

WHY READING STILL MATTERS FOR KIDS

SHAPING BRIGHTER MINDS BEYOND THE SCREEN

This white paper highlights why reading remains essential for children in a screen-filled world, outlining its key developmental benefits and simple ways families can build joyful, lasting reading habits together.



**GOLDEN
FIG BOOKS**

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So, why does reading still matter?

INTRODUCTION

In a world full of screens, technology often dominates family time, yet reading remains one of the most useful tools for fostering children's growth, creativity, curiosity, and emotional health. This white paper explores the benefits of reading for kids, from early literacy development to improved mental well-being, and provides parents with a guide to help reduce screen time and encourage more reading.

How can reading as a hobby can reshape family life and support lifelong learning through research about child development, educators, and literacy organizations? Let's find out together.



What are the benefits of reading for kids?



7 hours

per day that the average child spends on screens

30 min

per day that the average child spends reading

3x

more likely to report stronger mental well-being when they enjoy reading

Screens have become nannies. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry reports that the average child spends over **seven hours daily on screens** but only **30 minutes reading**. Although digital media can be effective and educational, high screen times often shorten attention spans and replace imaginative experiences with scrolling.

However, research shows that children who read for pleasure develop stronger vocabulary, empathy, and higher emotional intelligence.

The National Literacy Trust found that **kids who enjoy reading are three times more likely to report stronger mental well-being**. Reading gives children the opportunity to imagine, question, and understand beyond themselves, a skill in a high-demand scrolling environment.

Our Key Takeaway:

Reading nurtures focus capabilities, empathy, and creativity, all of which suffer from a high screen time culture.

Early literacy development starts in the home



60%

of a child's vocabulary by third grade is shaped by the at-home language environment before preschool (AAP).

THE BACKGROUND

Childhood literacy development does not start when kids start school; it starts on the couch, before bedtime, or during free time. Parents who read aloud every day help build vocabulary but also mold patience and curiosity. Participating in shared reading experiences helps children understand emotion, hear rhythm, and understand structure in language. Each read-aloud story can turn into a lesson.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Introduce reading as part of the routine. After dinner, before baths, or at bedtime.
- Let them choose. Ownership makes reading fun, not homework.
- Ask questions to help build critical thinking skills.
- Pair playtime while reading. Draw or act out scenes from the book.

Reading is not about preparing for school; it is about preparing for life by giving them the tools of confidence, imagination, and the ability to question and create.

Make reading a hobby, not homework

Many kids might see reading as a chore, something assigned, not enjoyed. The fix to this problem is to reframe reading as a hobby, not homework.

According to a meta-analysis of print exposure from infancy to early adulthood, children engage more deeply when they choose books that reflect their interests and personalities. From fantasy, adventures, sports, and comic books, self-selected reading boosts their motivation and comprehension.

When parents read alongside their children, they help reinforce reading as a shared experience, and **83% of kids say they love reading for fun when their parents read with them regularly** (Scholastic's Kids and Family Reading Report).



How to do it:

- **CHANGE “YOU HAVE TO READ” WITH “LET’S GO PICK SOMETHING INTERESTING”**

- **CELEBRATE FINISHING A BOOK WITH A TREAT OR FUN ACTIVITY**

- **MAKE FUN READING SPACES, BUILD A FORT, OR HAVE A DESIGNATED READING AREA**

TO MAKE READING A HOBBY IS TO GIVE KIDS STORIES TO EXPLORE INSTEAD OF TASKS TO COMPLETE.

The ultimate debate: Reading vs. Screen time



A 2023 Common Sense Media report showed that **kids with more than five hours of daily screen time for entertainment are two times more likely to feel anxious or unhappy**. While reading stimulates the prefrontal cortex in the brain, the part is tied to empathy and decision-making. Screens promise instant engagement and dopamine, but they often reduce focus and emotional control.

The best way to balance screens and reading is not to restrict technology completely; it is by offering them something better. Community reading programs bring families and friends together around stories, showing that reading can be shared, social, and exciting.

The Reading Partners impact report shows that **88% of K-2 students and 83% of all students met or exceeded their primary literacy growth goal when paired with reading-tutoring partners with schools and communities**.

Reading beats
screens in:

Attention

Reading improves focus abilities and delays gratification.

Empathy

Stories teach kids different perspectives and ways to feel emotion.

Imagination

Reading helps imagery and new thinking, also building social creativity.

Improved Sleep

Less screen time leads to improved and deeper REM sleep.

Communities should encourage reading

A study by Harvard School of Business titled “The Novel Resurgence of Independent Bookstores” highlighted how local bookstores have reinvented themselves in a digital world by emphasizing community engagement and local relevance. **These local stores are offering something screens cannot: an authentic connection.** Local bookstores host author events, reading clubs, and family activities that turn into community-building events.

Independent bookstores also play a crucial economic role in modern economies.

The American Booksellers Association and Civic Economics found that these **bookstores generate 405% greater local economic impact than large online retailers**, because the community keeps a larger share of each dollar spent. This leads to more local jobs, schools, and services every time a family chooses to shop locally.

This economic importance extends nationally as well. The U.S. Census Bureau data showed that in 2019 (published in 2021), **bookstores employed 61,000 workers and provided \$1.1 billion in annual payroll**, displaying how these stores are more than just retail space but anchors for communities.



Community reading has long-term benefits

When reading becomes a routine in families, the children see benefits later down the road. Research from Taylor & Francis showed that **children exposed to books early and often score higher on reading comprehension tests later in their academic careers**. Studies also show a strong correlation between early reading exposure, including shared reading with a caregiver, and later reading skills, vocabulary, and overall academic achievement. This benefit is seen because early exposure helps develop crucial cognitive and language skills that are foundational for later reading success.

85%

of juvenile offenders have problems reading

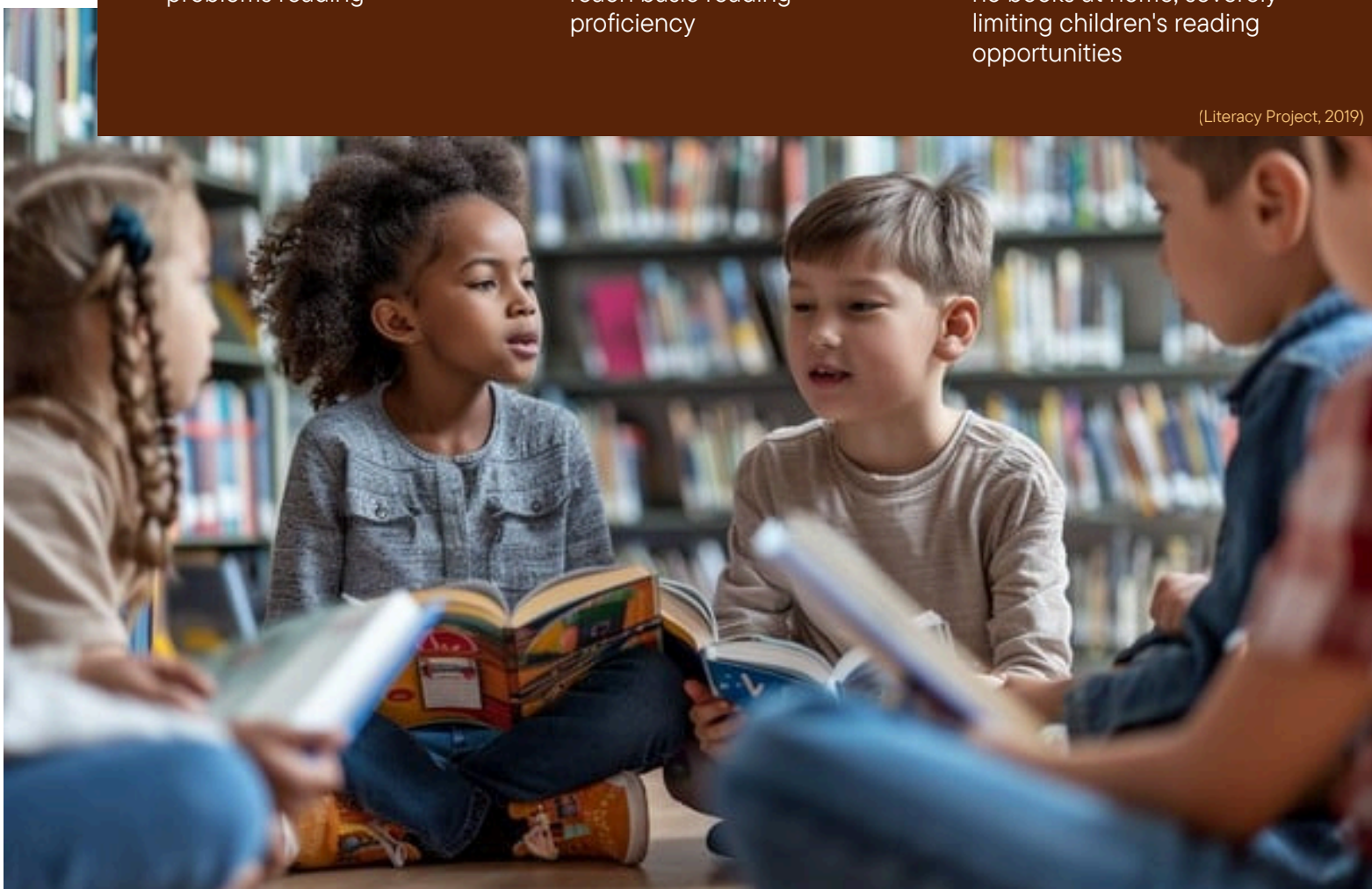
70%

of fourth graders failed to reach basic reading proficiency

61%

of low-income families have no books at home, severely limiting children's reading opportunities

(Literacy Project, 2019)



Ready to turn the page?

The benefits of reading for kids are more than academic; they are emotional, social, and communal. By reframing homework as a joyful hobby and integrating it into everyday family life, parents can help their children build focus, empathy, and creativity that lasts a lifetime.



Step - 01

START SMALL

Start with ten minutes of daily reading. Allow your child to lead with increasing the time limits.

Step - 02

SET GOALS

Set goals of reading a chapter a day or a book a month. Make sure to celebrate when you meet these goals.

Step - 03

JOIN LOCAL

Attend a local book club or event to connect with the community and allow your child to bond with others over reading.

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Step - 04

GIVE SPACE

Create individualized reading environments for older children to have autonomy and choice over their reading.

Step - 05

NEW NORMAL

Make reading normalized in your home. Make visiting libraries and bookstores normal when you run errands.

Step - 06

BE A MODEL

You are the most important model in your child's life. Show them that reading is fun for you too!

Golden Fig Books may be the place for you

At Golden Fig Books, we are committed to helping families rediscover reading not as a duty, but as a delight. We aim to provide a warm, local space for **Durham** and **Carrboro** families to connect through stories, imagination, and shared curiosity.

Golden Fig Books' new **Golden Roots Reading Club**, a monthly community program for elementary-aged kids and their families. It will be a warm, screen-free space where stories come alive and imaginations grow wild.

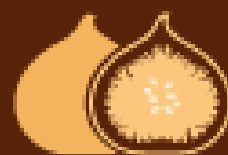


Let's get to reading together

CONTACT

Golden Fig Books is a bookstore located in Durham and Carrboro, North Carolina. Inspired by creativity and connectivity through reading. We help all readers of all ages rediscover their love for books.

Join us in building a culture of reading beyond the screen!



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