

## How to get your kid to be a fanatic reader - CNN.com

By James Patterson, Special to CNN  
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THINKSTOCK

James Patterson says boys can be a little squirrely when it comes to reading, but they need to be praised and encouraged.

Editor's note: James Patterson's most recent book, "Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life" is a No. 1 New York Times and No. 1 Indiebound

best-seller. He is also the author of the award-winning "Maximum Ride," "Daniel X," and "Witch & Wizard" young adult series, and is the 2010 Children's Choice Book Awards author of the year. In 2008, Patterson created [www.ReadKiddoRead.com](http://www.ReadKiddoRead.com), a site dedicated to helping parents find books that will get their kids reading.

(CNN) -- You're reading CNN.com, so maybe this isn't a stress-inducing worry in your house, but for too many kids in this country, reading is a dirty word. Fortunately, we know exactly whom we have to talk to in order to start a much-needed intervention.

Sorry, moms and dads, but it's your job -- not the schools' -- to find books to get your kids reading and to make sure they read them.

Here's some good news: This can often be as easy as teaching children to ride a two-wheeler or to throw a baseball. Case in point: When our son, Jack, was 8, he wasn't a gung-ho reader. Now, I'm sure my wife, Sue, and I have made a half-million mistakes raising Jack, but during that eighth summer of our stewardship, we did something right: We told him he didn't have to mow the lawn (hooray!), but he was going to read every day (boo).



DEBORAH FEINGOLD

We then told Jack we were going to help him find books we promised he would like: the Mom-and-Dad "Reading Can Be a Joy" Guarantee. We picked out "The Lightning Thief," a book in the "Warriors" series, "A Wrinkle in Time," "Al Capone Does My Shirts," a novel from my own "Maximum Ride" series, and a few others. By the end of the summer, Jack had read half a dozen books that he loved, and his reading skills had improved dramatically.

Here's a simple but powerful truth that many parents and schools don't act on: The more kids read, the better readers they become.

The best way to get kids reading more is to give them books that they'll gobble up -- and that will make them ask for another. Yes, it's that simple.  $1 + 1 = 2$ . Kids say the No. 1 reason they don't read more is that they can't find books

they like. Freedom of choice is a key to getting them motivated and excited. Vampire sagas, comics, manga, books of sports statistics -- terrific! -- as long as kids are reading. Should they read on e-tablets? Sure, why not? How about rereading a book? Definitely. And don't tell them a book is too hard or too easy. "Great Expectations"? Absolutely. "Finnegans Wake"? Well, maybe not. And remember, books can be borrowed free at libraries.

Some schools and school systems are on top of the reading problem. Is yours?

Many schools around the country are successful at getting kids reading. That raises the obvious question: How come so many schools aren't?

There are terrific models for success with reluctant readers, but many school systems and state governments need to set aside their "not invented here" and "we have more important problems than education" attitudes.

The Drop Everything and Read program is a brilliant learning tool used by more than a thousand schools. Drop Everything and Read schools devote one period a day to kids -- and their teachers -- doing nothing but reading, and mostly reading what they want to. The results can be dramatic.

The Knowledge Is Power Program schools in Washington require students to read at least 20 books a year and to carry a book with them at all times. Hooray! The Sun Prairie public schools in Wisconsin stopped buying textbooks and used the money to buy children's trade books. Reading scores improved, because the kids wanted to read. P.S. 8 in the Bronx, New York, has a rotating library of student-published and student-illustrated books. Kids love books written by their peers. One Texas school librarian has a club for fourth- and fifth-grade boys called the BUBBAs. The kids read books such as "It's Disgusting-- and We Ate It!," "Holes," the "Time Warp Trio" series, and the "Joey Pigza" books. Silly, funny, and it works.

Speaking of boys, here's how to get reluctant readers -- er, boys -- reading and loving it.

First, try to understand that boys can be a little squirrely when it comes to reading, and what's squirrely about them needs to be praised and encouraged.

Boys should be made to feel all squishy inside about reading graphic novels, comics, pop-ups, joke books, and general-information tomes -- especially the last. GuysRead.com has categories such as "Robots," "How to Build Stuff," "Outer Space, but with Aliens," and "At Least One Explosion." It's a wonderful site for finding books that will turn boys on to reading.

Teachers and school administrators might want to consider this: in many schools, there's a tendency not to reward boys for reading books like "Guinness World Records" or "Sports Illustrated Almanac" or "The Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock and Roll." Too often, boy-appealing books are disproportionately overlooked on recommended reading lists.

Big mistake. Tragic mistake. Avoidable mistake. It's all about attitude. If your kids' school library isn't a boy magnet, the school probably needs to check its attitude.

Where to find books your kids will gobble up.

ReadKiddoRead.com, GuysRead.com, and Oprah.com's Kids Reading List are excellent resources, and they're simpler to use than an iPhone. The American Library Association and the Young Adult Library Services Association have recommendations for terrific books, easily found by searching "ALA reading lists." DropEverythingandRead.com has a "Favorite D.E.A.R. Books" tab on its home page.

Most libraries and bookstores are extremely generous with their time and help. Kids and parents should visit Scholastic and other book fairs. Free or low-cost books for schools are available (while supplies last) at ReadKiddoRead.com, FirstBook.org, and ReadertoReader.org.

Reading role models, please apply here.

Let's face it: Most of us don't realize it, but we are failing our kids as reading role models. The best role models are in the home: brothers, fathers, grandfathers; mothers, sisters, grandmothers. Moms and dads, it's important that your kids see you reading. Not just books -- reading the newspaper is good too.

The president and the first lady can be powerful role models if they are willing to pitch in and press the issue from their bully pulpit. In England, the entire country celebrates World Book Day. Every young lass and bloke gets a pound to buy a book of their choice, and most bookstores lower prices for the day. Cheers for former Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was an active role model for getting kids reading.

By showing more respect for books, kid-influential organizations such as ESPN, the NBA, and the NFL could help thousands of kids become better readers. I cringe when I hear college-educated sports announcers scoff at books during broadcasts because they're afraid to man up to being readers themselves.

Hollywood studios and stars could inspire kids to read, but often don't. Apparently, some film directors think it's their civic duty to teach kids how to smoke. Magazines and newspapers could call attention to the reluctant reader and literacy problems on a daily or weekly basis. Fast-food chains could put stories in their kids' meal boxes -- most publishers will work with them. Video-game makers could incorporate written stories in their games; maybe it ought to be the price of admission for selling to kids. Many publishers could do a much better job of supplying free or low-cost books to schools in need.

Now, this entire article probably took you only a few minutes to read. Please don't let your effort end here. While you're thinking about it, send your thoughts, or even this piece, to your school principal or librarian. Heck, send it to the White House. If you have the means, offer to buy your local school a few good books. But most important, take your kids or grandkids or students to a library or a bookstore or go online to search for some books right now. If you have better ideas than the ones suggested here, terrific -- please share them with your school, or in the comments section below, or at [ReadKiddoRead.com](http://ReadKiddoRead.com).

Your taking action will speak louder than words to kids about the power and glory of reading: First you read, then you get up off your seat and do something to fix the problem.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of James Patterson.