



READING

In grade 8, your child will continue reading and writing, but in addition to stories and literature, he will read more texts that provide facts and background knowledge in areas including science and social studies. He will read more challenging texts and be asked questions that require him to refer back to what they have read. There will also be an increased emphasis on building a strong vocabulary so that your child can read and understand challenging material. Your child will read major works of fiction and nonfiction from all over the world from different time periods. He will continue to learn how to understand what he reads and how to evaluate an author's assumptions and claims. He will also conduct research that will require the analysis of resources and accurate interpretation of literary and informational texts. Activities in these areas include:

- Reading, analyzing, and annotating a literary text to comprehend what the author says explicitly and to discover the levels of meaning embedded deeply within complex literary texts.
- Provide an analysis of a modern literary text draws on themes, patterns of events, and/or character types, including describing how the material is rendered new.
- Reading, analyzing, taking notes and/or annotating a text for evidence to use in assessing whether or not the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient.
- Conduct self-checks to ensure comprehension of an informational text, persevere through difficult sections, examine unfamiliar words or phrases and attempt to uncover the meaning of unknown words.
- Providing textual evidence that most strongly supports analysis of what the text says explicitly.



Your child can cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- Learn that evidence is considered strong when it both convinces the reader and effectively expresses the central ideas or theme(s) of the text.
- Read closely to determine both explicitly stated and implied meanings in a text.

HELP AT HOME

- ▶ Have your child read to find the author's purpose and overall message of the text. To guide thinking, have your child mark the text as he reads. Highlight repeated ideas or patterns throughout the text, each with a separate color. This will help your child determine the author's overall message. Instruct your child to sort the highlighted information into categories (e.g., evidence that is weakly tied to the overall theme and evidence that is strongly tied to the overall theme).



VOCABULARY

THEME is the central, underlying, and controlling idea of a work of literature. It is the lesson or “moral” the author is trying to teach the reader. For example, the theme of “The Ugly Duckling” by Hans Christian Andersen is the search for personal identity or uniqueness, rather than conforming to society’s standards.



Your child can determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text. He can also provide an accurate summary of the text based on this analysis.

- Record repeated messages or patterns observed within various story elements.
- Note how recurring interpersonal conflicts between characters, setting changes, and plot twists all influence or shape the theme and guide the reader toward realizing the theme in its entirety.

HELP AT HOME

► Have your child use a story map like the one below to reveal the overall theme of the text. Seeing the basic story elements (characters, setting, plot, and theme) broken down into manageable pieces, your child should be able to write a summary of how the central idea changes over the course of the text.

RESOURCES

SAMPLE STORY MAP

STORY ELEMENT	Example
CHARACTERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the people who were involved? • Which ones played major roles? • Which ones were minor?
SETTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where and when did this event take place? • Over what period of time did the event occur?
PLOT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem/Goal: What set events in motion? What problem arose, or what were the key players after? • Events/Episodes: the key steps or events that capture the progress of the situation. • Resolution/Outcome: How was the problem solved? Was the goal attained?
THEME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The larger meaning or importance, the moral, the "so what?"



Your child should analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a literary text propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

- Determine how specific events or dialogue significantly impact the development of a story.

HELP AT HOME

- ▶ After reading a text, go back through and have your child determine (mark or highlight) critical turning points in the story, analyze the internal and external choices of the characters, and examine the conflicts in the story to see how the momentum of the story builds.
- ▶ Once the critical moments have been identified, your child should explain the cause and effect that the critical moment had on the plot of the story.



VOCABULARY

A struggle that takes place in a character's mind is called an **INTERNAL CONFLICT**. For example, a character may have to decide within himself between right and wrong.

A struggle between a character and an outside force (another character, the community, or nature) is called an **EXTERNAL CONFLICT**. For example, a main character who is struggling against an arctic winter cold is experiencing an external conflict with nature.



Your child should determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings. He can also analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

- Identify words and phrases that create and reveal a variety of tones.
- See the link between word choice and tone.
- Analyze multiple texts in which textual references, via allusion and/or allegory, are present.

HELP AT HOME

- ▶ Discuss with your child what each of the following allusions would mean:
 - If you called a boy a “Romeo,” the allusion is to one of Shakespeare’s plays in which a romantic relationship turns into a tragedy for the doomed tragic hero.
 - What if a person said, “I never thought I’d move back to my hometown, but I guess deep down I’m a Dorothy,” alluding to the “Wizard of Oz” character who learns “there’s no place like home?”
 - What would you expect if I called a certain boy an “Edward?” What about a “Jacob?” “Edward” and “Jacob” both allude to the main characters of the *Twilight* book and movie series.
 - Challenge your child to think of more allusions, explaining their meanings and sources.



VOCABULARY

An **ALLUSION** is a brief and indirect reference to a person, place, thing, or idea of cultural, literary, or political significance. It does not describe in detail the person or thing to which it refers. The writer expects the reader to possess enough knowledge to spot and understand the allusion in a text. For example, “this place is like a Garden of Eden,” would be a Biblical allusion to “paradise” in the Book of Genesis.



Your child should compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

- Understand how and why writers construct texts using a variety of structures.
- Notice how each choice the author makes affects the style and meaning of the text.



ANALYZING STORY STRUCTURE

To help your child analyze story structure, use the “S.T.O.R.Y.” Method:

- S** Identify the **setting**.
- T** Which characters are doing most of the **talking**?
- O** **Oops!** There’s a Problem! What is it?
- R** How is the problem **resolved**?
- Y** **Yes!** The problem is solved. How does the story close?

HELP AT HOME

- ▶ To understand how the structure and style of text affect meaning, have your child identify the structure and choice of writing techniques the writer uses in their story. Direct your child to look at details such as how chapter titles tie into the overall theme, how the writer uses the structure of the text to affect the meaning, and how the length and pace of certain chapters connect to the plot.
- ▶ Once your child can identify the structure(s) the writer uses, have him compare and contrast two or more texts with different structures. Tell your child to ask himself why the writer made specific structural choices and how these choices affect the reader’s understanding of a text. For example, why did the author use a cliffhanger at the end of the most exciting chapter? Or, why does one author begin a story with a character having a flashback while another author ends a story with one? How do these choices make connections for the reader?



Your child should analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

- Understand the role of point of view in a given text.
- Know that point of view is essentially the lens through which the reader is allowed to see the story.



HELP AT HOME

- ▶ Have your child examine one story from a variety of viewpoints. For each different viewpoint, your child should determine what he as the reader knows, versus what other characters know.
- ▶ Instruct your child to re-write the story (or a part of the story) from the point of view of another character. By becoming the “writer,” your child will see how the technique of point of view creates specific tones and moods in the story.
- ▶ Have your child watch the musical “Wicked” (clips available online) and compare it to “The Wizard of Oz.” Discuss the point of view of the characters from the two different plays.
- ▶ Watch courtroom reality shows to aid your child in understanding how the same situation can be seen and explained very differently from two people with different points of view.



Your child should analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the original text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

- Understand how any given literary text can be transformed into and presented in an entirely different form (e.g., film or live performance).
- Understand and be able to explain why the film or live performance may be different from the text version.



HELP AT HOME

- ▶ Have your child read a text focusing on the following:
 - How do you picture a certain character or setting? What details in the text make you think those things?
- ▶ Then show him the film version of the text or go to a theatrical version of the same story. Have him discuss and record the ways the two presentations were alike and different focusing on the following:
 - How was the performance the same or different from the original text? Do the characters and settings look as you pictured them? Why or why not?
 - Have some scenes or characters been left out of the performance version? Why would the director of the film/play make those choices?
 - Take note of elements like lighting, staging, costuming, and even casting. How do these decisions affect the quality of the performance and the viewer's ability to grasp the message the author intends?

Your child should analyze how myths, traditional stories, or religious works, such as the Bible, influence themes, patterns of events, or character types in modern works, including how the material is rendered new.

- Understand the timeless nature of literary themes.
- Explore how the same theme is presented across multiple texts (i.e., many Greek myths seek to explain natural phenomena that are also addressed in the Bible).

HELP AT HOME

► Have your child read a variety of texts from different time periods that all focus around a common theme, such as love, friendship, or perseverance. Have your child consider what each author's overall theme communicates about life, and how the author uses events, conflicts, and/or characters to create that theme. Ask your child to

reflect on how recent texts often teach the same "lesson" as older texts, yet still stay true to the characteristics of the genre.



THEME

Discuss with your child the Disney movies "Toy Story," "A Bug's Life," "Finding Nemo," and "Cars." Point out how each of these films centers around the characters who are willing to sacrifice their own wants for those of the people they love. The theme of novels works the same way -- thousands of novels seek to reveal the same theme!



By the end of the year, your child should independently and proficiently read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, poems, and nonfiction, at the high end of the grade 6-8 text complexity band.

- Read independently on a level that does not cause frustration.
- Acquire the habit of reading independently and closely, which is essential to future success.
- Determine when comprehension of the meaning of the text is lost and apply strategies to increase comprehension when necessary.

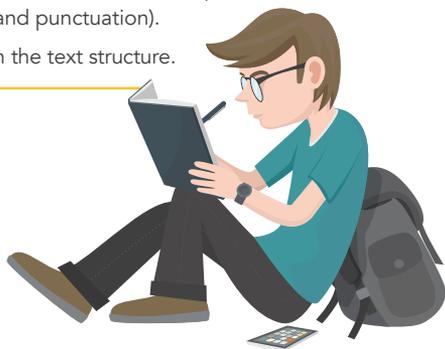
HELP AT HOME

- ▶ Have your child use the “Monitoring and Clarifying Strategy” when reading at home. Ask your child to begin reading the assigned text and use the steps as he encounters difficulties.

MONITORING AND CLARIFYING STRATEGY

Steps for using the “Monitoring and Clarifying Strategy” when reading:

- Stop and think about what you have already read.
- Reread.
- Adjust your reading rate: slow down or speed up.
- Try to connect the text to something you read in another book, what you know about the world, or to something you have experienced.
- Visualize.
- Reflect on what you have read.
- Use print conventions (keywords, bold print, italicized words, and punctuation).
- Notice patterns in the text structure.



Your child should determine an author's point of view and purpose in a text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.

- Recognize how an author's perspective presents itself within a text.
- Examine a text for overall purpose, personal bias, and opposing viewpoints.

HELP AT HOME

► Listen to a political candidate, motivational speaker, or debate with your child. Discuss the speaker's perspective, including: key ideas, supporting details, and counterarguments. Ask your child to consider how someone of an opposing viewpoint may respond to the examples, data, or support offered in the original perspective presented. Have your child take note of the author's tone, choice of words, and use of persuasive language.

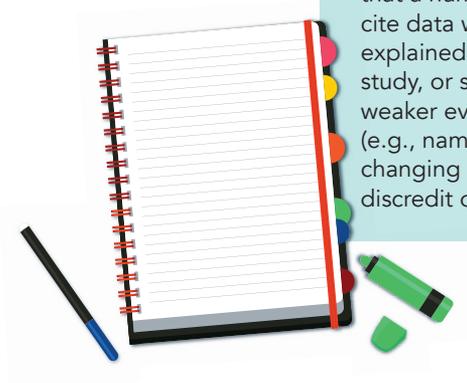


Your child should delineate and evaluate the argument or specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is sufficient. Recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

- Dissect the argument presented in a text and analyze the evidence presented.

HELP AT HOME

▶ Work with your child on analyzing debates, political advertisements, or courtroom reality shows. For example, have your child track claims, facts, and evidence presented as support. The notes taken could be used to determine how direct the link is between the speaker's overall claim and a piece of evidence. As your child sorts the evidence and repeats this process with a variety of information, your child may notice and discuss patterns. For instance, your child may recognize that a number of texts cite data without having explained the original study, or speakers use weaker evidence (e.g., name-calling, changing topics) to discredit opposition.



Your child should analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.

- Understand how two or more texts may present the same topic from differing viewpoints.
- Cite instances of disagreement and analyze the basis for these disagreements.



HELP AT HOME

► Read an editorial from the newspaper with your child. As he reads, have your child note the support established by the writer and how those details relate to the writer's overall message. For instance, have your child consider whether the details are given in order to exaggerate the issue, address the counterargument, or inform the reader. In addition, your child should consider the source of these supporting details and their overall credibility in regard to the given topic.

