Learn More
By watching our video series, Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers.

Available in VHS and DVD-ROM formats.

Order today at 800-228-4630. Or online at www.gpn.unl.edu.

Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers was produced by WETA, the public TV station in Washington, D.C., and Rubin Tarrant Productions.

Print Guides
You’ll receive a Viewers’ Guide with each videotape or DVD purchase. If you order the entire series, you also get your choice of a Teachers’ Guide or Family Guide. You can also download all three guides at www.ReadingRockets.org.
About the Series

Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers is a public TV series designed for teachers, parents, caregivers, and anyone else interested in helping children learn to read. Based on the latest research findings, the series features the country’s top reading experts and consists of five 30-minute programs that explore the stages of reading that every child goes through.

The programs are organized sequentially, beginning with a baby's remarkable power to recognize the distinctive sounds of her native language and continuing through decoding, writing and spelling, fluency, and reading comprehension.

Each program presents six or seven closely linked stories, illustrating the stages of how children learn to read and how adults can help them. Each program also features a short segment with a prominent children's book author.

About Reading Rockets

This Viewers' Guide is a companion to the PBS series Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers. The series is part of Reading Rockets, a multimedia project that looks at how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how we can help. Reading Rockets also includes a comprehensive Web site, a one-hour documentary, extensive outreach, and a series of teleconferences for educators.

For more information, please contact us:

By phone: 703-998-2001
By e-mail: info@ReadingRockets.org
On the Web: www.ReadingRockets.org
By mail: 2775 S. Quincy St., Arlington, VA 22206

Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers was produced by WETA, the public TV station in Washington, D.C., and Rubin Tarrant Productions.

Program 1
The Roots of Reading

Hosted by public television’s Fred Rogers, this program looks at the earliest stages of literacy, offers practical advice for parents of young children, and gives concrete suggestions for child care providers and kindergarten teachers.

Segment 1: Becoming Aware of Print
In San Jose, California, 32-month-old Mira gets a head start on reading from her parents. (Length – 3:30)

Segment 2: Tuning In to Speech Sounds
At a baby speech lab at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, psychologist Janet Werker studies how babies develop skills that distinguish speech sounds of their native language. (Length – 2:50)

Segment 3: Encouraging Young Storytellers
Two- and three-year-olds benefit from a project based in Washington, D.C., called STORIES, which is built on the premise that when adults respond to a toddler’s efforts to communicate, they increase conversational skills, boost vocabulary, and propel toddlers toward literacy. (Length – 2:22)

Segment 4: A Writer’s Secrets
Children’s book author and illustrator Rosemary Wells (Timothy Goes to School) talks about how successful children’s literature appeals to the heart of the child — and to the sense of humor in adults. (Length – 2:12)

Segment 5: Reading as Dialogue
In a Long Island Head Start classroom, children who are at risk for reading failure boost their reading skills using a technique called “dialogic reading.” (Length – 3:05)

Segment 6: The Building Blocks of Reading
In Baltimore, a pre-kindergarten program called Children’s Literacy Initiative helps at-risk children meet the school’s high expectations. (Length – 3:43)

Segment 7: Reading Together
A program called Georgetown Even Start is helping families at risk in Washington, D.C., to break the cycle of low literacy and educational failure. (Length – 3:25)
Here are some things you can do to foster language and literacy skills in preschoolers:

- Set aside time for reading to children every day. **Read expressively and with humor,** using different voices.

- Indulge children’s desire to hear favorite stories over and over again. **These repeated readings** actually promote language and literacy development.

- **Draw attention to letters** and print, especially letters that are familiar or that have special meaning, such as the letters in your child’s own name.

- **Read rhyming books,** say silly tongue twisters, and play other enjoyable games that help children become sensitive to sounds in spoken words.

---

**Program 2
Sounds and Symbols**

**Hosted by actress Annette Bening,** this program spotlights teachers using innovative strategies to help kids crack the code of reading.

**Segment 1: Fun with Phonemes**
One family in Raleigh, North Carolina, shows how playing word and rhyming games puts their child on the road to reading success. *(Length – 1:38)*

**Segment 2: Letters and Sounds**
A Hmong-American kindergarten teacher in Sacramento mixes serious instruction with lively play for his second-language learners. *(Length – 4:37)*

**Segment 3: Helping Struggling Readers**
The Lab School in Washington, D.C., shows how one-on-one tutoring helps struggling readers achieve phonemic awareness. *(Length – 4:12)*
**Segment 4: Assessments by Specialists**
At a Lindamood-Bell Center in Denver, a seven-year-old receives one-on-one assessment and guidance.  
(Length – 2:46)

**Segment 5: Deaf Children Master Reading**
Learning letters and the sounds of “cued speech” help deaf children improve their reading skills.  
(Length – 3:15)

**Segment 6: A Writer’s Secrets**
Norman Bridwell talks about *Clifford the Big Red Dog* and the one consistent message that shows up in his books: When things go wrong, don’t give up. … Try again.  
(Length – 2:42)

**Segment 7: The Alphabetic Principle**
In Houston, the teacher of an advanced kindergarten class connects letters and sounds in a systematic and explicit way.  
(Length – 3:04)

Here are some things you can do to help children decode the printed word:

- **Play word games** that blend and segment individual sounds in words: “Can you guess what this word is? /m/ /a/ /s/ /k/.” (Say each sound separately.)
- **Help with your child’s reading homework**, such as learning letter sounds and memorizing sight words.
- **Have your child read aloud** to you. Alternating reading (where you take turns reading a word, paragraph, or page) is also helpful and fun.
- **If your child experiences difficulty reading a word**, encourage him or her to look carefully at the letters in the word (rather than, for example, guessing based on a picture).
- **Encourage struggling decoders to practice**. Ask children to re-read sentences that they are having trouble decoding, and encourage their efforts: “I know it’s tough right now, but this is how you learn new words; and you’re getting better and better. If you keep practicing, eventually reading will seem much easier.”
- **Select appropriate books** for reading that are at the child’s level. Visit www.ReadingRockets.org for a list of 100 books organized by age group.
Program 3: Fluent Reading

This program highlights successful strategies for helping children become fluent readers and shows how early testing and intervention can help struggling readers. Fluent Reading is hosted by television anchor Deborah Norville and Theo Lion from PBS’s Between the Lions.

Segment 1: Developing Fluency
An after-school program called RAVE-O helps to teach reading fluency in Malden, Massachusetts. (Length – 3:33)

Segment 2: Word Families
At Sudduth Elementary School in Starkville, Mississippi, Tina Scholtes teaches first graders a handy spelling pattern that helps them recognize word clusters. (Length – 2:43)

Segment 3: Eye Movements in Skilled Readers
A research lab at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, investigates what good readers do with their eyes. (Length – 2:26)

Segment 4: Community Volunteers
The Charlottesville, Virginia, school district has started an innovative community volunteer program called Book Buddies. Six-year-old Trey now has a book buddy who will work with him twice a week during his first-grade year. (Length – 3:33)

Segment 5: A Writer’s Secrets
Writer William Joyce (George Shrinks) talks about the people and places that have inspired his work. (Length – 2:42)

Segment 6: Assessing Reading Skills
At the Stern Center in Williston, Vermont, struggling students get a leg up on reading and other skills. (Length – 3:04)

Segment 7: The Sounds of Speech
At Fort Pitt Elementary School in Pittsburgh, a second grader named Azeeza gets reading help from a dedicated mentor—a software program called The Reading Tutor. (Length – 3:20)
**Segment 4: A Blind Writer’s Story**

Kyra is the only blind child attending a public school in Santa Monica, California. With a little extra work, teachers help her meet her full potential.  

(Length – 3:41)

**Segment 5: Parents Promote Writing**

Reading experts explain why parents should create opportunities for their children to write.  

(Length – 2:46)

**Segment 6: Writing Poetry**

In Houston, Lynn Reichle and her second-grade students go on a writing adventure called the Writers’ Workshop.  

(Length – 4:46)

Here are some things you can do to help children become good spellers and writers:

- Supply preschool youngsters with **drawing and writing materials**. Encourage their attempts to write, and express interest in their writing.

- Find everyday **opportunities for children to write**, such as helping with shopping lists, writing thank-you notes, and sending out invitations.

- When your child is practicing spelling, emphasize **looking at the sequence of letters in a word** rather than just spelling it orally. Have the child write the word as he or she spells it aloud.

- Encourage an **interest in word spellings and word meanings**. Talk about words, point out written words in the environment, and respond with interest to children’s questions about words.

- Want more ideas to help your budding writer? National reading experts suggest activities for reading and writing fun in ReadWriteNow! Find it at www.ReadingRockets.org.
Program 5: Reading for Meaning

Hosted by author and former teacher Frank McCourt (Angela’s Ashes), Reading for Meaning highlights effective strategies used across the country to help kids understand — and care about — what they read.

Segment 1: Finding the Right Book
The library is a vital resource for one mom whose son’s appetite for information — especially about dinosaurs — is growing as quickly as his shoe size. (Length – 3:14)

Segment 2: Engaging Nonfiction Readers
In Salt Lake City, teacher Margaret Barnes uses a framework called CORI (Concept Oriented Reading Instruction) to teach reading comprehension skills to second and third graders. (Length – 4:48)

Segment 3: Students Take Charge
A Seattle school uses a technique called Reciprocal Teaching that’s designed to improve reading comprehension. (Length – 2:14)

Segment 4: Understanding Themes
At Community School 200 in Harlem, Robert Vetesse uses the Theme Scheme method to help his third graders discuss complicated narratives. (Length – 4:00)

Segment 5: A Writer’s Secrets
Children’s book author Walter Dean Myers (Harlem) talks about a discovery he made in childhood: that books are a path to a world beyond our own neighborhoods. (Length – 3:23)

Segment 6: Families Find Meaning
In Washington, D.C., inmates volunteer to get training in how to run a book club for their kids. (Length – 4:14)
Good reading comprehension depends on abilities in two broad areas: (1) accuracy and ease of reading individual words and (2) oral language comprehension. Here are some things you can do to help develop children’s reading comprehension:

- **Encourage variety** in your children’s reading choices to expose them to a wide range of books (fiction, poetry, fables, biographies, science, etc.).
- **Activities that foster comprehension do not always have to involve reading.** Discussing movies and television programs, taking children to new places, even talking about everyday experiences—all contribute to growth in comprehension.
- **Tell stories.** Oral storytelling indulges a child’s passion to hear stories about his family’s experiences. Talk about what life was like when Grandma was growing up, the time you got in trouble at school, etc.
- **Continue to read to children** even after they can read independently. Besides the gains in reading development, parents and children both benefit from this continued bonding experience.

If reading isn’t **enjoyable**, children won’t choose to read, and they won’t get the practice they need to become fluent readers. Reading is an active process of constructing meaning—and the key word here is active.

To develop and maintain the motivation to read, children need to:

- **Appreciate the pleasures of reading.**
- **View reading as a social activity,** to be shared with others.
- **See reading as an opportunity to explore** their interests.
- **Read widely for a variety of purposes,** from enjoyment to gathering information.
- **Become comfortable with a variety of different written forms and genres,** including both fiction and non-fiction books.
Writing and Spelling, hosted by actress Vivica A. Fox, features activities that promote writing practice, vocabulary growth, and spelling proficiency in children.

**Segment 1: Spelling Patterns**
The Johnson School in Charlottesville, Virginia, has its own homegrown reading program called RISE (Reading Initiative for Student Excellence). *(Length – 3:41)*

**Segment 2: Invented Spelling**
In a Connecticut suburb, first-grade teacher Carol Spinello turns a spelling lesson into something of a game. *(Length – 4:00)*

**Segment 3: A Writer’s Secrets**
Kate Duke, best known for *Aunt Isabel Tells a Good One* and *One Guinea Pig Is Not Enough*, frequently visits classrooms to teach kids about plot, character, and setting — without writing down a word! *(Length – 3:05)*

Children who can’t read fluently often get discouraged and lose interest in reading. Here’s how you can help:

- Encourage **independent reading** by taking children to the library, reading with them, and buying books as gifts.

- Encourage **re-reading of favorite books**.

- Subscribe to **children’s magazines** that relate to their interests.

- Limit **television viewing, video games, and computer games**. It’s hard for reading to compete with these activities, especially when children are still struggling to develop reading fluency.

- Bring along books or magazines for children to read during “waiting” times such as doctor or dentist appointments.

- Encourage **re-reading of favorite books**.

- **Subscribe to children’s magazines** that relate to their interests.

- **Limit television viewing, video games, and computer games**. It’s hard for reading to compete with these activities, especially when children are still struggling to develop reading fluency.

- **Bring along books or magazines for children to read during “waiting” times** such as doctor or dentist appointments.
5. Kids who struggle usually have problems sounding out words. Difficulties in decoding and word recognition are at the core of most reading difficulties. When word recognition isn’t automatic, reading isn’t fluent, and comprehension suffers.

6. What happens before school matters a lot. What preschoolers know before they enter school is strongly related to how easily they learn to read in elementary school.

7. Learning to read is closely tied to learning to talk and listen. Families and caregivers need to talk and listen to young children in order to help them learn a lot of the skills they will need for reading. Children with language, hearing, or speech problems need to be identified early to avoid developing future reading difficulties.

8. Without help, slow starters don’t improve. Eighty-eight percent of children who have difficulty reading at the end of first grade display similar difficulties at the end of fourth grade (Juel, 1988). Three quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school (Shaywitz et al., 1997).

9. With help, slow starters can succeed. As many as two-thirds of reading-disabled children can become average or above-average readers if they are identified early and taught appropriately (Vellutino et al., 1996; Fletcher & Lyon, 1998).

10. Teaching kids to read is a collaborative effort. Parents, teachers, caregivers, and members of the community play an important role in helping children learn to read.

Resources and References

Books to help you learn more


Web sites packed with useful information

Reading Rockets

>> www.ReadingRockets.org — A continuously updated Web site with tips for parents and guidance for educators on teaching kids to read and helping those who struggle.

>> www.pbs.org/launchingreaders — Includes additional interviews with experts and other extras from the making of this television series.

LD Online

>> www.ldonline.org — The leading Web site on learning disabilities for parents, teachers, and other professionals.

Television Series

For WETA/Reading Rockets

Noel Gunther, Executive-in-Charge
Mary Esselman, Co-Executive Producer
Maura Daly Phinney, Co-Executive Producer
Layton Lawlor, Researcher-Writer/Series Development
Special thanks to Diane Henry Leipzig, Ph.D.

For Rubin Tarrant Productions

John Rubin, Producer and Writer
Anne Tarrant, Producer
James Donald, Co-Producer
James Ohm, Editor
Dickran Manoogian, Editor
Richard Lewis, Field Producer
Linda Duvoisin, Field Producer

Reading Rockets Project Staff

Noel Gunther, Executive Director
Keisha Dyson, Associate Producer
Christian Lindstrom, Producer
Pam McKeta, Web Site Director
David Meissner, Content Associate
Susan Petroff, Partner Relations Director
Erika Robinson, Production Coordinator
Latrice Seals, Research Director
Jessica Snyder, Web Associate

Reading Rockets Advisory Panel

Dr. Lynn Fuchs, Vanderbilt University
Dr. Edward J. Kame‘enui, University of Oregon
Dr. Louisa Moats, Former Director, NICHD Early Interventions Project
Dr. Annemarie Sullivan Palincsar, University of Michigan
Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling, Southern Connecticut State University
Dr. Lee Swanson, University of California, Riverside
Dr. Joanna Williams, Columbia University, Teachers College

This guide was edited by
Lina Heil and designed by Particle.