

Your fourth grader and reading

In fourth grade, children read across subject areas, thereby building more complex research and analytical skills.

By GreatSchools Staff

Is your child reading at grade level? Are there any gaps in her 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 her aptitude.

Reading for a reason

By the beginning of fourth grade, children should be reading chapter books and nonfiction independently, fluently, and with understanding. The goal in fourth grade is to keep kids reading a variety of texts and deepen their comprehension. Fourth-graders should read and understanding elements of myths, fairy tales, fables, tall tales, legends, biographies, plays, fantasies, mysteries, realistic fiction, autobiographies, magazines, newspapers, diaries, journal passages, and letters.

Through reading, students learn they are able to:

- gain information
- do research
- experience a pleasurable pastime

Decoding strategies

Fourth-graders become proficient at using strategies to decode unfamiliar words. These strategies include breaking words into syllables or parts (such as in the word *i-ma-gin-ar-y*), finding root words (such as learning the root *omni-* in *omnivore* and *omnipresent*) and recognizing sight words (words that are recognized immediately such as *probably*).

Building vocabulary

Throughout the year fourth-graders gradually increase their vocabulary through reading. They are expected to transfer this passive vocabulary into active usage in speech and writing. Fourth-graders understand that some words, such as *file*, have multiple meanings. They should be able to use context to figure out the meaning of unknown words as well as look them up in a dictionary or glossary.

Research through reading

Fourth-graders do research by gathering information from a variety of sources, including the Internet, encyclopedias, textbooks, maps, and other resource materials.

They should be able to use different features of a book (such as the index, glossary, title page,

introduction, preface, and appendix) to find facts. Strong fourth-grade curriculum should teach students how to take notes and highlight important passages. Fourth-graders are expected to produce research projects on a variety of subjects, such as life in a Native American village, the systems of the human body, or the solar system.

Reading for meaning

Fourth-graders should be able to retell familiar stories, summarizing the main ideas and plot, and identifying the characters and settings. To prepare for state tests in reading, students practice reading passages and answering open-ended short answer questions as well as multiple-choice and true-false questions. To see if your state releases its test questions, search your state Department of Education online.

"By fourth grade, your child should be moving beyond basic comprehension," explains Karen Heath, Vermont's 2005 Teacher of the Year. "In order to access deeper meaning, she should be engaging in intellectual and emotional interaction with the text. By learning to analyze character motivation or character change, and identifying elements that lead to these things, books become ways for children to make sense of the world."

Literature circles

Fourth-graders may take part in 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 understanding of a novel.

"When peers engage in interactive discussion and exploration centered on a work of fiction, they experience a greater in-depth understanding of literature," says Heath. "Instead of a teacher explaining or pointing out deeper meaning, in literature circles children discover these themselves, thereby learning much more from it."

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

- Read grade-level material with accuracy and fluency
- Use root words, prefixes, and suffixes to decode words, such as in the word unforgettable the root word forget; the prefix un; and the suffix able.
- Identify the point of view in a story (first person, second person or third person.)
- Self-correct when reading
- Read quotes with expression
- Know common synonyms (words with the same meaning), such as modern and current
- Know common antonyms (words with opposite meanings), such as horrible and pleasant
- Use a range of strategies (such as prediction, connections, and inference) when drawing meaning from text
- Recognize elements of various text structures: fiction, nonfiction, fantasy and folktales
- Understand cause-and-effect relationships
- Use graphic organizers to aid in comprehension

What to look for in the classroom

- **A reading center** with a collection of books and a place for students to sit comfortably and read
- **Posters or other visual aids** that refer to the reading process: reading strategies, parts of speech, similes/metaphors and proofreading symbols.

- **Evidence** (such as charts and posters) **that reading and writing are integrated** into various content areas.
- **Displays of student reading activities** (book projects)