

Why to Read Above Grade Level

1. One of the purposes of reading aloud is to create better readers. This means both preparing pre-schoolers to be able to read; and for children already reading, improving their facility w/ words so they can read better.
2. To do this, children must be exposed to verbal material which grows and stretches their mind, material which exposes them to the rich panoply of vocabulary and description, familiarizes them w/ complex sentence and paragraph structure, gives them the time and expeirience to contemplate chartacters and plot structure.
3. If all of this is going to happen - if we are to insure that children are exposed to all the verbal pyrotechnics that books contain: grammar and syntax, the whole kit and caboodle - then we must make sure they are read challenging material, material which contains new stuff, stuff they didn't know they'd like, but which expands their repertoire.
- (All - I can't say this enough times - w/out their knowing it.)
4. For younger children, this means stepping up the quality of picture book you read your child. At some point, you move beyond the over-simple sentences of Clifford and Bob the Builder (books which are probably tiresome for parents to read repetetively anyway), and introduce the more complex sentences (and illustrations) of William Steig and Chris Van Allsburg.
- Pay attention to the ratio of sentences to pages or pictures. At some point, you want to move from a ratio of one sentence per picture (or page), to a ratio of one full paragraph (w/ perhaps five sentences) per picture or page.
5. For older children - meaning children who already can read (or are beginning to read) - it's time to read chapter books together. You certainly don't have to start w/ imposing behemoths like Harry Potter. There are lots of good introductory chapter books - shorter books, w/ shorter chapters, some w/ 2 or 3 illustrations per chapter - to start w/. If you're sly, it will be a seamless transition and your child won't even realize that you've made the transition to chapter books. Such books will not only challenge and enrich your child in greater ways, but will also offer more stimulating fare for you - the parent reader.
6. Jim Trelease talks about the difference btwn Reading Level and Listening Level. Your first grader can probably read the Cat in the Hat. If so, he goes so far as to say, although it may be fun, it is an insult to the child's listening level to read him/her Dr. Seuss. Is there anything wrong w/ that? Of course not. What older brother or sister hasn't come around to re-listen when baby brother is being read Horton Hears a Who for the first time. It is an insult, he says, because their first grade brains are capable of so much more. If we want to accrue all the verbal gains that reading makes possible, then we have to use and stretch and develop their listening spans. We talk all the time about the potential each child has as a learner. Here is a clear case where they remain

ready and waiting - and the power resides in us, the parent, to wake them up and turn them on. (And it's fun!)

7. One expected trick to ease the transition to chapter books is to read comic books. If some of you haven't been in a comic bookstore lately, it's not your father's Oldsmobile. Comics not only have more complex words and sentences and plots than you might imagine, they also contain a ratio of words to pictures that is second only to full-fledged chapter books. And there are a raft of comics available today that can not only entertain families, but that are even wholesome. Best of all, comics can ease the transition to chapter books both for your student reader AND your listen aloud children.