

Mentor Tips: HOLDING STUDENT'S ATTENTION

We've all seen it: that glazed look, that knee-jiggling inability to concentrate on a story, outright exclamations of "I don't know what to read today!" With winter break behind us, it's time to get creative with our methods for engaging students in reading. It isn't always easy to hold a student's attention, but here are a few things to try:

Make sure the book is appropriate

Students tend to tune out quickly if a book is too hard for them. More importantly – just like each of us – students will have a hard time staying focused on a topic that isn't interesting or relatable.

- It is essential to know your student and his/her interests! Read books that complement your student's specific experiences or curiosities.

Help your mentee make the connection

By getting your mentee to think about what they have in common with characters or situations, their connection and engagement with the story will grow.

- Ask questions about what you are reading: Has that ever happened to you? Tell me about it!
- Tell them how the story relates to YOUR life: "One time I dressed up as Cat in the Hat..."

If your conversation takes a 5-minute tangent away from actual reading, that's OK! In the long run, it will help your student relate to books, exercise their imagination, and make your time together more enjoyable.

Get a little silly

Remember that your main role is to show your mentee how much fun it is to read. Increase your energy and enthusiasm; channel your inner performer and inspire your partner to do the same.

- Be a dramatic reader: speak softly in suspenseful parts of the story, use funny voices or make animated gestures! You are helping words come alive, and if you can't get excited, your student won't either.

Turn reading into a game

Sometimes, facilitating an attitude shift about your reading hour just can't be done without a little incentive. Here is an example of a reading game.

- Play "Popcorn": Start reading and whenever you feel ready, call "Popcorn!" This means it is your student's turn to read. If he/she doesn't know where you were on a page, you get a point! (The same rules apply to you!)

With any luck these suggestions will help you to engage your mentee. Remember that by using any of these strategies you are not only varying the reading session, but also showing that you care about your student as a person and a reader. This personal relationship makes all the difference!



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