

Kids are Closing the Books and Plugging In

It's Friday afternoon and all around the world, anxious school children are awaiting the final bell. The signal that time for structure and schedules is over and the weekend is here! It's no longer up to the teacher, but now it's their turn to choose how to spend their time.

The choices kids have for their "downtime" nowadays are endless. Thanks to technology, they are constantly surrounded by every option imaginable. Fewer and fewer children are choosing to spend their time curled up with a good book. The numbers in the U.S. on television alone are staggering:

- On average, kids spend nearly 4 hours a day watching television, DVDs and videos.
- 68% of 8- to 18-year-olds have a TV in their bedroom; 54% have a DVD/VCR player, 37% have cable/satellite TV, and 20% have premium channels.
- In 63% of households, the TV is "usually" on during meals.
- In 53% of households of 7th- to 12th-graders, there are no rules about TV watching.
- Kids with a TV in their bedroom spend an average of almost 1.5 hours more per day watching TV than kids without a TV in the bedroom.
- In 51% of households, the TV is on "most" of the timeⁱ.

Flashback twenty years, and think of what children were doing with their free time. Kids got on their bicycles in the morning only to stop back by for lunch and at dusk return for dinner. After dinner, families often sat down together to watch family centered sitcoms and then finished off their evenings with some quiet time reading before bed.

Then, the computer generation occurred. And cable TV provided more variety in television programming than ever before. Family time at the table has been replaced by the busyness of life. And everyone is in their own rooms doing their own thing – often with computers or TV. Kids rarely stop to pick up a book.

As parents, we can find ways to encourage children to read when there are so many other options vying for their free time. Finding ways to get kids to read has become a new and difficult challenge and sometimes, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em" is the best theory to use. You can use technology to your advantage and get your kids to read other places than just in books.

Many companies are now offering video games and DVDs that promote reading and can actually improve kids reading skills. Here are just a few companies that carry educational games, toys, and software that you might take a look at:

- ◆ [Leap Frog](#)-Wide variety of electronic games based on learning activities for babies all the way through high school
- ◆ [VTech](#)-Electronic learning toys and games for kids from 0-9+

- ◆ [Rocket Reader](#)-Software designed to improve reading skills for ages 4-adult
- ◆ [Scholastic](#)-Books, DVDs, and software all with educational basis
- ◆ [Big Brain Academy](#)- Educational video game for Wii or Nintendo DS
- ◆ [Reader Rabbit](#)-Computer games for ages 2-18 in various subject areas that all involve reading
- ◆ [Smart Kids Software](#)-Find software for any subject and any age range

Many sites offer online reading activities as well. Some are even free! Your kids might enjoy playing games online at these sites:

- ◆ [Starfall](#)
- ◆ [Literactive](#)
- ◆ [Scholastic](#)
- ◆ [Readquarium](#)
- ◆ [Earobics](#)

We know that many problems come along with too much screen time in front of the television or computer. Spending too much time “plugged in” can affect children’s weight, sleep habits, behavior, grades and more. So, always use smart guidelines even with educational software. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, children should not be in front of television or video games more than 1-2 hours a day.

As an alternative for reading activities that involve technology, helping kids find activities that they enjoy that require reading is another beneficial idea. Reading does not always mean sitting down with a book.

So, try heading to a craft store or hobby shop and find an activity that your child would be interested in. You’ll find that reading directions, recipes, or many other alternatives to books will help encourage your child to read and build their skills while they are doing something they enjoy (see our article on 50+ Tips to Get Kids Reading at www.treasureboundbooks.com in the Supporting Literacy section).

The world in which our kids are living in now is vastly different from that of years ago. It’s up to the adults in their lives to help motivate kids to read and to help their children make wise choices in how they spend their time.

ⁱ <http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/tv.htm>

Leap Frog <http://www.leapfrog.com/en/shop.html>

VTech <http://www.vtech.com/toys/index.php>

Rocket Reader <http://www.rocketreader.com/>

Scholastic

<http://store.scholastic.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/HomeView?storeId=10052&catalogId=10051>

Big Brain Academy <http://www.bigbrainacademy.com/>

Reader Rabbit <http://www.learningcompany.com/jump.jsp?itemType=CATEGORY&itemID=512>

Smart Kids Software <http://www.smartkidssoftware.com/>

Starfall <http://www.starfall.com/>

Literactive <http://www.literactive.com/Home/index.asp>

Scholastic <http://www2.scholastic.com/browse/learn.jsp?grades=35>

Readquarium <http://www.gamequarium.com/readquarium/>

Earobics <http://www.earobics.com/gamegoo/goeeyhome.html>

Karen Robertson

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