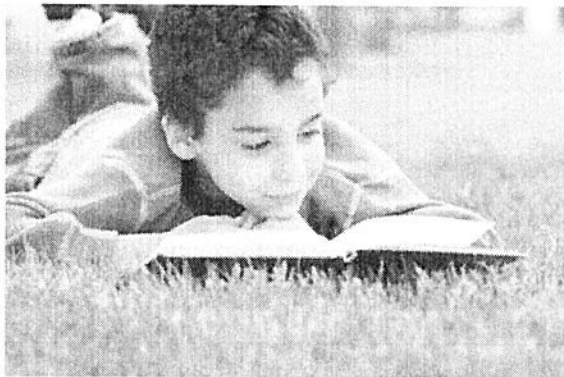




## Third grade: Helping your child with reading

One simple secret for helping your third grader with reading

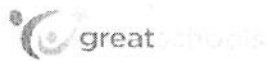


By GreatSchools Staff

Third grade is the year kids are expected to go from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” It sounds so easy, doesn't it? As if by spending enough days sitting at their desks, third graders will magically make the switch. For most kids, though, the change from learning how to read to reading to learn can be very difficult.

To help your child make this big change in reading, by all means, keep reading to him, and having him read aloud or by himself. But there's one more way to help your child read to learn that may come as a surprise: Talk with him! Have conversations full of all kinds of words (he's not a baby anymore, so don't hold back on using big words conversations that build vocabulary than by focusing on decoding strategies.

So to make sure your child doesn't fall behind when it comes to reading to learn: 1) Read challenging books aloud to him; 2) Use words he doesn't know; 3) Talk about big topics like what's going on in the world, history, or whatever he's interested in, whether that's sports or space rockets or animals.



## Your third grader and reading

In third grade, students shift their focus from learning to read to reading to learn.



By GreatSchools Staff

Is your child reading at grade level? Are there any gaps in his phonics or comprehension? Since learning to read is a long and complex process, some students hit college only to discover their skills aren't where they should be.

How do you know if your child's on track? Our grade-by-grade guidelines give you all the details you need to assess his aptitude.

### The leap to learning

In third grade, students are expected to make a huge change in their fluency and understanding. Suddenly, reading is seen as a tool for learning rather than the object of the learning itself. At this stage, children should be able to read a variety of books including contemporary fiction, historical fiction, legends, fables, myths, and biographies.

Third-graders are expected to read with fluency, comprehension, and expression. As they read a variety of books, they expand their vocabulary and interpret the ideas in the texts.

Third-graders are introduced to the ways language is used by learning about similes, metaphors, personification, and imagery. They should be able to select books at their reading level that interest them. Reading specialist Jennifer Thompson recommends using the "five-finger test" to choose appropriate books: "Have your child open the book to any page. If he can find five words that he does not know, the book is too difficult."

### Doing research

Third-graders improve on their beginning research skills by reading books on different subjects and answering questions about a topic. Third-graders should be able to use the index, glossary, title page, introduction, preface, and appendix of a book to find information. Using encyclopedias, informational books, and the Internet may be part of a research project.

"Reading informational text is critical for second- and third-graders," says Thompson. "Most of the federally mandated tests contain a great deal of nonfiction reading. Children need to learn to read nonfiction for understanding and need to be taught how to use all of the conventions of nonfiction to assist with understanding. These include the table of contents, index, glossary, captions, illustrations, bold print, diagrams, charts, and graphs."

### Decoding words

Third-graders are expected to be able to read unknown words automatically, though some children may not be capable of this. The strategies used to decode and read unknown words include using roots, suffixes, prefixes, homophones (for example, *aloud* and *allowed*), and word families (such as *ack* and *ight*). Third-graders should be able to use context to figure out the meaning of unknown words as well as look them up in a dictionary.

### Reading for meaning

Third-graders learn strategies to derive meaning from what is read — including illustrations, text, and prior knowledge to make predictions and grasp the story. They should be able to recognize the sequence of events in a story, as well as their cause and effect. They retell familiar stories, summarizing the main ideas and plot and identifying the characters and settings. They are expected to answer questions about the text, such as who, what, when, where, why, and how. Third-graders begin to distinguish fact from opinion and explore themes that recur across literary works.

### Shared reading

Third-graders may take part in shared reading, an interactive reading experience guided by the teacher. During the reading, the teacher demonstrates strategies students can use to read and derive meaning. The teacher may pause in the reading to teach vocabulary, introduce a reading skill, or encourage children to predict what comes next. The book is typically read multiple times over several days.

### Literature circles

Third-grade classrooms sometimes start literature circles, student-led book discussion groups. Students choose their own reading material and meet in small groups with others who are reading the same book. Each member of the group is assigned a role and helps guide the group in a discussion of the book. Literature circles allow students to share their thoughts, concerns, and their understanding of a novel.

"The literature circle experience helps the most timid or passive learner become an engaged and active learner," says Thompson. "Literature circles help build confidence as children assume responsibility for their reading."

### By the end of third grade, you can expect your child to:

- Read silently for at least 15 minutes
- Read fluently with expression and comprehension
- Read longer stories and chapter books
- Self-correct when reading
- Read multi-syllable words automatically
- Recognize irregularly spelled words, such as *said* and *where*
- Know common synonyms (words that have the same meaning) and antonyms (words that have opposite meanings)

- Use a range of strategies when drawing meaning from text
- Use word identification strategies (such as chunks, prefixes, suffixes and root words) appropriately and automatically when encountering unknown words
- Recognize elements of various text structures such as fiction, nonfiction, fantasy and folk-tales
- Develop richer vocabularies and use it in his writing
- Use knowledge of homophones
- Use dictionaries, thesauruses, glossaries, indices, encyclopedias and online reference materials
- Compare and contrast characters and settings
- Identify author's purpose for writing
- Draw conclusions, summarize major ideas and find the main idea

### What to look for in the classroom

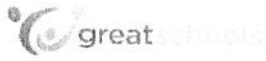
- **Leveled books**, which are books organized in levels of difficulty from the easy ones for a beginning reader to longer, more complex books for advanced readers. The leveling of texts allows teachers to match books with an individual student's reading ability.
- **A reading area** with a class library of books and a place for students to sit comfortably and read
- **A listening center** with a tape recorder, earphones, tapes of stories and multiple copies of the accompanying text provides a model for fluent reading.
- **A word wall**, which is a list of words displayed in alphabetical order on a bulletin board, used for reference and to reinforce vocabulary words
- **Reading centers**, where students can do different activities to reinforce reading skills and strategies such as filling out a story map, using reading software, and making books

### Recommended books

*Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to Our Children Will Change Their Lives Forever*, by Mem Fox (Harvest Books, 2001).

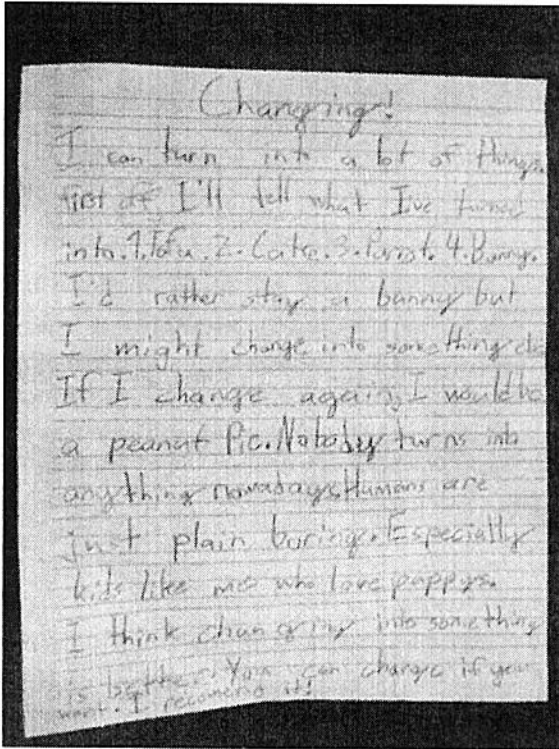
*The Read Aloud Handbook*, by Jim Trelease (Penguin, 5th edition, 2001).

*Read to Me 2000: Raising Kids Who Love to Read*, by Bernice E. Cullinan (Cartwheel, 2000).



## Your third grader and writing

Third graders move from invented to conventional spelling.



— Midorianna/Flickr

By GreatSchools Staff

Third-graders should be writing daily, whether they're writing stories, answers to word problems, personal narratives, journal entries, scientific observations, or responses to the books they read. Some students even try their hands at science fiction or detective stories.

Third-graders should learn how to use a variety of literary techniques, including dialogue, point of view, and figurative language (similes, metaphors). They should be taught how to write a paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting details, and a conclusion.

Children also learn to write more complex sentences by using transitional phrases — “in the meantime,” “afterward,” etc. — to create a sense of sequence and flow. And they should be able to edit their own writing for grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure.

Third-graders should be familiar with the following steps in the writing process:

- Prewriting
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Publishing
- Sharing

This process can help your child with the organization and thinking required to write well. Over time, kids should become more aware of their audience and more sure of their own goals in writing. They should understand the roles of different genres of writing, that a report's purpose is to inform readers about a topic, while a story's purpose might be to entertain or encourage deeper thinking.

Karen Heath, Vermont's 2005 Teacher of the Year, says that third-graders should start to feel comfortable writing on their own. "Over the course of the year, most students go from largely teacher-supported writing to far more independent writing," says Heath. "The biggest key to success," she adds, "is lots of practice. So give your child regular opportunities to write at home (whether composing thank-you letters, keeping a journal, or writing a poem)."

## What will my third-grader learn about spelling?

In third grade, spelling is reinforced through the use of literature; writing, oral and written exercises; and games. Third-graders build on their spelling knowledge by learning more-complex spelling rules and patterns.

### Weekly spelling lists

Often third-graders bring home weekly spelling lists they will be tested on. These lists may be from a prescribed spelling program or chosen by the teacher. They may include word families, or groups of words that have a common feature or pattern. For example, words with a long *e* that is spelled *ea*, *ee* or *ie*. The lists may also contain "challenge words," which are more difficult to spell, or thematic words that are used around the holidays or in specific subject areas. Third-graders typically do activities with the spelling words, such as writing a sentence using each word to understand its meaning and reading stories that include the terms.

"To reinforce what your child is learning at school," suggests Heath, "find out what spelling program is being used in the classroom. If there is no weekly list, ask the teacher for lists of word families to work on each week."

### Moving beyond invented spelling

By the end of third grade, kids should be using conventional spellings. Students might rely on invented spelling for complex and unfamiliar words, but students should be learning to look up correct spellings in a dictionary

By the end of third grade, your child will have learned to spell:

- Words with short and long vowel sounds, like *bread* and *dough*
- Words with *r* after a vowel like *turn*
- Words with consonant blends, including the *cl* blend in *clay* and *clam*
- Homonyms (words with the same sound or spelling but different meanings) like *aloud* and *allowed*
- Contractions including *wouldn't* and *doesn't*
- Compound words like *underground* and *butterfly*
- Word endings such as *-tion* in *fraction* and *condition*
- Words in which the consonant is doubled when the tense changes, such as *stop* becoming *stopped* and *stopping*
- Words in which the final *e* is dropped when adding an ending, like *use* becoming *usable*
- Words in which the *y* changes to *i* when adding an ending, as with *easy* becoming *easily*

## What will my third-grader learn about handwriting?

Third-graders learn cursive writing, receive regular instruction and practice on a daily basis. They practice writing strokes, letters and connecting letters before advancing to sentences. They often do these activities in handwriting workbooks.

### **What to look for when you visit**

- An individual alphabet chart (perhaps taped to the child's desk or in a folder) for easy reference
- Cursive-handwriting workbooks
- Spelling workbooks
- Spelling games such as crosswords, word searches and riddles
- Journals
- Examples of student writing displayed around the classroom
- Students writing individually, with a partner and in groups
- "Word walls" with vocabulary words
- Lots of print materials for easy reference
- Charts made by the teacher on topics the class has been learning

*Updated May 2010*