

Making a Bright and Brainy Summer

What goes up most during the summer?

- A. The temperature
- B. The price of gas
- C. The school achievement gap

If you guessed “C,” you get an A! Research shows that in the early grades, large gaps in student achievement are due in part to gains made—or not made—when school is out of session. Once the last bell rings, most youngsters expect goof off. But exercising kids’ brains in the summer can bring big benefits in the fall. In particular, disadvantaged students and struggling readers can gain the most from a summer filled with learning activities.

Now is a great time to consider how you can help your child continue his or her academic progress. You don’t need a lot of extra time or cash to give your kids a smarter summer. The trick is to find the fun in reading every day. All people, young and old, tend to be pleasure-oriented—so if reading is a pleasurable activity, then children will be more likely to read for recreation.

Remember that any daily reading, including listening to books-on-tape in the car, or taking a variety of comic books to the beach or on a picnic is good for kids’ brains. The key to success is for the child to choose the subject. A librarian can help children select books on any topic—from baseball to butterflies, from horses to hurricanes—so that they are truly reading (and listening) for pleasure.

Like reading, writing skills benefit from practice. Children can work on their writing skills by writing letters or sending postcards to a pen pal, a relative, or a friend. Many drugstore photo departments sell peel and stick postcard labels, which can be used to turn any photo into a fun postcard. Also available are “photo-funnies” which are sticker labels shaped like cartoon dialogue bubbles with different sayings (and blank ones so you can write your own message) that can be added to any photo postcard for extra fun for both the sender and receiver!

Younger children can play games by spotting letters or words on street signs, in newspapers, or even on cereal boxes. Older kids will find crossword puzzles and other word games boost spelling skills and increase vocabulary. By the way, it never hurts to have an adult join in to help solve the puzzles. Friendly assistance by a caring adult really validates any activity and makes it more fun and interesting.

So when schools are closed, young minds and books must stay open. Many books offer ideas for parents interested in creating a bright and brainy summer for their children. Try **[365 TV Free Activities You Can Do With Your Child](#)** by Steve and Ruth Bennett.