



Minnesota Center for Reading Research

Research Brief

Need to Read: Overcoming Summer Reading Loss

As the weather turns warmer and students in schools begin to think about summer, educators will want to gear up to support summer reading opportunities. The benefits of summer reading are well documented¹. When students read during summer months they typically gain an average of a month of reading achievement; however, students who do not read during summer months lose two months of reading achievement². This yearly process of summer loss continues to add up throughout elementary and middle school and accounts for a large proportion of differences in student reading achievement¹. Summer reading loss is particularly significant among students living in poverty³.

The book, *No More Summer Reading Loss* by Cahill, Horvath, McGill-Franzen and Allington (2013)⁴ is an appeal for teachers and reading leaders to help students become immersed in reading over the summer months. This book, which is part of the series, *not this, but that*, provides research-based suggestions to guide implementation of a successful summer reading program. Suggestions are listed below.

1. Put books in students' hands for the summer. The common approach of handing a recommended summer reading list to students may support some students, but it doesn't help students who don't have access to print materials. A significant obstacle for summer reading is the limited amount of reading materials that are available to children at home, and this lack of access to summer materials has been shown to result in lower academic achievement². Ensure that students have access to print materials at home over the summer months by handing students books they can keep. Book ownership, rather than lending programs, contributes more significantly to increased attitudes, volume of reading, and accelerated development among children⁵.

2. Provide student choice. Student choice in reading materials makes one of the biggest contributions to reading achievement⁶. For example, children who are given choice have demonstrated twice the reading gains compared to children who were not given choice⁷. Also, providing free self-selected books for summer

reading has improved reading achievement for students in a manner similar to three years of summer school². When providing a choice of texts, gather a wide range of options in topics, genres, and reading levels from which students can make a selection.

Students and faculty in the children's and adolescent literature area of Literacy Education at the U of MN shared some of their ideas about interesting books you might want to check out to share with your students. Emily Midkiff offers some recommended science fiction at her own site, especially if your students may be interested in the upcoming Star Wars movie. Sara Sterner suggests checking out the *Reading Without Walls* campaign, a nationwide program celebrating reading and diversity, explained here by cartoonist Gene Luen Yang, the National Ambassador for Young People's Literature. And check out this great list of literature resources compiled by Laura Lemanski and her colleagues. The more educators explore and share with students, the wider the world of choices become! See the links following this research brief for even more resources offered by professor Marek Oziewicz to open up your awareness of children's and young adults' literature.

3. Support student choice. Educators play an important role in student choice. Explore books with children and find out if an individual prefers reading about true or imaginary things, humorous or scary things. Ask students if they prefer books about animals, superheroes, or monsters. Studies have shown that elementary-aged children tend to select books based on interesting topics, pop-culture, humor, and fascinating visual features; middle school students, on the other hand, start to select books with more mature topics. Across all grades, the most popular books are series books. Whatever the book choice, it is better for students to read a few books they love rather than a large number of books that don't appeal to them⁸.

4. Make Reading a Family Affair. Some parents wonder if they are qualified to support their children's reading, and other parents focus too heavily on reading accuracy or completing workbooks at the expense of reading for meaning and enjoyment⁸. A reading specialist or teacher can bring meaningful summer reading to the whole family. One way is through a theme-based book bag that includes a collaborative journal to record family impressions of books. As new families read books from the book bag, they can read the comments of previous families. Schools can also bring families together around summer reading with a "Breakfast and Books" event. During this event, students and families sit and read together and discuss their favorite books. Also, summer reading provides an opportunity for celebrating transnational and bilingual literacy among families who speak and read more than one language⁸.

5. Support personal goals and social interaction. Motivation is a key factor in summer reading. Educators can support motivation by asking students to create personal reading goals or quests for knowledge about a topic. Facilitate social interaction during the summer months by providing reading pen pals, book exchanges, book clubs, and student blogs.

6. Foster independent reading throughout the school year. Often, a lack of summer reading is an indication of how well students have developed as independent readers during the school year. It is important for educators to broaden the definition of successful reading to go beyond decoding accuracy and fluency. Be careful not to overemphasize whole-class reading, narrowly leveled texts, fiction as the most common reading genre, and isolated skill instruction. Instead, teach reading strategies so that students know what to do when they encounter difficulty with a book. Provide time each day in school for students to make choices about texts and read independently. In addition, give time for students to write and talk with their peers about their reading. Model reading as a joyful experience that connects us to others and helps us grow.

For some new summer reading recommendations, check out the links provided below from Professor Oziewicz. I heard great things about the read-around-the-world experience: parents or librarians compiling lists of children's books reflecting cultures and places all over the planet. There are many websites that cover iterations of that idea, for example, delightfulchildrensbooks.com (and then the *read around the world* tab).

My special new recommendations include:

- ✓ **Craig Russell's *Fragment* a suspenseful YA cli-fi, or "climate science fiction"**
- ✓ **Aleksandra Mizielska and Daniel Mizielski's brilliant picturebook informational album for elementary readers *Under Water***
- ✓ **Emily Gravett's early readers picturebook *Tidy***

Citations

1. Alexander, Entwisle & Olson (2007). Lasting consequences of the summer learning gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72, 167-180.
2. Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S., (1996). The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analysis review. *Review of Educational Research*, 66 (3) 227-68.
3. Reardon, S., (2011) The widening academic achievement gap between the rich and the poor: New evidence and possible explanations. In *Wither Opportunity? Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances*, edited by G. Duncan and R. Murnane, 91-116, New York: The Russell Stage Foundation.
4. Cahill, Horvath, McGill-Franzen & Allington (2013). *No More Summer Reading Loss*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
5. McGill-Franzen, Ward & Cahill (2016). Summers: Some are reading, some are not! It matters. *The Reading Teacher*, 69, (6), 585-596.
6. Guthrie, J., & Humerick, N. (2004). Motivating students to read: Evidence for classroom practices that increase motivation and achievement. In *The Voice of Evidence in Reading Research*, edited by P. McCardle and V. Chhabra, 329-54. Baltimore: Brookes.
7. Lindsay, J. (2013). Interventions that increase children's access to print materials and improve their reading proficiencies. In *Summer Reading: Closing the Rich/Poor Achievement Gap*, edited by R. Allington and A. McGill-Franzen, 20-38. New York: Teachers College Press.
8. Compton-Lilly, Caloia, Quast & McCann (2016). A closer look at a summer reading program: Listening to students and parents. *The Reading Teacher*, 70 (1), 59-67.