

My child can't read.

My child won't read.

I don't know what to do.



Won't read or Can't read?

Why your child is reluctant to read  
and what you can do about it

Barrington Stoke

# Why doesn't my child read?

**Patience Thomson explores the issues and offers advice and solutions...**

There are plenty of good reasons why a child fails to learn to read and none of them are his fault. They are not your fault either. First find out what the problem is. Then you can take action to get things moving. Don't expect a miracle cure. Look for slow but steady progress, which will gradually build up your child's confidence.



**Does your child think reading is uncool and that TV, computers, Game Boys and football are more fun? Does he like to stick to things he's good at? Does he reject books because he thinks they are not for him?**

A lot of children have a short concentration span and want things instantly. Find books that are short, exciting and satisfying and that match the interests of your child.



**Has your child's schooling been disrupted through illness or frequent moves or constant changes of teacher?**

If he is vulnerable, each setback will put him further behind. It is important to discuss the gaps with the teacher and plan for plugging them.

Read to your child on a regular basis, sharing the enjoyment of a good story. The vocabulary of books is far more extensive than spoken English, so introduce him to a few new words every time.



**Have there been traumatic incidents in his life that have affected him? He may be "emotionally unavailable for work" and unable to concentrate because his mind is constantly on other things.**

Books can play an important role in helping a child, either as a form of escape, or as a way of looking at relevant issues in a different way. Through identifying with the fictional characters the reader realises his problems are not unique and may even work out some similar solutions for himself.



**Could your child be dyslexic? This is surprisingly common and is often inherited. These children are no less bright than their peers, but they find it hard to learn to read by conventional methods and need a different approach.**

Discuss your concerns with your child's teacher. You may be able to get a full assessment through the school. Or you can pay for one privately. For more advice and information try:

- [www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk)
- [www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk](http://www.dyslexia-inst.org.uk)
- [www.arkellcentre.org.uk](http://www.arkellcentre.org.uk)
- [www.dyslexia-scotwest.org.uk](http://www.dyslexia-scotwest.org.uk)
- [www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk](http://www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk)





**Does your child have problems with his eyesight? Does he tire quickly when he's reading? Does he skip words and lines, repeat himself and lose his place? Does black print on white paper hurt his eyes? Problems like these can really affect your child's ability to read comfortably.**

Cream or off-white paper is more restful on the eye. Lines of text of differing lengths make it easier for a child to keep his place. The size of the print, not too large or too small, and proper spacing between the letters, words, lines and paragraphs is important to prevent "words and letters jumping around".



**Does your child find it difficult to concentrate or settle? Hyperactivity is common these days and extreme cases will need to be referred to a specialist doctor. The child's inability to concentrate will affect many areas of his life including reading and most school-work.**

It is vital that the stories are well-written and gripping with lots of cliff-hangers and unexpected twists. Short stories can be more rewarding for hyperactive readers, who will gain confidence from finishing a book.



**Is English your child's second language? It is easier to learn to speak a second language than to read and write it.**

Simple sentence structure and plenty of conversation support readers who are less familiar with the English language and help them pick up current English usage.



**Does your child say, "Books are boring", "Books are not my thing"?**

Reading fluency is a vital skill. It is hard to survive at school without it. So any pleasurable ways of improving a child's reading ability is a bonus. And fiction is important because it feeds the imagination and introduces children to a wide range of experience that would otherwise be beyond their reach.



**How can I tell if a book is too hard?**

Encourage your child to test a page of any book before choosing it. Let your child put a finger on each word he cannot read. If more than five fingers are used on any one page, he will not be able to read it without help.

It is obvious when a child is falling behind with his reading. He himself will be aware of his problems and of his parents' growing anxiety. But there's lots that can be done to help at home. Reading difficulties may be a challenge, but they are not a disaster!

Good luck!

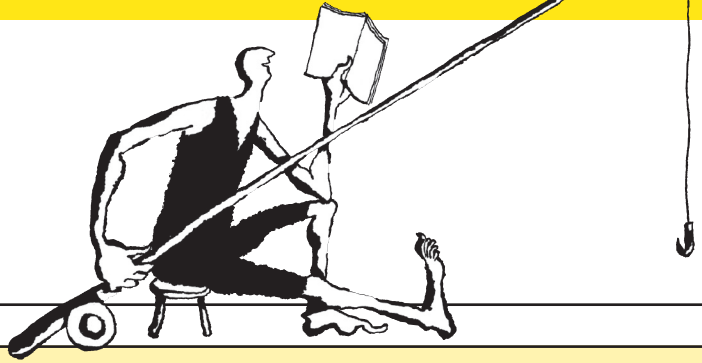
**Patience Thomson, co-founder Barrington Stoke and former Head Teacher.**

# Barrington Stoke Tips for helping reluctant readers

- 1 Parents and carers play a vital role, as their attitude is often the strongest influence on a child. Enthusiasm is catching so never imply reading is a chore.
- 2 Read aloud to your child as often as you can. This is important because it introduces him to a much wider and more literary vocabulary than the limited number of words used in everyday speech.
- 3 Find out which authors your child likes, then read several of their books with him. It's easier to guess what's coming next if the style is a familiar one.
- 4 Tape yourself as you read a book to your child. You can create a bank of stories for those times when you are unable to read to him yourself. Borrow tapes from the library.
- 5 Visit libraries and bookshops with your child. Teach him to check with the librarian or bookseller on where to find the sort of books he enjoys.
- 6 Set aside a time for reading each day when you can be alone and undisturbed with your child. If you are distracted, he will be even more so.
- 7 Read in new places, in the bath, in a den behind the sofa or up a tree!
- 8 When your child starts to read independently, you're still needed. Most reluctant readers like a companion when they're reading to themselves. So why not sit beside him and read your own book?



# What sort of books will get your child hooked?



## First impressions

The books should look attractive and individual but not too different. The covers should be stylish and in no way indicate that they are aimed at less able readers.



## Language

Watch out for oddly spelt, unusual or difficult words. If there are too many it will slow up the reading process. For example, 'fast' is easier than 'quickly', 'wizard' than 'magician' and 'most of the time' than 'usually'. Words like 'neighbour', 'unique', 'echo', and 'anxious' will be real stumbling blocks. Beware also of vocabulary that is dumbed down or over-simplified.



## Gripping stories

Don't go for books, which are technically easy to read, but whose stories are babyish and dull. Barrington Stoke only chooses authors who know how to write an exciting story and grab the child's attention from the first page.



## Illustrations

Intriguing, age-appropriate illustrations will help to motivate young readers and carry the story forward. It will also help to explain difficult words and identify characters.



## Style – keep it simple!

Look for a simple and direct style. There should be nothing to hold up the flow of the story. Barrington Stoke avoids long, complicated sentence structures full of sub clauses. For example: 'Feeling lonely, he sat there miserably, under the tree, in the rain, until it got dark.'



## Keep it short!

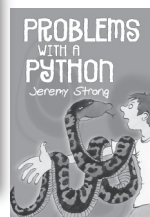
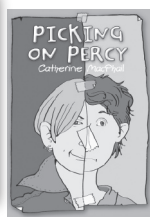
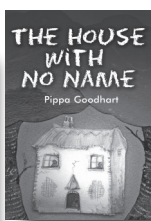
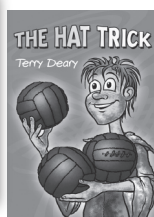
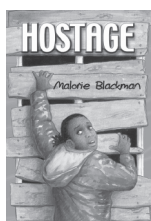
Children will get such a confidence boost if they can get to the end of a book.

# About Barrington Stoke

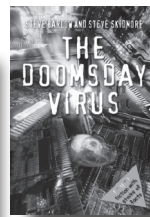
Barrington Stoke is an award-winning publisher of fiction that is designed to entice even the most reluctant reader. We have a huge range of fiction for children of 8-18, to suit all tastes.

Our books are designed to help the struggling reader in every way. The language is very visual and there are plenty of illustrations. Dyslexic and less able readers appreciate and remember a story best if they can run it "like a DVD" in their head.

## Top titles for 8-12 year olds (reading age 8+)



## For 8-12 year olds (reading age 8+)



A range of Barrington Stoke books are available in most good bookshops, including Waterstones, Ottakars, Borders and W H Smiths. A list of Golden Stockists is available from the office or online.

For further information and useful links go to our website at [www.barringtonstoke.co.uk](http://www.barringtonstoke.co.uk)

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