

Mission Critical: Reading Together to Build Critical Thinking Skills

As parents, we hope to develop many positive skills and traits in our children. Critical thinking, the ability to think deeply about a topic or a book, is an essential skill for children to develop. Critical thinking doesn't develop overnight. It's something that develops and builds through conversations and experiences. It's also something parents can nurture by sharing quality books with their children.

Even though your elementary-aged child may now be able to read on their own, reading together remains just as important as it was when your child was younger. Family read-alouds provide great opportunities to tackle more challenging books together. These longer chapter books may have plots that are more complex and more demanding vocabulary. Working through these books chapter by chapter helps teach persistence. And by reading together, you are there as an important source of support and information.

Reading critically involves slowing down, and taking the time to help your child reflect on what you've just read. Depending on the book, discussions may involve talking about what a character's actions tell us about his personality, or how the book's setting is important to the overall message. It might mean helping your child recognize something about the plot and the conflict that exists. It also means asking more open-ended questions to which there can be multiple correct answers.

Quality books enable you and your child to talk about the book in depth and with substance. All of this will help your reader develop critical thinking skills that will last a lifetime. Below are a few recommended titles, by grade level, that you and your growing reader may enjoy reading together and talking about.

Books for second and third grades

- *Mr. Popper's Penguins*, by Florence and Richard Atwater
- *Babe: The Gallant Pig*, by Dick King-Smith
- *Half Magic*, by Edward Eager
- *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster

Recommended titles are from *Deconstructing Penguins: Parents, Kids and the Bond of Reading*, by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone (HarperCollins, 2005)

**For more information, read *How to Increase Higher Order Thinking*:
www.ReadingRockets.org/article/34655**

