

# Keeping kids academically engaged during the summer months

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Emily Hayden encourages parents to read outside the box and make learning fun during the summer months. Credit: Ryan Riley

It was not unusual for Emily Hayden to spend the first three or four weeks of a new school year re-acquainting her students with material

they had learned the previous year. That's typically how long it would take to overcome the learning students lost during three months of summer vacation.

Often called "summer slide" or "summer brain drain," educators recognize that time away from school is going to have an impact come fall. Hayden, an assistant professor of literacy education at Iowa State University and former elementary school teacher, says every day she spent playing catch up was one less day to devote to new material. While students deserve some time off, Hayden encourages parents to incorporate learning into summer activities.

"Summer is a good time to explore," she said. "Find things your child loves so that it doesn't feel like school work."

Here are a few suggestions Hayden has for parents:

- Read outside the box. Summer reading should be fun. Hayden says it is OK to select books with lots of pictures and less text, if it will encourage [children](#) to read. Match books to their interests, whether that's bugs, cars or making crafts. Hayden says any time spent with eyes on text is beneficial.
- Buy a science notebook and have your children record their daily observations. Have them spend time outside taking notes and drawing pictures of what they see in nature.
- Spend an hour at a bookstore or the library and help your children pick out four or five books they may enjoy reading. Give them [time](#) to read the first few pages of each book and select only those that capture their attention. Allowing children to "try out" the book will increase the likelihood they will want to read and finish the book, Hayden said.
- Ask children to help write a grocery list or create a menu plan for the week to encourage writing. Pack a journal on vacation so

they can write about their experiences and include photos or memorabilia.

- Plant a small garden. Children like the idea of growing things and bringing things to the table to eat. It can be something simple and easy to grow – Hayden recommends green beans – in a small pot or space in the backyard.

Hayden says it is important for children to have ownership and interest in the activity.

"Give children a choice and avoid telling them what book to read," Hayden said. "Help them pick out options that are appropriate and fit their reading level, but let them make the decision."

## Help for struggling students

Getting children involved in the selection process can also help those who struggle to read, Hayden said. The problem is generally not because of a lack of effort on behalf of the child, it's a matter of finding the right reading material. She recommends selecting [books](#) for [summer](#) that are a step below your child's reading or grade level, so they do not get discouraged.

"You want your child to have experience reading and persist through a piece of text, not give up or have it be a painful experience," Hayden said.

Provided by Iowa State University

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