

## Top 10 Fun-Filled Summer Reading and Writing Ideas

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If you have a school-aged child at home, you have likely heard about the infamous “summer slide”. And in truth, when the weather is hot and the family is packing up for a road trip to the beach, school work may be the last thing on your mind! But should parents be concerned about summer learning loss even with fun family plans on the horizon? The answer might surprise you: it depends.

From socioeconomic factors to your daily routine and childcare arrangements, you might very well have reason to be concerned. Let’s dive deeper to see what the research has to say about achievement gaps before exploring options for writing practice and reading ideas for summer!



# Summer Learning Loss: What Does the Research Say?

For decades, educational researchers have been analyzing the many ways in which traditional summer breaks away from school impact students from kindergarten through high school. Over time, most experts as well as parents have noticed a decline in academic achievement due to being away from school. In a foundational study by Harris Cooper in 1996, researchers found that students scored lower on achievement tests in the fall equal to about one month of grade-level loss. Cooper notes that the gap seems to affect socioeconomically disadvantaged students more negatively than middle class counterparts, possibly because of differing educational opportunities.

The Brookings Institute reports that recent studies have shown mixed results. In one study, the firm reports that students from grades 2-9 lost somewhere around 25-30% percent of school-year progress, whereas another study found very little evidence to prove that learning loss occurs after the 1st grade. Additionally, the data seems to suggest that socioeconomic factors affected subjects and grade levels disproportionately.

When looking at the literature overall, it does seem to point to the idea that some form of summer learning gap arises, but varies depending on a multitude of factors, including location, subject, grade level, socioeconomic level, and even by race and/or ethnicity. Like anything else, home life, opportunities, and culture tend to affect a child's success or loss of learning.

So what can a parent do to prevent the summer slide while the kids are home from school? The answer relies on providing ample enrichment activities and meaningful grade-level practice or opportunities to help children grow!

## Step 1: Get Reading!

Make no mistake, kids should practice math during the summer, but this article will focus on keeping your child's literacy skills in check. The first step you'll want to take is to simply start reading with your child, or create a summer reading goal, plan, or challenge to engage him or her with as many books as possible! Below we'll discuss several cool reading activities, but first, it's time to pick out some books!

When headed to the book store or your local library, be sure to check out the following popular children's authors to find fun summer reads:

- Jeff Kinney
- Ronald Dahl
- Robert Munsch

- Kevin Henkes
  - Mo Willems
  - Patricia Polacco
  - Rita Williams-Garcia
  - Stan and Jan Berenstain
  - James Dean
  - R.L. Stine
  - Eric Carle
  - Maurice Sendak
  - Shel Silverstein
  - Ezra Jack Keats
  - Dr. Seuss
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Summer is also a great time to read a book series that offers a connected story line to get your child hooked. If your child will be in 2nd-5th grade, check out the following book series that kids love:

- Junie B. Jones by Barbara Park
- The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis
- The Babysitters Club by Ann M. Martin
- Ivy + Bean by Annie Barrows
- Magic Treehouse Series by Mary Pope Osborne
- The Harry Potter Series by J.K. Rowling
- Beezus and Ramona by Beverly Cleary
- The Boxcar Children Series by Gertrude Chandler Warner
- The Secrets of Droon Series by Tony Abbott

## Step 2: Set Goals and Plan Activities

Now that you have titles and authors in mind, it's time to make some plans to ensure your kids are engaged in their reading! Try out the following ideas to get your child started:



## Listen to Scary Stories by the Fire

On a few evenings this summer, light the fire, make some s'mores and turn up your stereo to listen to scary audiobook stories by the fire! Listen to a book from the Goosebumps series by R.L. Stine, or the classic children's book, *A Wrinkle in Time*. After listening, discuss the story with your child and ask about the setting, conflict, characters, and more!

## The Scholastic Read-a-Palooza Summer Reading Challenge

If your child attends a public elementary school, look through your child's folder or your email inbox to find out if your school participates in Scholastic's reading program. If not, head to your local library to sign up, or use the Independent Kids' sign-up option on the site! The annual [Read-a-Palooza](#) challenge adds the logged minutes your child reads over the summer to a group competition and rewards the winning school, library, or community for the most minutes read. The program also donates books to those in need, holds book drives, and serves as a motivating way to keep track of reading!

## Play Summer Reading Bingo

Everyone needs a bit of variety in their lives, and your child's summer reading list is no exception! Play a game of bingo to keep your kids interested in their books! Head online to find free printable bingo card specifically for summer reading, or print out the one

from the [Scholastic](#) website. Encourage your little reader to call bingo before school starts again by choosing boxes and following the directions on each. Watch as your child reads a recipe, finds a joke book, or reads a title that was made into a movie!

## Vocabulary Water Balloon Fight

As your child reads, identify vocabulary words, or better yet, have him or her write down any hard-to-understand word they find in their book and keep a running list. Once the list has grown go outside and prepare water balloons, making one for each word. Go ahead and write each vocabulary word on the balloon using a permanent marker.

To play, place all the balloons in a bucket and instruct your child to pick up one at a time and read the word. He or she will carefully define the word and/or use it in a sentence—your choice! If your child gets it correct, watch out! This gives the child free reign to throw the balloon at you or another target. If the definition is incorrect, you get to throw it yourself! Make this a competitive game by getting your child's friends in on the fun! Follow the same rules, with each child taking turns to choose a balloon and defining a word to see who gets to throw it at whom!

## Customized Bookmarks

When kids personalize something, they value it more. For that reason, make customized bookmarks for each new book they read this summer! One great idea for making a bookmark is to start reading the book with your child. Ask him or her to visualize something important they read that relates to a character, the setting, or any conflict introduced. Using strips of cardstock or any material your child would like to use, start drawing a picture based upon what they picture in their head. During continued reading, encourage kids to add to the bookmark and complete it by the time the book is finished!

## Step 3: Tackle Writing Alongside Reading

Once you get kids writing, it's critical to get them writing, too! Reading and writing goes hand in hand; in fact, the more children read, the better writers they become. Try the following for fun summer writing ideas:



## Create a Character Diary

This is a great activity for kids who are reading a book series! At the store, pick up a small journal or diary that can be used as a character diary. Don't use this journal for any other writing, so feel free to encourage your child to decorate it and make it special. Every day after reading, have your child create a diary entry in the point of view of the protagonist. Help your child think about how that character must feel and recap the events of that day's reading in the eyes of the main character.

Mix it up by letting your child choose a different character for each entry and discuss the conflict or events from the perspective of others. Make sure to write using complete sentences and correct spelling and grammar! In doing this, your child will work on both reading comprehension and writing skills!

## Everyday Writing Prompts: A Summer Journal Challenge

Sometimes kids need to practice writing in isolation from what they are reading. In this case, get another notebook to create a writing journal that is independent from any other project. Decorate the front with pictures and a title to represent summertime writing. Next, set a routine and decide what time of day you would like your child to write. This can be right away upon waking up, or maybe during quiet afternoon downtime. Regardless, sit down at the same time each day with a new and exciting prompt. These

prompts shouldn't be serious; they can be silly and fun! For example, try the following funny prompts:

- Imagine you are a sea star. Describe what it's like to live in the ocean and on the beach.
- Write an imaginary story about finding a magic treehouse in the woods.
- Imagine that you have created a new water park. Draw a map and describe your favorite water slide.
- One night you were camping with all your friends in a tent when all of a sudden...

Feel free to make up your own prompts or search the web to find enough for each day of the summer! Type the prompts into a printable calendar and hang it on the fridge for each day's writing.

## Describe Your Dream Beach House

Here's an activity that can double as a project your child can make! First, task your child with planning an imaginary beach house. What would it look like? What kind of rooms would it have? Describe each room and what the house looks like inside and out. Help your child organize this information in a logical way before making a blueprint of the house on a separate sheet of paper. Once finished, create the beach house using a shoe box, wood, or other craft materials!

## Scavenger Hunt Storytelling

Review narrative structure to reinforce reading skills while activating your child's imagination using this exciting writing activity! Head outside, to the park, beach, or anywhere you like to go on the hunt for anything worth writing about! Wherever you choose, search around your environment for intriguing objects, wildlife, plants, and more! Collect items or make a list and take pictures to remember items or use for illustrations later on. Once your child has a collection of items or pictures, head back inside to write a story. For this activity, kids must write a story using all of the items, objects, or photos in the collection. They can serve any function in the story from personified characters to objects that characters see or interact with in the story. Watch as your child's creativity comes alive to make a story from beginning to end using ideas from their scavenger hunt!

## Summer Bucket List

What does your child want to do or see this summer? Think about priorities and organization of ideas by making a bucket list! Find a small bucket and fill it with sand or Styrofoam packing peanuts. Using jumbo craft sticks and a permanent marker, have kids think of their summertime to-do lists and write one idea per craft stick to place into the bucket. After creating the list, start removing the sticks to cross off each item off as they

come to fruition! See how many fun-filled ideas can be completed before school starts in August!

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Summer is the best time work on reading and writing skills in a meaningful yet enjoyable way, teaching children to take pride in their work and to become lifelong literacy champions! Be sure to try out the above fun summer reading ideas and don't forget to keep children writing!

