

# Key 3rd grade reading skills

## Decoding and fluency

Decoding is the ability to use patterns to figure out words and decipher their separate sounds. Fluency is the ability to read quickly and accurately. Third graders learn the meaning of most common prefixes (e.g. *dis-* in *disagree*; *re-* in *rebuild*; *un-* in *unfriendly*) and simple suffixes (e.g. *-able* in *agreeable* or *-less* in *homeless*). They also be decode dozens of multisyllabic words, such as *pho-to-graph* and *est-i-mate*, as well as read grade-level irregularly spelled words such as *enough*, *especially*, and *confusion*.

Your child should be able to read fairly accurately and fluently (not stumbling over too many words). Using the decoding and fluency skills they've developed, your third grader is able to read text out loud smoothly and with expression, and able to understand what they are reading as they read it.

## Exploring fiction and nonfiction

Third grade is the year of reading mastery. Under the Common Core, second and third grade reading is intertwined. Kids are expected to read different types of fiction and nonfiction — from poems and early literature to science and technical texts (e.g. charts and glossaries). The big difference for third graders is the expectation that, when tackling fiction and nonfiction, your child should be reading text geared toward the high end of grade 3 independently, with expression, understanding, and without much help from adults.

## Building knowledge

Your third grader should be learning from every book she reads and relating that information to what she already knows. Think of it like using reading comprehension skills to build a knowledge bank: with every poem, story, or book she reads, there's a main point, message, and a few key facts that your child learns, relates to what she already knows, and "banks" for future use.

What might building knowledge look like? It's your third grader retelling the Native American myth *How Mosquitos Came To Be* by heart and being able to tell you the story's main message afterward. Or when third graders tackle *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, they should understand how Sarah affected Papa, Anna, and Caleb differently and how each character changed over the course of the book. Your child should be able to distinguish the narrator's, each character's, and their own personal point of view, too. Third graders also start to realize how chapter books — and others texts — are organized, with stories unfolding paragraph by paragraph, one chapter after the next. When it's time for *Skylark*, book two in the series, third graders should become adept at comparing not just how the two stories are similar and different — but how all four characters feel, change, and grow over the course of the two tales.

Your child's teacher will emphasize evidence in different ways this year, but the main skills your child should work on include:

- Asking and answering questions about the five W's — who, what, when, where, and why — to show both understanding and an ability to find answers in a book's text or illustrations.

- Identifying the main topic and then naming key details and explaining how those details support the main idea.
- Explaining how specific images — like a diagram of the parts of a flower — contribute information to what they're reading.
- Describing how a text delivers information in a logical order, such as presenting the problem and then listing the causes or presenting a series of steps in order.

## The wide, wide world of words

Your child's vocabulary plays an increasingly important role in your child's college readiness. The surest way to expand your child's vocabulary is simple: reading. Read aloud to your child and ensure that they read on their own. Your child's teacher will expose her to classic fiction, such as *Charlotte's Web*; poetry, like Robert Frost's *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening*; and nonfiction, like *So You Want to Be President?* Any reading that allows your third grader to recognize and use an ever-richer and more academic will keep your child on track.

All year long, your child will hone her word-recognition skills. Increasingly, she'll be expected to rely on clues within the text to decode meaning. For example, in the sentence *The miserable troll wouldn't stop crying and complaining*, your child might be unfamiliar with the word *miserable*. But this year, your child should be able to figure out that the word means *unhappy* from the context. Your third grader should know how to distinguish shades of meaning among related words (e.g. *knew*, *believed*, *suspected*, *heard*, *wondered*), and how to use base words as clues to the meaning of an unfamiliar word (e.g. *believe*, *unbelievable*), and how a new word is created when an affix is added

to the beginning or end of a known word, such as *-ful* added to success to make *successful*.