A library-style reading challenge at home

Peabody guide · updated 2026-10-30

What public library reading challenges do, what to borrow for a family reading challenge at home, what to leave out, and a free version with a chart that prints.

A library reading challenge has five parts worth copying at home: dates on the calendar, a finish line every reader can reach, a log on paper, something to show at the end, and a reason to visit the library. The parts I leave out at home are the ones a library needs to run a programme for a whole town: accounts, minute timers and prize desks. This guide is what three library programmes do, read on their own pages on 30 October 2026, what to borrow and what to drop, and how Peabody's free version works. Like the rest of Peabody, it is free through the end of 2026, with no account and nothing to buy.

What libraries do

Three examples, described as their pages showed them when I opened them.

Mahopac Public Library, Children's Winter Reading Challenge. Last winter's challenge ran from 20 December 2025 to 3 January 2026, for kindergarten to 5th grade. Children read for 20 minutes a day over the break and did winter-themed reading activities. Parents picked up a paper reading log in December, one per child, and a finished log could be swapped for a prize until 31 January.

Jefferson County Public Library (Colorado), Summer Reading. Its Summer Reading page describes a challenge from 1 June to 31 July, open to everyone, so whole families can sign up. The finish line is eight hours of reading, and the page points out that an hour a week gets you there. Readers earn a badge for each hour, a prize for signing up, a prize for finishing, and entries in a grand prize drawing. You can sign up online through Beanstack, in person at a branch, or by phone, and there is a contest between local schools. Alongside it, the library runs 1000 Books Before Kindergarten for ages 0 to 5 and 500 Books Before Middle School for ages 5 to 12.

Beanstack. Beanstack is the software Jefferson County's challenge runs on, sold to schools and libraries, who ask for a quote. Readers can log minutes, books or days, use a reading timer, collect digital badges and appear on leaderboards, and there is an app for scanning a book's ISBN.

All three are built to run reading for a lot of people at once, and that shapes every choice they make.

What to borrow

1. Dates. A start and an end make a challenge feel like an event. School holidays are the natural window: Mahopac's ran across winter break.
2. A finish line everyone can reach. Jefferson County's eight hours over two months is about an hour a week, a pace a reader can keep. At home, set a number that fits the reader's age, and that they can reach with a few days to spare.
3. Paper. A log on the fridge does more than any reminder, and it works on a car journey with no signal.
4. Something at the end. A finished log, a certificate, a moment when someone says "you did it".
5. The library itself. The best thing about a library challenge is the library. Make a trip in the first week and come home with a stack.
6. The whole family. Jefferson County's summer reading is for everyone. At home, grown-ups can keep their own chart too.
7. Counting books for the youngest. Programmes like 1000 Books Before Kindergarten count books read to a child, from birth. A book read aloud is reading at that age.

What to leave out

A library has to keep a challenge fair for hundreds or thousands of families it doesn't know, which is why it needs sign-ups, logged hours and a desk to collect prizes at. At home you know every reader, so you can drop:

- Accounts. You don't need a login to know your child finished.
- Minutes, for children under eight. A book is something a child can point at. Count books, or days with reading.
- Prize drawings and rankings. A ranking between brothers and sisters has one winner. A finish line each reader can reach lets every one of them finish.
- Checking up. If your child says they read the book, ask what happened in it because you want to know, not to test them.

Peabody's version

I built Peabody's Book Club to be the library challenge my family could run at home. The challenges:

- Winter Break, Saturday 19 December 2026 to Sunday 3 January 2027: 10 books for ages 5 to 7 (read-alouds count), 6 for ages 8 to 10, 4 from 11 up. A snowy mountain climbs a step a book.
- January: a day's square colours in when a child finishes a book or reads for 20 minutes, with no timer. Twenty coloured days of 31 is the finish line.
- 100 Books: a 10 × 10 chart with no end date, a little like the library's books-before-school

programmes.

- Book Bingo: 25 kinds of books on a card. Five in a row is a Bingo; all 25 earns the certificate.
- The Series Challenge: one series, read to the end in order.
- Read-Aloud 20: twenty books read aloud to a little one, ages 2 to 6, a patch of a reading quilt each.

How it differs from a library programme:

- No account and nothing typed by the child. Each reader is an animal face, up to six on one device, so siblings keep separate records.
- Library books count. "A book from somewhere else" lets a grown-up press and hold for two seconds and type the title, which stays on the device; the child taps a picture of what kind of book it was.
- It prints. The chart prints with a table of the books so far, a line for records like "Read 6 books, 19 Dec – 27 Dec", and a QR code back to the challenge that carries no child data. Paper logs need no device at all: weekly, monthly, the bingo card and the 100 books chart.
- The certificate only prints at the finish line. No certificate for half way, no prizes, no leaderboards.
- Nothing about the reader leaves the device. Peabody receives a count that a book was logged in a challenge, never the title or the reader.

Running it like a library, at home

- The week before: pick the challenge together, print the chart, and make the library trip.
- Sign-up day: each child picks their animal face, or writes their name on the paper chart. Make a small occasion of it.
- The middle: a second library trip, or a look in Peabody's library for free stories at their level that are a tap to log. What should I read next asks three questions and picks one.
- The finish: print the certificate, put it on the fridge, and let the reader choose what comes next.

Questions parents ask

Can we do the library's challenge and Peabody's at the same time?

Yes. A book counts in both. Keep the library's log the way the library asks, and tap the same book into Peabody's tracker or write it on the paper chart.

Do library books count in Peabody's challenges?

Yes. Any book counts: log it as a book from somewhere else, or write it on the printed chart.

What age is a home reading challenge for?

Read-Aloud 20 is for ages 2 to 6. The other challenges start at 5, with read-alouds counting for ages 5 to 7, and have targets for 8 to 10 and for 11 and up.

Is there a prize?

The certificate, at the finish line. If you want more, make it shared and about reading: a library trip or a new book the reader chooses.

Free at peabody.kids/guides/library-style-reading-challenge-at-home