



How to Talk with Your Kids About Books

3 CONVERSATION STARTERS YOU

CAN USE WITH ANY BOOK

How to Talk with Your Kids About Books

Do you ever wish you knew how to talk with your kids about books?

Talking about books with my kids has been the single most meaningful way I've connected with them through the years. Those discussions didn't just deepen our relationships; they helped my kids fall in love with books and gave them lasting tools for writing and communication.

You tell your family what happened at the grocery store. You talk about a movie you loved. You mention a story you came across in the news, or share an experience a relative had and called you about.

Whether it's a book you've read aloud together or one they've finished on their own, there's something about a good story that makes us want to talk about it.

When we approach conversations about books as actual conversations (and not quizzes), our relationships change for the better. **Our kids feel seen and heard.** They experience an invitation to wonder, to get curious, and to connect ideas.

And our relationships aren't the only thing that benefit—open-ended conversations have a greater impact on our kids' writing and communication skills than almost anything else we do.

In this guide, you'll learn how simple and effective it can be to talk about books in ways that deepen your connections and help your kids become discerning readers and writers.

It's easier than you think, it doesn't cost a thing—and it can change everything. So let's go.



Sarah Mackenzie

You can join Sarah in a 12-min video as she walks you through this guide [right here](#).



TIP

BEFORE WE GET TO THE 3 CONVERSATION STARTERS,
THERE ARE TWO SIMPLE PRINCIPLES TO KEEP IN MIND:

Keys to Open the Door to Conversation

★ START WITH AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION.

An open-ended question doesn't have a single correct answer. It invites your child to get curious about possibilities.

★ ANSWER THE QUESTION YOURSELF FIRST.

Rather than asking your child the question, start by answering it yourself. When you share your own thoughts first, you initiate a conversation rather than a quiz.

TIP

Don't Sweat the Answers.

The act of *asking questions* matters much more than any specific answer. Focus on developing the habit of asking questions, which invites your child to engage more deeply and become an active reader.



3 Conversation Starters You Can Use With Any Book

Notice how these conversation starters work equally well with picture books as with contemporary novels and time-honored classics.

Because the questions are open-ended, your child will answer based on his or her own developmental stage. You can use the same questions to prompt a conversation with any child of any age about any book.

TIP Try starting the conversation by answering the conversation starter first.

1 Should he/she have done that?

Should is an incredibly powerful word. The answer to this question might seem obvious on the surface, but ask this question once or twice, and you may be surprised at how much fun you can have with it.

To ask this question, choose any character from the story and any of his or her actions from the book. Ask your child if the character in question should have done the action in question, and then follow that up by asking why.

examples

- Should Strega Nona have left Big Anthony on his own with her pasta pot? Why or why not? (*Strega Nona*)
- Should the Ingalls family have continued on the trail without Jack? Why or why not? (*Little House on the Prairie*)
- Should Hamlet avenge the ghost of his father? Why or why not? (*Hamlet*)

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How is this like... or different from...?

Everything in the world is like everything else. Everything in the world is also different from everything else.

When we think carefully about how characters, places, or events in the books we read are similar or different from others, we practice the art of thinking in metaphor.

examples

- How were the new designs Frank Lloyd Wright designed the same as the old designs? How were they different? (*Prairie Boy*)
- How are the Vanderbeeker siblings alike? How are they different? (*The Vanderbeekers of 141st Street*)
- How is Heidi's life with Grandfather the same as her life in Frankfurt? How is it different? (*Heidi*)

TIP

If you find you get stuck with this one, consider differences first. Those are often easier to spot than similarities!

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Who was _____ in this story?

★ THIS CONVERSATION STARTER WORKS ESPECIALLY WELL WITH BOOKS THAT YOUR KIDS HAVE READ, BUT YOU HAVEN'T.

Insert any character trait into the blank space. You'll find a list of possible traits to use below, but don't feel limited by these. You can insert any character trait at all.

You'll want to follow up this question with, **"What makes you say that?"** or **"Can you give me an example?"** This gives your kids practice using **textual evidence** . . . but no need to tell them that!

character traits

ambitious	creative	grateful	naughty	sad
bold	dangerous	greedy	nervous	selfish
brave	dauntless	happy	noble	selfless
bright	deceptive	hard-working	obnoxious	sharp-witted
calm	disloyal	honest	optimistic	sincere
capable	demanding	humorous	persistent	thoughtful
careful	determined	inconsiderate	pleasant	unkind
cautious	faithful	intelligent	proud	unselfish
charming	foolish	loving	reliable	virtuous
considerate	friendly	merciful	resourceful	wise
cowardly	generous	mysterious	restless	witty

TIP

Try not to use superlatives. Answering, "Who was the most courageous in this story?" is much harder to answer than simply, "Who was courageous in this story?" Remember, we're going for a conversation, not one correct answer.



Printable Bookmarks

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CONVERSATION STARTERS

- 1 Should he or she have done that?
- 2 How is this like . . . or different from . . . ?
- 3 Who was _____ in this story?

Character Traits:

Loving, sharp-witted, thoughtful, unselfish, witty, sad, happy, hard-working, wise, virtuous, restless, intelligent, humorous, humble, charming, cautious, noble, brave, cowardly, generous, demanding, determined, nervous, careful, calm, dangerous, grateful, obnoxious, naughty, proud, bold

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WE CAN'T WAIT TO COME ALONGSIDE YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY TO MAKING MEANINGFUL AND LASTING CONNECTIONS WITH YOUR KIDS THROUGH BOOKS.