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Keep kids reading this summer and avoid the 'summer slide'



Kids watch as magician Tommy Terrific, AKA Tommy Diaz, performs at QuikTrip Plaza during the "Storytime in the Park" kids summer reading series. MICHAEL WYKE/Tulsa World

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By Rita Sherrow World Scene Writer | 9 0 comments

Summer is the time for fun — but not the "summer slide."

That's something you don't want your kids to experience, according to experts. The term refers to what happens when kids don't read during the summer months.

"Research shows children that don't read at all in the summer can lose up to two months or more of their reading skills and then they will start the next school year a little behind," said Marianne Stambaugh, youth services manager for the Tulsa City-County Library.

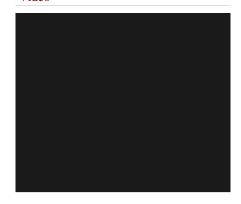
"It affects everything in school," said Stambaugh. "We talk about kids needing to read in the summer but what they need really is to be engaged in the summer whether it is traveling, going to camp, being exposed to new things. In the summer, you're home and it needs to be informal and recreational, not formal learning.

"I think the goal in the summer is to let reading be fun and don't hang it over the kids like a homework assignment."

There are several ways parents can help keep their children engaged and reading. Have books and magazines around the home. Pick books, magazines or comic books that you know will interest your kids. Even playing video games on the Internet can involve a lot of reading. So can following a recipe and cooking, Stambaugh said. Recipes are good and the edible outcome can be a "powerful



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motivator "

"I feel very strongly that you should let your child take the lead on what they want to read," said Stambaugh, who also serves as children's services coordinator.

"If you're planning to take a trip, find a book about your destination. Or if you are going fishing or out to the Oklahoma Aquarium, find books that play into that to read after you return.

"I think the example of reading is probably the most important. But, second to that, if parents aren't reading naturally themselves, if they could be just a little more conscientious of it."

Stambaugh, who holds a degree in library and information studies and studied children's literature, said she can tell by the demeanor of a child entering the library if it's going to be a good experience or not.

"That's why I say the best book for a kid is the book he or she wants to read.

Stambaugh said parents need to let kids follow their reading interests.

"In the summer, I will see kids come to the library with their shoulder slumped down and they have that look of 'Mom is going to make me read.' I will say, 'Have you seen this book on snakes or this joke book?' Kids are thinking of books as chapters, not something fun. Then later, I hear the Mom say 'I told you you could only have four books today.'

"You just have to find what lights them up."

The Tulsa City-County Library system provides reading programs for children such as "Storytime in the Park," which kicked off last Thursday and runs through August, and the Summer Reading Program, which enrolls approximately 44,000 youngsters under 16 years old each summer through Tulsa's 24 libraries. The Summer Reading Program includes prizes such as medals and age-appropriate coupons for food and entertainment. For the first time, the program offers an online-only component for adults as well as one for teenagers, Stambaugh said. For more information about the reading program, call 918-549-7323 or look online at bit.ly/readprogram

The library also offers events that let kids partake in the reading experience in groups. These include a science show with performer Chris Middlebrook, LEGO competitions at 14 locations, duct tape crafts, shrinky dinks toy workshops and book clubs.

"Every location chooses the programs that they think their kids will like and then the library system hires performers who give the bigger shows," Stambaugh added.

The goal is to show kids reading is fun. And, for parents, that it's essential to success in school.

"I know parents have been really worried about reading right now with the third grade tests, but everyone needs a break in the summer," Stambaugh said.

"That doesn't mean a break from reading but just keep it light, keep it fun ... help your child find books that are interesting or fun and don't worry if they don't like the book that was your favorite when you were a child."

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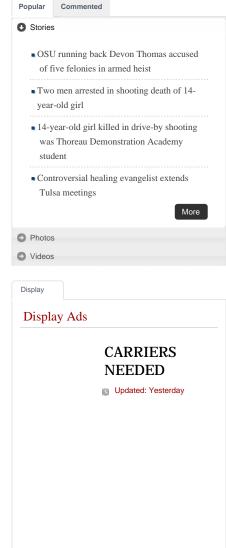
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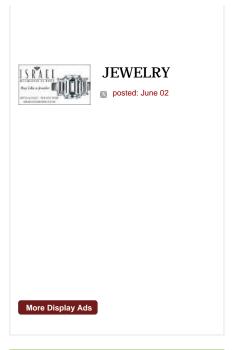
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