How to run a read-a-thon at school without a fundraising platform

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Read-a-thon ideas for school: a plan for one day or a week, a poster, a class wall chart, certificates and a cheer sheet, free to print, with no money in it.

A read-a-thon is a day, or a week, when a class or a whole school reads as much as it can toward one shared goal. It needs a plan, a poster, a wall chart to colour, and a certificate at the end. Peabody's read-a-thon kit has all of them free to print, plus a March reading-month calendar, and like the rest of Peabody it is free through the end of 2026.

What the kit doesn't have is money. Many read-a-thons are fundraisers, and the platforms that run them take a share of what families give and ask for each child's details to do it. If your school raises funds, keep that on its own paper. The kit keeps the reading.

The one-day read-a-thon

One button prints the four sheets a class needs for a single day:

1. The plan, hour by hour: a goal set first thing, reading in blocks of twenty minutes with a stretch between, a grown-up reading aloud in one block, the squares coloured every hour, and books talked about at the end.
2. The poster, with a line for the date and the class goal, for the door a week ahead.
3. The class wall chart: thirty rows and a square a book.
4. Certificates, two to a page: a line for the reader's name, written by hand, and the number of books.

Ask every reader to bring two or three books, and keep a basket of spares. Peabody's library of free stories at nineteen levels is a good spare basket on a tablet.

The week-long version

A week gives every day a theme: start and set the goal on Monday, read with someone on Tuesday, read somewhere new on Wednesday, try a different kind of book on Thursday, and count up on Friday. The kit's week plan prints on one page, and a reader's log follows each child home.

On a screen, the challenge maker starts a week of reading as its own challenge: readers scan the poster's code and log their books on their own devices, and the teacher counts the class on the board with numbers, never names.

A cheer sheet instead of a pledge sheet

A pledge sheet usually asks relatives to promise money for each book or each minute. The kit's cheer sheet asks them to promise something else: to read a book aloud, to listen to a chapter, to ask about the book, to go to the library together, or to sit and read their own book beside the child for twenty minutes. A child brings it home, the grown-ups sign up for a promise, and the child ticks it when it's done.

Children notice who reads with them. They remember the promise long after the total is forgotten.

Read-a-thon prizes

The certificate is the prize. If you want more, a book to keep is the best one; a class can also choose a reward it earns together when the wall chart reaches the goal, such as a picnic reading afternoon or a mystery reader visiting the class. Food rewards and points shops teach that reading is the price of something else, which is the opposite of the day's point.

March is reading month

Many schools give March to reading. The kit's calendar for March 2027 gives each week a theme (read everywhere, read together, read something new, share a book) and lists spirit days to pick from: dress as a book character, pyjama reading day, favourite book day, a school-wide read-in, a book swap and a mystery reader. Print it in February, when teachers plan the month.

Questions teachers ask

Should we count books or minutes?

Books, for a day: a child can see a book finished, and a short book counts as much as a long one, which keeps the younger readers in. For a week, either works, but say which before you start.

What about the children who can't read yet?

A book read aloud to them counts. Pair them with an older reading buddy for one block.

Do we need a device for every child?

No. Everything in the kit works on paper. The screen version is there for classes that want it.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/read-a-thon-ideas-for-school