Reading challenges with prizes vs. a certificate: what we chose and why

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Reading challenges for kids with prizes, and why Peabody's give a certificate instead: what BOOK IT! and two libraries offered on 30 Oct 2026, and what we chose.

Peabody's reading challenges have no prizes and no leaderboards: a child who reaches the finish line prints a certificate, and nothing is given for half way. Plenty of good reading programmes do offer prizes, and this post sets out what a few of them offered when I looked, what I chose instead, and why. The challenges are free, like the rest of Peabody through the end of 2026.

What other challenges offer

I read these pages on 30 October 2026. Each is described as it was that day; they may have changed since.

- Programme: Pizza Hut BOOK IT! · What a child does: Reads to a monthly goal, for families and for classrooms, October to March · What they get: A certificate each month, and the rewards are pizza; the page said five certificates per family a month at most
- Programme: Mahopac Public Library, Children's Winter Reading Challenge · What a child does: Reads twenty minutes a day over the winter break, kindergarten to 5th grade, on a paper log · What they get: The log is swapped for a prize; the page did not name it
- Programme: Jefferson County Public Library (Colorado), Summer Reading · What a child does: Reads eight hours over the summer (the page says an hour a week will do it), all ages, logged in Beanstack · What they get: Prizes that the page said vary by age
- Programme: Beanstack · What a child does: Logs minutes, books or days, with a minutes timer, in a tracker that schools and libraries buy · What they get: Badges

The Mahopac page I opened was last winter's, for the challenge that ran from 20 December 2025 to 3 January 2026, and it said the event had passed. Jefferson County's is a summer programme, but it shows the hours-and-prizes model plainly.

A prize is a reason to come back to the library, and I understand why libraries offer one. I made a different choice for Peabody, for the reasons below.

What Peabody does instead

Every challenge has a finish line, sized so a child can see it from the start:

- Winter Break, 19 December 2026 to 3 January 2027: ten books for ages 5 to 7 (read-alouds count), six for 8 to 10, four for 11 and up.

- January 2027: a square a day for a finished book or twenty minutes of reading; twenty coloured days out of thirty-one.
- 100 Books: a hundred squares, no end date.
- Book Bingo: five in a row is a Bingo, and all twenty-five squares earns the certificate.

The tracker fills as a child logs each book, the chart prints for the fridge at any time, and the certificate prints at the finish line and not before. There is also a blank certificate to fill in by hand for a child who did it all on paper.

Why a certificate and not a prize

Peabody cannot send a prize, and that is on purpose. The challenges need no account. Everything a child logs stays on the device, and the only thing Peabody receives is a count that a book was logged in a challenge, never the book, the title, the face or the age. A prize would need a name and an address, and I would rather not hold either.

A prize for the most books rewards the shortest books. When the reward is for volume, the sensible move is the thinnest book on the shelf. A finish line that every child can reach rewards finishing instead, and leaves the choice of book to the reader.

A certificate for half way means nothing. Children can tell a prize for turning up from one they earned. If the certificate prints at the finish line and only there, it is worth putting on the wall.

No leaderboard, because reading is not a race. Brothers and sisters can share a device, up to six of them, each under their own animal face with a separate record. Nobody is ranked against a sibling or a classmate.

A missed day costs nothing. On the January challenge a missed day simply stays empty, with no message about it. A prize that hangs on a perfect streak is lost on the first sick day; twenty days out of thirty-one survives it.

If you want a prize at home

That is your call, and a reasonable one. If you do, I would make it about books: choosing the next book from the bookshop, a trip to the library, or fifteen extra minutes of reading at bedtime. Agree it before the challenge starts, so it is a goal rather than a bribe halfway through. The printed chart has a records line, such as "Read 6 books, 19 Dec – 27 Dec", which is handy if you are counting towards something.

And if your library runs a challenge with a prize this winter, do both. Peabody's weekly reading log has a column for pages or minutes and a line for a grown-up to sign. The books can come from Peabody's library, 425 free stories on 19 levels, or from the library's own shelves.

Questions parents ask

Is there really nothing to win?

Nothing to win, nothing to buy and nothing to sign up for. A child earns the certificate by reaching the finish line, and prints it at home.

Why is there no certificate for half way?

Because the finish line is the point. The chart prints at any time with the books so far, so a child can still show what they have read; the certificate waits for the end.

Can a teacher add prizes to Peabody's challenge?

Yes. Everything prints, including the class reading log with thirty rows for reader, title, level and date finished, so a class can run the challenge and add whatever reward the school likes.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/reading-challenge-prizes-vs-certificate