Best reading apps for kids: free learn-to-read apps, 2026

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The best reading apps for kids, free and paid, checked October 2026: learn-to-read apps side by side with cost, ages, ads and accounts, and what each one does.

The best reading apps for kids depend on the job: Starfall's Learn-to-Read steps, Teach Your Monster to Read (free on a computer), Khan Academy Kids and Duolingo ABC teach letter sounds and first words for free, Storyline Online and Unite for Literacy read books aloud, and Libby lends real ebooks with a library card. To practise with nothing to install, Peabody's leveled stories and reading games such as Deep Dig open in the browser with no sign-up; Peabody is ours, and free through the end of 2026.

Peabody (peabody.kids) wrote this guide. None of the other apps are ours, and nobody paid to be listed. Every fact about another app below was read from its own public pages in October 2026 (the first table on 18 October, with Starfall's, Epic's and Teach Your Monster to Read's rows read again on 31 October, the learn-to-read table on 24 October), and each one is linked. Where a page does not say something, we write "not stated", which is not the same as "no". There are no scores and no ranking, the same rule as our free learning apps comparison. Prices and plans change, so treat this as true as of October 2026.

Free reading apps for kids, side by side

- App: Khan Academy Kids · What is free: The app, with no subscriptions; schools can pay for a version · Account?: A name and age at setup · Ads?: No, the page says · Ages (as the page states): 2 to 8 · Kind of reading: Books, videos and early literacy activities
- App: Starfall · What is free: The four-step Learn-to-Read program; the rest of the site is a $35 a year home membership · Account?: None for the Learn-to-Read steps, which open straight from the page · Ads?: No, the page says · Ages (as the page states): Pre-K to 5th grade · Kind of reading: Phonics-led learn-to-read steps
- App: Teach Your Monster to Read · What is free: The game on laptops and computers; the phone and tablet apps are paid (no price on the page; the iPhone and iPad app was $8.99 on the US App Store) · Account?: A free account, set up by a grown-up · Ads?: Not stated · Ages (as the page states): "The first two years of learning to read" · Kind of reading: Phonics game, letter sounds to sentences
- App: Storyline Online · What is free: Everything; its FAQ says it is free and ad-free · Account?: None on its own player; YouTube playback needs a YouTube sign-in · Ads?: No · Ages (as the page states): A suggested grade for each book · Kind of reading: Listening: actors read picture books aloud

- App: Unite for Literacy · What is free: More than 600 picture books, at no cost · Account?: No login or registration · Ads?: Not stated · Ages (as the page states): Birth to about 8 · Kind of reading: Picture books with narration in 60+ languages
- App: Libby · What is free: Ebooks and audiobooks your public library lends · Account?: A library card · Ads?: Not stated · Ages (as the page states): Depends on your library's collection · Kind of reading: Free choice: real books to borrow
- App: Sora · What is free: The app; the books come from your child's school library · Account?: School sign-in · Ads?: Not stated · Ages (as the page states): App rated 4+ · Kind of reading: Free choice: the school's ebooks and audiobooks
- App: Epic · What is free: Epic School for teachers: about 20,000 of its 40,000+ books, on weekdays 7am to 4pm; families get a free trial · Account?: A teacher's account for Epic School; a grown-up's for the family plan · Ads?: Not stated · Ages (as the page states): 12 and under · Kind of reading: Free choice digital library
- App: Peabody · What is free: Everything, through the end of 2026 · Account?: None to start · Ads?: No · Ages (as the page states): Pre-readers to about 8th grade · Kind of reading: Decodable first books, leveled stories, a read-aloud button

A few things this table shows quickly. "Free" means very different things: free for everyone (Storyline Online, Unite for Literacy, Khan Academy Kids), free for one part (Starfall, Teach Your Monster to Read on a computer), free through someone else (Libby through your library, Sora and Epic through a school), or free for a period (Peabody, through 2026). And the kind of reading differs even more than the price.

Learn-to-read apps, free and paid, side by side

The table above is mostly free books. These are the apps that teach reading step by step, from letter sounds to first books, and many of the well-known ones are paid. The facts come from each maker's own pages, read for our Big Index on 24 October 2026; each name opens our directory page, which links the sources and adds the age rules, data and what to watch for. Alphabetical, no scores.

- App: ABCmouse · Cost (US, October 2026): 30-day free trial, then $14.99 a month or $79.99 a year · Ages (as stated): About 2 to 6 · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: A guided path of reading, math and more for preschool and kindergarten
- App: Duolingo ABC · Cost (US, October 2026): Free · Ages (as stated): About 3 to 8 · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: 700+ short lessons on letters, phonics, sight words and vocabulary
- App: Ello · Cost (US, October 2026): Free daily activities; Ello Unlimited is sold in the app, price not on the website · Ages (as stated): About 5 to 9 · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: Listens as a child reads aloud from 1,200+ decodable books and coaches misread words

• App: Epic · Cost (US, October 2026): Family plan after a 7-day free trial ($4.99 to $13.99 a month on the App Store, by offer); free in school hours through a teacher · Ages (as stated): About 2 to 12 · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: A library of 40,000+ books, audiobooks and read-to-me books (Epic School opens about 20,000 of them)
• App: HOMER · Cost (US, October 2026): 30-day free trial, then $9.99 a month or $59.99 a year · Ages (as stated): About 2 to 8 · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: A step-by-step learn-to-read path, plus math and thinking games
• App: Khan Academy Kids · Cost (US, October 2026): Free, no subscription · Ages (as stated): 2 to 8 · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: Games, books and videos in early reading, phonics and math
• App: Microsoft Reading Coach · Cost (US, October 2026): Free with a personal Microsoft account · Ages (as stated): Most useful for 6 to 11, suitable for 5 to 18, per Microsoft · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: A child reads aloud while it tracks accuracy and drills missed words; AI writes choose-your-path stories
• App: Nessy Reading and Spelling · Cost (US, October 2026): $15.50 a month or $126 a year for one child · Ages (as stated): About 6 to 11 · Ads: Not stated · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: A placement test, then about 100 lessons of videos and games, from a company that grew out of a dyslexia centre
• App: Read Along by Google · Cost (US, October 2026): Free, no ads or upsells · Ages (as stated): About 5 to 10 · Ads: No · Account: None · What it does: A reading buddy listens as a child reads stories aloud (Android and web)
• App: Reading Eggs · Cost (US, October 2026): Free trial, then $13.99 a month or $99.99 a year for up to 4 children · Ages (as stated): About 2 to 13 · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: Animated lessons, phonics games and an e-book library
• App: Starfall · Cost (US, October 2026): Learn-to-Read free; home membership $35 a year · Ages (as stated): About 3 to 11 · Ads: No · Account: None for Learn-to-Read · What it does: Letter sounds, phonics and first stories in order
• App: Teach Your Monster to Read · Cost (US, October 2026): Free on a computer; iPhone and iPad app $8.99 · Ages (as stated): About 3 to 6 · Ads: No · Account: A grown-up's · What it does: A phonics game from letter sounds to sentences
• App: Peabody (ours) · Cost (US, October 2026): Everything, through the end of 2026 · Ages (as stated): Pre-readers to about 8th grade · Ads: No · Account: None to start · What it does: Decodable first books, leveled stories, a read-aloud button and reading games, in the browser

What the table says, in short:

• Free learn-to-read apps are real. Khan Academy Kids, Duolingo ABC, Read Along and Starfall's Learn-to-Read steps cost nothing as of October 2026, and none of them show

ads.
• Most paid apps start with a free trial that renews. ABCmouse, HOMER and Reading Eggs roll into a paid plan unless you cancel, so put the end date in your calendar.
• Three listen to a child read aloud: Ello, Read Along and Microsoft Reading Coach use the microphone. Their makers handle the voice differently (Microsoft says it is processed on the device, Google says on the device except in limited cases, and Ello says it keeps raw audio for 30 days), so read what each privacy page says before you allow the mic; our directory pages sum them up. Peabody never listens to a child. For a paid one on iPhone and iPad, see our note on Readigo, which sends the voice to the cloud and says so.
• Phone or browser matters. Khan Academy Kids, Duolingo ABC and HOMER are phone and tablet apps; Starfall, Teach Your Monster to Read (on a computer) and Peabody open in a browser.

What kind of reading does your child need?

Children need different reading at different stages. A free reading program that is perfect for a four-year-old can be useless for a seven-year-old.

• Listening. Being read to builds vocabulary, background knowledge and a love of stories long before a child can decode. Storyline Online and Unite for Literacy do this well, and so does you reading a library book on the sofa.
• Phonics practice. Learning which sounds the letters make, and blending them into words. Starfall's Learn-to-Read steps and Teach Your Monster to Read are built for this.
• Decodable books. Books that only use the letter-sound patterns a child has been taught, plus a few heart words, so every word can be sounded out. These matter most in kindergarten and first grade. We explain why in decodable readers and leveled readers.
• Leveled books. Sorted by overall difficulty. Useful once decoding is secure, for fluency and stamina.
• Free choice. Whatever a child wants to read. This is where Libby, Sora and Epic shine, because they hold real published books.

How to choose a reading app by age

Ages 2 to 4: listening and sounds

At this age the goal is talk, stories and noticing sounds, not reading words. Try Storyline Online together, pick a narrated book on Unite for Literacy, or open Khan Academy Kids, which is made for ages 2 to 8. Sit with them. A screen story is better with a grown-up asking "what do you think happens next?"

Ages 4 to 6: letter sounds and first words

Now a child starts linking letters to sounds and blending them: c-a-t, cat. Starfall's free Learn-to-Read steps and Teach Your Monster to Read on a computer both work on this. Peabody's level 0 page shows its first rung: books made from a few letters and short sound-it-out words, a big picture on every page of the first books, and stories checked against the sounds a child has met.

Ages 6 to 8: decodable, then leveled

Most children in first and second grade need lots of practice reading text they can actually sound out, then gradually longer books. Peabody's level 7 and level 8 pages show what changes as the levels climb. A library card in Libby opens real early readers and chapter books, and if your child's school uses Sora or Epic, ask the teacher how to read at home.

Ages 8 and up: free choice and stamina

Older readers mostly need time with books they choose. Libby and Sora are the richest free sources of real books. Peabody's library runs up to about eighth grade, and its higher levels add practice words with kid-sized meanings.

For more on matching books to a stage, see free stories by reading level and our step-by-step guide on how to teach a child to read.

What Peabody does for reading (ours)

We make it, so we describe it and don't rate it. Here is what Peabody does, checked against its own code:

- A free library you can open without an account. Stories from first books to about eighth grade, each marked with its level. Open the library and let your child pick.
- Nineteen reading levels, 0 to 18. Level 0 is for a child who cannot read yet. A story's level is measured from its text by code: sentence length, words per screen and how familiar the words are.
- Decodable first books. At levels 3 to 5, a story written for a child is checked against the phonics patterns that child has met, and repaired or rewritten if too many words can't be sounded out yet.
- AI-written stories at the child's level. A child taps a few ideas and a mood, and Peabody writes a short story at their level. AI writes it; code checks the level and safety screens run before anything is shown. See the free AI story generator.
- A read-aloud button. The button reads text using the voices built into the browser, for children who can't read the words yet.
- Reading games. Short games that practise first sounds, rhymes, phonics, sight words, spelling and vocabulary. They're covered in free reading games for kids.

- No ads, no open chat with an AI, and nothing to sign up for to start.

Peabody's honest limits

- It can't hear your child read. Peabody never listens to a child, so it can't check accuracy or fluency aloud. Listening to your child read is still a grown-up's job, and a lovely one.
- Levels are estimates. A level is a good starting guess, measured from the text, and it moves with how reading goes. It is not a test result or a grade equivalent.
- There is a daily limit on new AI stories. The library has no limit.
- It is not a full reading curriculum and has no teacher dashboard. It has no efficacy study of its own yet.
- Its free period is promised only through 31 December 2026. What happens after that hasn't been decided.

If your child is struggling to learn to read, no app replaces a conversation with their teacher.

A simple plan using free apps

1. Pick one listening source for bedtime or car rides, such as Storyline Online or Unite for Literacy.
2. Pick one practice app that matches the stage: a phonics app for beginners, leveled stories for newer readers.
3. Get a library card and set up Libby, so there is always a real book to borrow.
4. Keep it short and regular. A few minutes most days beats a long session once a week. Our post on little and often reading explains why.
5. Read together. Even ten minutes of you and a book counts.

What paid reading apps charge

Books at the child's level

- App: Epic · Price on 30 Oct 2026: families $7.99 to $13.99 a month (App Store); Epic School free from 7am to 4pm for students · Ages: 2 to 12 · What the money buys: 40,000+ books at the child's level, badges, a parent dashboard
- App: ReadingIQ · Price on 30 Oct 2026: $7.99 a month · Ages: 2 to 10 · What the money buys: 1,000+ leveled books, with quizzes
- App: Raz-Kids / Raz-Plus (Learning A-Z) · Price on 30 Oct 2026: $158.99 / $294.99 a year (App Store) · Ages: K to 5 · What the money buys: leveled e-books to listen to, read, record and quiz, mostly bought by teachers

Learning to read

- App: Reading Eggs · Price on 30 Oct 2026: $69.99 a year · Ages: 2 to 8 · What the money buys: a phonics path with a placement test
- App: HOMER · Price on 30 Oct 2026: $59.99 a year · Ages: 2 to 8 · What the money buys: a phonics path with a placement test

Logs, challenges and rewards

- App: Reader Zone · Price on 30 Oct 2026: Classroom $60 a year for 40 readers; a free trial edition for 10 readers · Who buys it: teachers, libraries · What the money buys: minutes, pages or books, goals, badges, a teacher dashboard
- App: YOMU · Price on 30 Oct 2026: tracking free; Family Rewards $9.99 a month or $95.99 a year · Who buys it: parents · What the money buys: a timer, streaks, gems turned into family rewards
- App: Beanstack · Price on 30 Oct 2026: a quote only, sold to schools and libraries; Beanstack Go free for readers whose library doesn't subscribe · Who buys it: districts, libraries · What the money buys: challenges, a timer, streaks, badges, reports
- App: Pizza Hut BOOK IT! · Price on 30 Oct 2026: free (a sponsor pays) · Who buys it: classes, homeschoolers · What the money buys: a monthly goal and a pizza certificate
- App: Page Turner · Price on 30 Oct 2026: free · Who buys it: parents · What the money buys: barcode add, minutes, streaks, custom challenges

Schools buy some of these too, so ask your child's teacher before you pay: if the school already has a licence, your child may be able to use it at home.

Most of what the money buys is a licensed library of books, a planned path through phonics, or reports for a grown-up; the log, the streak and the badges are not what you are paying for.

Five questions before you start a trial

1. What happens when the trial ends? Most trials turn into a paid plan unless you cancel. Put the date in your calendar the day you start. On 30 October 2026, Epic's reviews on Trustpilot averaged 3.1 out of 5, and billing was the top complaint.
2. How do I cancel, and where? A subscription bought through an app store is usually managed in the device's settings rather than in the app; one bought on a website is managed there. Know which you have.
3. What does it collect about my child? A name, a photo, a recording of their voice, their reading level? Read the privacy page before the sign-up page.
4. Does it work for more than one child? Some trackers handle one child well and siblings badly; reviews of the logging apps mention twins logged one at a time and a second child that can't be added.
5. Is the school already paying for something? Ask before you buy a second app that does

the same thing.

Reading apps that listen to your child read

• Ello (ages 5-9, Free core; optional paid upgrade): Ello listens in real time as a child reads decodable books and steps in on the exact sound they missed. In 2026 the core reading and math activities are free. Watch: Microphone use; read the privacy policy on voice recordings.
• Read Along by Google (ages 5-10, Free): A friendly guide listens as kids read stories aloud, helps on tricky words and adds word games. Works offline once stories are downloaded, and has no ads.
• Microsoft Reading Coach (ages 6-11, suitable for 5-18; Free with a Microsoft account): Kids build a story from characters and settings they choose, AI writes it at their level, and the coach gives practice on the words they found hard. Can also use your own text.
• Readigo (ages 6-12, $9.99/month or $59.99/year; no free trial (Nov 2026)): Listens as a child reads aloud, scores each sentence, marks misread words in red and crosses out skipped ones, with a Try again button. Manga-style stories and a range up to age 12 suit older kids who still read haltingly. Its maker sets out price, ages and where the voice goes in plain words.
• Amira (ages K-6, Through schools and districts): A reading tutor used by schools that listens to kids read in English or Spanish and gives feedback on the spot. Some districts and libraries offer it free for home use.
• Lalilo (ages K-2, Through schools): A phonics program for kindergarten to second grade that schools use, with speech recognition to check sounds and words read aloud. Ask your child's teacher; if the class uses it, home practice is usually included.
• Immersive Reader (all ages, Free): Built into Edge, Word and OneNote. It reads text aloud, highlights each word, splits syllables and can show a picture for a word. Great for a child stuck on a hard page.
• Gemini Storybook (for young kids, run by a parent; Free): Describe a story and Gemini makes a 10-page illustrated book with read-aloud narration, in 45+ languages. Fun for reluctant readers who want to read about their own idea.
• Speechify (ages 10 and up, Free tier; Premium about $139/year (Oct 2026)): Turns any text, PDF or web page into natural-sounding audio with words highlighted. Helps older kids who can understand more than they can decode. Listening while reading along builds vocabulary.
• Khan Academy Kids (ages 2-8, Free): No generative AI here, and that is the point: a free, ad-free app with books, phonics and games for little kids, from a nonprofit. A calm choice for preschoolers.
• Epic (ages up to 12, Subscription; free for teachers): A large digital library of children's books, with read-to-me titles for early readers. Not an AI app; a useful pair with any of the

listening coaches above.

• NaturalReader (ages 8 and up, with a parent; Free tier; Premium $9.99 a month or $59.99 a year on iOS (Oct 2026)): Reads documents, web pages, PDFs and photos of printed pages aloud in AI voices, with highlighting that follows the voice and a dyslexia-friendly font. Useful for an older child who can read but finds long texts tiring, and for checking a draft by ear. Watch: The privacy policy says a child should not open a consumer account without a parent's authorization. A voice reading to a child is not the same as a child reading, so use it as a support, not a substitute.

• Learning Ally (ages 5-18, Paid membership or through a school (check current price)): Human-narrated audiobooks for students with dyslexia and other learning differences, so a child can follow a grade-level text with a real reader's voice. Not AI, and that is the point: children hear natural phrasing and expression.

• ReadTheory (ages 6 to adult, Free for students; paid teacher features): Adaptive reading passages with quick questions, where the next text gets harder or easier based on the answers. A short daily practice for comprehension in grades 2 and up. Teachers and parents can see progress.

• Reading Rockets (for parents, Free): A nonprofit's guide for families on how reading is taught and how to help at home, with book lists, short videos and advice for struggling readers. Read it before you choose a reading app, to know what a good phonics routine looks like.

Using Peabody in your homeschool

For a homeschool, the plan above becomes a daily reading block: a read-aloud from a listening app or a library book (10 minutes), then 10 to 15 minutes on one practice app, then your child reads aloud to you. On Peabody, that middle part can be a story from the library at your child's level from Monday to Thursday, and on Friday a story your child makes from their own ideas on the free AI story generator. Ask one or two questions after each. The honest limit: Peabody can't hear your child read, so the reading-aloud part, and any note of how fluent it sounded, stays with you. For a year laid out by grade, see the free homeschool reading plan and the homeschool hub.

Learn more elsewhere

• IES practice guide: foundational reading skills for K–3: four recommendations, each rated for strength of evidence, from the US Institute of Education Sciences.

• IES tips for supporting reading skills at home: a short, practical handout for parents of kindergarten to third graders.

• Libby help: getting started: how to borrow free ebooks with a library card.

• Unite for Literacy FAQ: how its free narrated picture books work.

Questions parents ask

What is the best free reading app for kids?

There isn't one best app, because children need different reading at different stages. For listening, try Storyline Online or Unite for Literacy. For learning letter sounds, Starfall's free Learn-to-Read steps or Teach Your Monster to Read on a computer. For real books, Libby with a library card. Peabody offers free leveled stories and decodable first books through the end of 2026.

What is the best app to help a kid learn to read?

It depends on the step your child is on, so no one app is best. For letter sounds and blending, the free choices are Starfall's Learn-to-Read steps, Teach Your Monster to Read on a computer, Khan Academy Kids and Duolingo ABC; paid ones include HOMER, Reading Eggs and ABCmouse, which start with free trials. Once a child reads short words, books they can sound out matter most, which is what Peabody's free decodable first books are for.

Which reading apps listen to my child read aloud?

As of October 2026, Ello, Read Along by Google and Microsoft Reading Coach use the microphone to hear a child read and help with missed words. Each handles the recordings differently, so read its privacy page first. Peabody never listens to a child, so reading aloud to you stays your part.

Are there completely free reading apps with no ads?

Yes. As of October 2026, Storyline Online's FAQ says it is free and ad-free, Khan Academy Kids says it has no ads and no subscriptions, and Starfall says it has no advertising (its free part is the Learn-to-Read program). Peabody has no ads and is free through 31 December 2026.

Is Epic free for families?

As of October 2026, Epic's educators page offers Epic School free to teachers, with books available on weekdays from 7am to 4pm. Families are offered Epic Family with a 7-day free trial; on the US App Store its monthly price ran from $4.99 to $13.99 depending on the offer when we checked on 24 October 2026. If your child's teacher uses Epic, ask how reading at home works.

Where can I find free online books for kids?

Unite for Literacy has more than 600 free picture books with no login. Storyline Online has picture books read aloud by actors. Your public library lends ebooks and audiobooks free through Libby with a library card. Peabody's library of leveled stories is free to open without an

account through the end of 2026.

Can a reading app teach my child to read on its own?

No app should be expected to. Apps can give extra practice, but children learn most from being taught letter sounds in a clear order, reading books they can sound out, and being read to and talked with by a grown-up. Peabody, for example, cannot hear a child read aloud.

Is Teach Your Monster to Read free?

Its website says the games are free to play on laptops and computers, with a free account. The phone and tablet apps are paid: the iPhone and iPad app was $8.99 on the US App Store when we checked on 24 October 2026.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/best-free-reading-apps-for-kids