



National Institute for Literacy
The Partnership for Reading

Shining
Stars

KINDERGARTNERS LEARN TO READ



HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR KINDERGARTNERS LEARN TO READ

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

You are your child's first and most important teacher. Use this booklet to help your young child learn to read.

- The story on **PAGE 1** is about the parent of twin kindergartners. As you read it, watch for ways that their mother and father help Chris and Mike learn to read, like reading the newspaper to them and asking questions about the book they're reading.
- Build your child's reading skills by trying activities like those on **PAGE 4**.
- Use the **CHECKLIST** on the back page to think about your child's reading skills.

Pirate On A Purple Planet

This is my favorite time of day. It's about six in the morning and I'm alone at the kitchen table. It's beautiful outside: warm and breezy. Dan has already started working. We grow apples. I guess you could say we're farmers, even though Dan and I both have full-time jobs as well. He'll prune some trees this morning, until about eight o'clock, then clean up, drive the boys to kindergarten, and go to work.

Chris and Mike will be up any minute. They'll roll out of bed and hit the floor like sacks of potatoes. They will get dressed, and come down for breakfast. Sometimes I have to show them that their socks don't match, or their sweaters are on backwards, but for five-year-old boys, they do okay. Part of doing things on their own comes from living on a farm, part of it comes from watching Dan when he works hard: he grew up in a big family, where you had to take care of yourself!

When they come into the kitchen, the boys pour some cereal and sit down with me. Then we plan our day. I like to start the day by showing them something in the morning newspaper that's interesting or fun, like a new space mission, or the man who grew a 30-pound cucumber. I read part of the story to them and show them a picture, if there is one. I know they like doing this, because the first thing Chris says every day is "What's new, Mom?"

I also get them to wake up their minds a little at every breakfast, pointing to all the food on the table, and they tell me the letter each one starts with: "T, toast; C, cereal; O, orange; J, juice!"



*The last thing we
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we're tired.*

Then we go over the schedule: what time Dan will drive them to school, what time I'll pick them up, any special errands we have to do today, what's for supper. I think the boys like knowing what's coming, and, sometimes, how they can help. For instance, this afternoon, I need to make a trip to the grocery store. I'll make a list of what we need, and Chris and Mike will suggest things to add. They'll check the cupboards to see what we're out of, and tell me as I write the list. Sometimes they write their own lists. Even though at this age they're mostly pretending to write, Chris can write his own name.

The last thing we do every day is read, even if we're tired.

Chris and Mike have collected a lot of books and keep them all in a bookcase. The other night, I looked at those books and realized how much they have helped my sons. We've come a long way from the days when I would read to them and they would just listen.

Last night Chris took his favorite book, *The Knights of Neptune*, out of my hands and read the whole book to us. He wasn't reading all of the words – most of it came from memory, because we've read that book a hundred times – but he got a lot of it right. By now, both boys know a lot of the words just by seeing them, like “space,” “ship,” “fly,” and “Earth.” The funny thing was, when

Chris got a part of the story wrong, Mike spoke up and corrected him. They are also starting to challenge each other: Mike might say, “who can find a word that rhymes with space in the book first?”

One great thing about living here is that the night sky is very clear and full of stars. Mike and Chris sleep near a window, and after Dan and I turn out the lights they can look into space. Sometimes we'll sit on the edge of their beds and ask them what they see “up there.” Mike usually answers with something silly, using a new word he just learned, like “a pirate.” I've been trying to get him to talk more in whole sentences. So I say, “Tell me more.” “I see a pirate on a purple planet,” he'll say. “What's he doing?” I'll ask. “The pirate is building a space ship out of space trees and he's going out to find some space treasure,” he says.



Chris is more of a talker. When he looks up at the sky, he usually asks a lot of questions. “Mom, how far away is that star? Dad, what are those dark spots on the moon? Do you think people live up there?” Dan and I have been talking about taking the boys to new places. Work here is so hard, but we need to take some time off, even if for just a day or two. Lately, the boys are like sponges, learning everything so fast. Dan’s brother lives in the city, about three hours away, and he says we’re always welcome to come and visit. There’s an art museum I want to go to, and a science museum that has a telescope and a planetarium. I think the boys will just be amazed at the huge buildings and all of the different kinds of people. Chris will be full of questions. Mike will do a lot of watching and thinking.

One way my boys are alike is that they’re going to be ready for first grade next year. They know the alphabet by heart, and when you suggest that it’s time to read, sometimes they even cheer. (Well, Chris cheers. . . Mike just smiles!). I have the feeling that we’ve done a lot of the right things.

Some day, I think Chris is going to be an explorer – maybe not a space explorer, but I’m sure he will discover something. Mike? I hope he’ll be a writer. He uses words in interesting ways, and he has such a big imagination. I’ll miss them when they grow up, but I’m not worried about that yet—it’s a long time away. For now, I love the early morning talks about the news, and the late night questions about the world. And I love the feeling of holding a book with my boys sitting beside me.

The End.

*The boys
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There's more to reading together than just saying the words.

Try asking your kindergartner questions like these when you read together.

Talk about the book

- **Is this a real story or a made-up story? How can you tell?**
We don't have ships that can fly people to Neptune.
- **What can you tell by looking at the cover of a book?**
The title, the author, pictures about the story.
- **Where is the top of the book? Where's the bottom?**
Point to each.

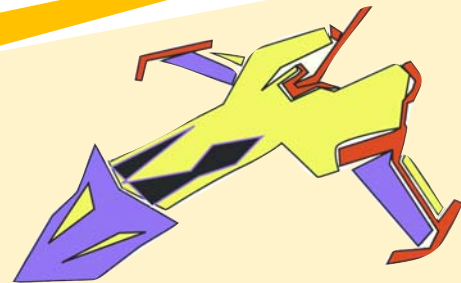
Talk about the words

- **Valiant means brave. Can you tell who was valiant in the story?**
Can you think of people in other books who were valiant?
- **How many words can you think of that sound the same as "doom?"**
Room, boom, broom, etc.

Talk about the story

- **How are Space Commander and Skip each feeling in this part of the story?**
Scared, nervous, brave.
- **Who do you think is in charge of the space ship? How can you tell?**
The commander; he is telling the others what to do.
- **What would you name a space ship?**
Enterprise, Jupiter, Fireball XL5.
- **What do you think will happen next?**
Maybe the Knights of Neptune will follow them, or maybe they'll go home to rest, etc.

THE KNIGHTS OF NEPTUNE



Space Commander had a scared look on his face. His ship was falling! The engines were stalling! They were falling through space!

Neptune came closer and closer. The stars sped by. Space Commander wondered why.

"Lieutenant Skip?"

Lieutenant Skip began to flip.

"I'm afraid, Commander! Something is pulling us down! We're going to crash! We're going to smash!"

"Don't be rash, Skip! Get a grip! This isn't the end of our trip! We'll find a way to save the ship!"

"The Knights of Neptune, Commander! They've found a way to seal our doom! The ship will smash, we'll go ka-boom!"

"I know a way to save the day" shouted the valiant Commander. "If we fly fast, give the rockets an extra blast, we might just go right past Neptune!"

He pushed some buttons—one, two, three, then a blue one labeled "ENERGY"—and they felt themselves break free!

A smile spread across the Commander's face as his ship soared swiftly into space.

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The Partnership for Reading, a project administered by the National Institute for Literacy, is a collaborative effort of the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to make evidence-based reading research available to educators, parents, policy-makers, and others with an interest in helping all people learn to learn well.

This Partnership for Reading publication describes strategies proven to work by the most rigorous scientific research available on the teaching of reading. The research that confirmed the effectiveness of these strategies used systematic, empirical methods drawn from observation or experiment; involved rigorous data analyses to test its hypotheses and justify its conclusions; produced valid data across multiple evaluators and observations; and was accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts. The application of these research-based strategies will increase the likelihood of success in reading instruction. Adherence to scientifically based research in this publication was ensured by a review process that included representatives of each Partnership for Reading organization and external expert reviewers. For detailed information on this review process, contact the Partnership for Reading at the National Institute for Literacy, 1775 I Street NW, Suite 730, Washington, DC 20006.

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Checklist

FOR PARENTS OF KINDERGARTNERS

These skills usually develop when a child is in kindergarten. Talk with your child's teacher if you have questions.

- My child listens carefully to books read aloud.
- My child knows the shapes and names for the letters of the alphabet and writes many uppercase and lowercase letters on his own.
- My child knows that spoken words are made of separate sounds.
- My child recognizes and makes rhymes, can tell when words begin with the same sound, and can put together, or blend, spoken sounds.
- My child can sound out some letters.
- My child knows that the order of letters in a written word stands for the order of sounds in a spoken word.
- My child knows some common words such as **a**, **the**, **I**, and **you**, on sight.
- My child knows how to hold a book, and follows print from left to right and from top to bottom of a page when she is read to.
- My child asks and answers questions about stories and uses what she already knows to understand a story.

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- My child knows the parts of a book and understands that authors write words and text and illustrators create pictures.
- My child knows that in most books the main message is in the print, not the pictures.
- My child predicts what will happen in a story and retells or acts out stories.
- My child knows the difference between “made up” fiction and “real” nonfiction books and the difference between stories and poems.
- My child uses what he knows about letters and sounds to write words.
- My child writes some letters and words as they are said to her and begins to spell some words correctly.
- My child writes his own first and last name and the first names of some friends and family.
- My child plays with words and uses new words in her own speech.
- My child knows and uses words that are important to school work, such as the names for colors, shapes, and numbers.
- My child knows and uses words from daily life, such as street names and the names for community workers—teacher, mail carrier, etc.

This checklist is adapted from *A Child Becomes a Reader—Birth Through Preschool*. Get a free copy at www.nifl.gov.