

So here it is! The time you never thought would come...your “baby” is starting first grade! How can that be? Weren’t they just in diapers for goodness sake? The truth is, time marches on, and it marches quickly in regards to our children. At school, the same truth applies. We watch our students begin their investigative journey in Kindergarten, and before we know it, they are proudly walking across the stage with a diploma in their hand. Also true is that each grade is unique and plays an important role in your child’s education. It is important to know what to expect and how you can help your child succeed each year in the new grade they embrace.

I know how hard it is to know what to do each year because I’ve been in your shoes! It’s been many years since my own children were in first grade, but my advice to you would be the same as it was twenty-five years ago. My advice is rooted in thirty-six years of being a classroom teacher and learning what is really valuable in this process we call education. If I was a realtor, my advice to you would be, “location, location, location”! If I was a coach, my advice would be, “practice, practice, practice”! But I am an educator so my advice to you is “read, read, read”!

I know this sounds so very simple, but it is absolutely the single most important factor in your child’s entire education! Becoming a strong reader will give your child an advantage in every subject and with every step they take on their journey, both in education and in life. In my opinion, first grade is the most crucial year for your children to become strong readers. This involves having a consistent routine in place. Reading with your child on a regular basis is the best foundation you can give them. Most importantly, have your child read to you. Find out what kind of things your child likes to read about and choose books according to your child’s interests. Make sure the book can be read easily and with few errors. The goal is to build your child’s confidence in reading! If they are struggling with a

book, your child may feel defeated and become a reluctant reader. You can always increase the difficulty of the books as your child becomes a stronger reader. It is a good idea to vary the way you approach your reading time together. Make sure you also read books to your child. These books can be a little more advanced which will help build your child's vocabulary. These books should also be of high interest to your child. Nothing will spark a love for reading more than listening to a wonderful book read with passion and enthusiasm.

Another helpful tip is to vary the genre of the books you choose. Fiction stories are always a young child's favorite and a great way to get them excited about reading, but don't forget about nonfiction! Nonfiction books can also be very interesting, and they can answer many questions young minds are inquisitive about. Nonfiction reading will increase each year, and reading it will be very beneficial to your child.

A final suggestion would be to throw some poetry into your mix. Poetry can be inspiring, whimsical, and fun! There are many poetry books that are written for children that are just plain silly. Kids love these books! It is a great idea to include all kinds of books. Your child may develop new interests as you introduce new genres.

The bottom line is reading should be fun! If you make it fun and instill a love of books in your child, everything else should fall into place. I hope your first grade experience is amazing! Enjoy this new year with your child and remember...read, read, read!