

## How to improve a child's literacy

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent  
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### Albuquerque reading teacher, tutor gives tips

According to the 2022 New Mexico KIDS COUNT Data Book, 79% of New Mexico fourth graders scored below proficient in reading in the 2022 National Assessment of Education Progress.

New Mexico is currently ranked 50th in the nation in fourth grade reading proficiency. The N.M. KIDS COUNT Data Book states that children need to be able to read proficiently by fourth grade in order to be able to use their reading skills in other school subjects. The data book also notes that kids who aren't reading at grade level by that critical point are more likely to drop out of school and less likely to go to college.

So how can parents help their children with their reading, and better prepare them for the future?

Cameron Bourg, an Albuquerque-based reading teacher, tutor, and author of children's books, has some tips.

His first tip is making sure the child is reading something they're interested in. In an interview with the *Sun*, he said that "kids are little sponges" and focusing the reading on things they're interest in will be a big help.

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"Interest inventory is a very powerful tool," he said. "[Kids] want to crack the world around them, and they want to know more about the world around them."

Besides finding books that an individual kid will enjoy, Bourg said to focus on fluency. One way to promote fluency and comprehension is doing a words-per-minute exercise.

Bourg said seeing how many words of a certain text a child can read will help their fluency.

"Words per minute are important, so if you have three or four texts that you want a child to become more proficient in, set up a words-per-minute chart up with them at home," Bourg explained.

Bourg said that when a child is timed to see how far they can read in a minute they can track their progress easily. As they become more and more familiar with the text, they'll be able to see how much they've improved. Bourg said this exercise will boost a child's confidence.

"Hands-on learners will like the words-per-minute {exercise} because they're in direct competition with themselves," Bourg said. "... Confidence is also a very important tool; it's a feeling they get when they feel they've done something correct."

The last tip Bourg shared was one called "shadow-reading." This strategy lets an adult do the reading, and the child marks words that they don't understand. The adult then goes back over the challenging words, and after that is done the student tries reading the text by themselves.

Besides tutoring and teaching in Albuquerque, Bourg also travels around New Mexico giving talks about how to improve a child's literacy skills. He spoke at the Octavia Fellin Public Library at the beginning of February and will speak at the library again in May.

Bourg said he relies on audience participation during his presentations.

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“When I’m there giving a talk or doing a book read I really like to look at my audience and I can tell whether they’re engaged or not,” he said. “I like to focus my techniques on that. I like to read with a lot of expression, I like to ask a question every once in a while, or call on audience participation.”

He also stressed how important the parent’s role is in a child’s literacy journey.

“I think it’s such an important part of learning and literacy to get their parents involved,” Bourg said.

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