

25 Ways Schools Can Promote Independent Reading

1. Set aside time for independent reading. Time for reading independently doesn't just happen. Plan for it by making it a priority in schedules across K-12 classrooms. You may need to get creative by stealing minutes here and there, but find at least 15 minutes a day (20 recommended) for self-selecting, independent reading.

2. Create Literacy-Rich Environments in every K-12 Classroom. A literacy-rich environment – full of print, word walls, books, and reading materials – not only supports the Common Core standards, but also provides a setting that encourages and supports speaking, listening, reading, and writing in a variety of authentic ways – through print & digital media. Make it a priority for every K-12 classroom to be an inviting, print-rich environment that supports independent reading and student learning.

3. Support High-Quality Classroom Libraries. Students need access to interesting books and materials – both in print and online. When students are provided with well-designed classroom libraries, they interact more with books, spend more time reading, exhibit more positive attitudes toward reading, and exhibit higher levels of reading achievement (NAEP, 2002). Additionally, research-based classroom libraries support balanced literacy instruction. Support teachers in building classroom libraries through budget dollars, grants, and book drives.

4. Encourage Read Aloud. In the *Becoming a Nation of Readers* report (1985), experts reported that “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.” Not only did the experts suggest reading aloud in the home, but they also suggested reading aloud in schools. Read alouds not only allow teachers to model that reading is a great way to spend time but also expose students to more complex vocabulary than they typically hear or read.

And, that doesn't exclude reading to older students, too. Occasionally reading more difficult text aloud provides opportunity for rich discussion and vocabulary development. And, reading young adult selections such as *The Fault in Our Stars* ([affiliate link](#)) by John Green provides the background and context for meaningful discussions about current topics, too.

5. Create a “Caught Reading” Campaign that features Teachers as Readers. Creating a school wide reading culture is important to promote reading as a lifestyle. Students need to see their teachers as readers. Create posters of teachers and staff reading their favorite books and display them in hallways throughout the schools. You can also produce bookmarks that feature teacher's favorite book picks to help guide students as they select books for independent reading.

6. Invite Guest Readers into Classrooms. What better way to promote reading than by having guest readers read aloud to students. Invite parents and community members to select a book or article to read aloud and discuss with students. You can even make it fun by announcing them as “mystery readers” and providing clues during the week to create anticipation for the guest reader.

7. Encourage Students to Read Widely. Sometimes students get in a rut and don't read beyond their favorite genre or author. Encourage students to read outside of their preferred genres. To build a wide vocabulary and broad background knowledge, students need to read in a wide variety of genres and text types. Through book talks, read aloud, and book displays, open students' eyes to new authors, genres, and text types.

8. Create a Twitter Hashtag for Sharing Books. Move beyond traditional books reviews by creating a schoolwide Twitter #hashtag such as *#GESTitleTalk* or *#PS41FavBooks* where students and teachers write

super short reviews and highlights of recently read books. In addition, the librarian can create interest in books by posting new titles on the school hashtag. Teachers can create a classroom hashtag, too, such as #4thReads.

9. Host Book Clubs for Students and Parents. A community of readers sometimes happens naturally; however, book clubs are a perfect way to foster connectivity around books and reading. Students can even host their own book clubs within a classroom, grade level, or school.

Reading is important for parents, too. Host a book club at school or online to help create an adult community of readers and build strong parental support for reading. “Books and Bagels” can be a perfect duo for an early morning book club.

10. Financially Support School Libraries. In an era of tightening budgets, the school library/media center needs to continue receiving financial support. While classroom libraries are vitally important to a balanced literacy program, media centers are as well. Each serves a distinctly different purpose in supporting readers. And, media centers should be staffed by licensed librarians who are experts in both children’s literature and how to build and maintain a high-quality collection that supports independent reading, research, and instruction.

11. Collaborate with the Local Library. Work with the local library to learn about and support their programs, services, and resources for students. Invite them into your school so students can easily obtain a library card and learn about how the public library can support their reading and research needs.

12. Provide Opportunities for Summer Reading. The summer reading slide is real. Schools can play an important role in providing opportunities so that students read over the summer. Ranging from giving away books to providing summer library hours, there are many ways that schools can support independent reading during the summer months.

13. Support Author Visits. Students need to learn about how writers get their ideas and turn those ideas into books. Author visits help make those connections visible for students. If your budget is tight, work with a local library or another school district to help financially sponsor an author visit.

14. Sponsor a Young Author Conference. Along with author visits, a “young author” conference provides a venue for readers to showcase their writing. Some schools invite an author and illustrator while showcasing student books. It’s a perfect opportunity to connect reading, writing, and illustrating. And, parents and community members can share in the celebration of literacy.

15. Read what Students are Reading. Creating a culture of reading includes teachers, too. Students need to read, and so do you. As classroom teachers and librarians, it’s important to help students find books that grab their attention and interest them. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to keep your book knowledge current.

It’s not easy keeping current with new books in children’s and young adult literature; however, there are many excellent book lists, reviews, websites, and blogs to steer you in the right direction. In a previous post, [I compiled several of my favorite go-to sources](#). As you explore book lists, websites, blogs, and twitter feeds,

I'm certain you'll find several that will become your favorites! And, students will benefit from your first-hand knowledge of books.

16. Host a Read-In. A combination of books, pizza, and p.j.'s party can be lots of fun! Be inventive. Invite parents, community members, and sports figures to be mystery readers read each hour. Wrap up new books and unveil them during the read-in. Invite a local author. A fun way to liven up reading.

17. Solicit Donations from Local Book Stores. In a day of tightening budgets, building classroom libraries can be a financial strain on schools and individual teachers. Local bookstores such as Half-Price Books often willingly donate books to schools. It can be a cost-effective way to build classroom collections of books to support students.

18. Share Books through Book Talks. Readers need to share books with one another. Book Talks are a perfect way for teachers and students to share books with one another.

19. Create a Read box to Promote School wide Reading. A new display can do wonders to highlight favorite books, new releases, and best-loved authors. The 'readbox' is, of course, a play off of 'redbox.' It's a creative way to display books, create interest, and support reading choice. [For more ideas, see this recent post featuring the readbox.](#)

20. Host Reading-Related Events at School. Many schools host Scholastic Book events as a way to promote reading and to bring affordable books into the hands of readers. How about coupling the book event with a school play since many parents will be visiting your school?

21. Create Video Book Commercials. Creating videos is easier than ever and people love to do it. Have students, teachers, staff, and community members create book commercials promoting a favorite book or author. Display them on your school website or on a dedicated page for the library. If you have morning announcements through a production system, you could feature live book commercials or show recent entries.

22. Create Attractive Displays of Books. Feature attractive book displays throughout your school. Create book displays in likely and unlikely places such as the front office, principal's office, in classrooms, labs, display cases, and the school library.

23. Encourage Students & Teachers to Write Book Reviews. Readers need to share books with each other in the form of book reviews. Experiment with the form. For example, short book reviews or snippets can be featured on a series of bookmarks. Longer book reviews can be displayed in the school library or classroom library or hosted online.

24. Partner with Parents. Schools can do their part to support and encourage reading; however, parents play a key role as well. Support parents by informing them of school library hours and resources available at the school and public library.

25. Host a Mystery Check-Out Day. Create a little mystery around books. Wrap selected books in brown paper and encourage students to check out a mystery book. After they check the book, they can unwrap it to reveal their selection. Mystery selections can encourage students – in a fun way – to venture further and try a new genre, author, or series.