



**National Institute for Literacy**  
The Partnership for Reading

Shining  
Stars

**FIRST GRADERS**  
LEARN TO READ



HOW PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR FIRST GRADERS LEARN TO READ

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

You are your child's first and most important teacher. Use this booklet to help your young child learn to read.

- The story on **PAGE 1** is about the parent of a first grader. As you read it, watch for ways that Hallie's mother helps her learn to read, like when they find words that begin with "H" or when they take turns reading.
- Build your child's reading skills by trying activities like those on **PAGE 4**.
- Use the **CHECKLIST** on the back page to think about your child's reading skills.

# “H” is for Hallie

**H**elping my daughter learn to read is an important part of being her mom. It's right after keeping her safe and making sure she eats and sleeps enough, in my book. Hallie just started first grade. It will be an important year for both of us. I know if she can read by the end of first grade, she should do well in school.

I know I can help Hallie practice what she learns in school, so I try to make reading a big part of our life. I've learned that there's a lot we can do while reading. Just doing everyday things will make Hallie an even stronger reader. I hadn't thought of some of the ideas before, but now they make sense.

She needs to know “sight words,” like “and” and “the” that you need to know when you see them. So we'll flip through a magazine together just to find words like that—“was” and “to” and “by.”

**She can already find a lot of H words.** It's her favorite letter, because it starts her name. And it's the beginning of “horse,” her favorite animal, and “hamburger,” her favorite food. Sometimes on the way to the school bus stop we make up tongue-twisters, like “Horrid Harriet Hated Hats, Had Halloween Hair.” That gets us started on all kinds of games, like thinking of other words like “ghastly” and “hideous” that mean the same thing as “horrid.”

I'm thrilled that she knows the meaning of words like “horrid.” It's an unusual word. When I read Hallie a word I think she doesn't know, I ask her about it. I want her to know as many words as she can, so she's never at a loss for words.



*When I read  
Hallie a word  
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doesn't know,  
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about it.*

**Hallie is beginning to write actual words**, although her spelling can be funny, like hors for horse and blak for black. I can see that she's sounding the words out, and getting the sounds in the right order, even if she doesn't get all the letters. And she's starting to notice when words aren't exactly right, and ask for help spelling them.

Playing silly word games helps me feel close to her. If she's helping me in the kitchen, I might start with "you can catch a catfish, you can catch a flea," and she'll go on with "you can catch a chicken, you can catch a bee," then I'll say, "you can catch a BUS—but you can't catch me!" I'm glad I can still make her giggle.

She and I have always loved rhymes, but now I see how they make you notice the sounds in words. I have heard that the more she notices about sounds, the easier it will be to match those sounds to letters—and she can use that when she's reading.

**At dinner, we talk about the day.** It helps me remember what I did, and reminds me of what's important. And Hallie tells me about what she read at school and about playing kickball with her best friend Joey at recess. Talking like this helps her reading and writing because she has to use words, not pictures, to make me see something.

I know Hallie reads aloud at school, but I still make sure she reads to me for five or ten minutes every day. I help her sound out the words she can't read yet. Sometimes we take turns reading pages so she can hear me saying some of the harder words. Now that Hallie's older, I can read her longer books, like chapter books. I didn't hear a lot of books as a child, so it's a treat for me, too. I get so caught up in those stories! We chatter away about the characters, and what she or I would do in their places.



Hallie's crazy about horses, even though we live in a city. Someday I hope I can take her to ride one. But meanwhile, we read about them. We go to the library, and Hallie chooses books she can read to herself. Some nights, when I check on her after she's asleep, she's still holding one of those books about horses.

**I don't visit Hallie's school often, because I work, but I go to evening meetings when I can.** I'm glad her classroom has plenty of books. Almost everything's labeled, from the reading rug to a plastic elephant, and there are letters and words up on the walls. The teacher puts the kids' writing up on the wall, too. I look for Hallie's first, of course. She doesn't write as well as some of the other kids, but she's definitely writing!

What I like best, though, are the questions the teacher asks: "Who is in the picture?" "Why did the boy draw monsters?" "How do you think the story will end?" It shows me that he is asking them to think, not just know words. With his questions, the teacher is encouraging Hallie to be the smart person she is.

Some days I leave work early so I can pick Hallie up at school and talk with her teacher. I want to know how she's doing. The last time I visited, the teacher said Hallie could practice writing more. So I've been asking Hallie to write me notes sometimes when she has a question, and every month we write a letter to her grandfather together.

Today on the way home from school Hallie and I stopped at the corner grocery. I picked up some cookies—for later, I told her, after dinner and some practice writing. But it was still early, so Hallie asked if we could walk home the long way, through the park. The trees were soft and hazy. The leaves weren't out yet, and the flowers hadn't begun to blossom yet. But they will. And so will Hallie.

**The End.**

*Rhymes help  
you notice  
the sounds in  
words.*



# There's more to reading together than just saying the words.

*Try asking your first grader questions like these when you read together.*

## Talk about the story...

- **What is the fox helping the boy find?**  
*The golden horse.*
- **What does the fox tell the boy to do with the old saddle?**  
*Put it on the horse.*
- **Would a fox really let a boy sit on his back? Could a fox really fly?**  
*Not really. This is imagination.*
- **Do you think the boy will follow the fox's advice this time? Why or why not?**  
*Probably, because he didn't listen the first time and got into trouble.*

## Talk about words and sounds...

- **How many words can you think of the rhyme with fox? With gold?**  
*Box, socks, clocks, etc. Fold, bold, rolled, etc.*
- **How many words on these pages start with "w"?**  
*Seven.*
- **What are some words that mean the same as "fast"?**  
*Quick, speedy, rapid.*

## Talk about new words...

- **What is a "groom"?**  
*A person who takes care of horses.*
- **What color is "golden" like?**  
*Yellow.*
- **What do you see behind the castle?**  
*Mountains.*

## THE GOLDEN HORSE

**T**he fox said, "Now you see what happened because you did not listen to me! I will help you find the golden horse, but this time, do as I tell you. When we reach the castle, go straight to the barn.



There you will find the horse, his groom sleeping nearby, and two saddles. One saddle will be made of gold, and the other of old leather. Lead the horse away quietly, but put the old leather saddle on him. Leave the golden saddle behind."

Then the boy climbed onto the fox's back and they flew off so fast the wind whistled in the boy's hair.







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# Checklist

FOR PARENTS OF FIRST GRADERS

*These skills usually develop during first grade. Talk with your child's teacher if you have questions.*

- My child knows all the letters of the alphabet.
- My child knows the difference between letters and words, and knows there are spaces between words in print.
- My child knows that written words represent speech and can show how words are represented by letters arranged in a specific order.
- My child knows some punctuation marks and where sentences and paragraphs begin and end.
- My child is beginning to understand and explain why people read.
- My child can put together (blend) and break apart the sounds of most one-syllable words and can count the number of syllables in a word.
- My child can sound out words he doesn't know, and recognize some irregularly spelled words, such as have, said, you, and are.
- My child reads first grade books aloud, and can tell when she cannot understand what she is reading.

(over)

- My child reads and understands simple written instructions.
- My child uses what he already knows to enrich what he is reading.
- My child predicts what will happen next in a story
- My child asks questions (how, why, what if?) about books she is reading and can describe what she has learned from a book.
- My child uses invented spelling in his writing and also understands that there is correct way to spell words.
- My child uses simple punctuation marks and capital letters.
- My child writes for different purposes—stories, explanations, lists, letters—and reads and revises her writing.
- My child uses language with more control, speaks in complete sentences, and uses more formal language at school than at home and with friends.
- My child is curious about words and uses new words when he speaks and writes.
- My child is beginning to see that some words mean the same thing (synonyms) and some mean the opposite (antonyms).
- My child is learning that words play different roles in sentences—that nouns name things and verbs show action, for example.

This checklist is adapted from *A Child Becomes a Reader—Birth Through Preschool*. Get a free copy at [www.nifl.gov](http://www.nifl.gov).