photos, and messages can be scheduled ahead of time. Teachers can communicate the best times for parents to reach them and see who has read

each message. Parents who volunteer at their child's school can connect and coordinate with other parents, and students can work together via Remind.

## BLOOMZ

Bloomz advertises itself to teachers as "One app for all

your parent communication." Aside from giving teachers the ability to keep parents up to date on the class' activities, Bloomz also can help facilitate sign-ups for volunteers and donations, as well as providing behavior tracking and calendar syncing for busy parents.

## SECURITY

Most of the school-home communication apps available take children's privacy and security seriously. They require security codes for sign-up and don't allow anyone not associated with a student's classes to gain access to their information.