A winter break reading challenge your kids will finish

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How to run a winter break reading challenge kids finish: targets by age, books not minutes, a chart on the fridge, the busy middle week, and a free tracker.

A winter break reading challenge that children finish has three things: a finish line they can see from the first day, a number that fits their age, and a way to count that does not need a grown-up to referee. Peabody's Winter Break challenge is built on those three: from Saturday 19 December 2026 to Sunday 3 January 2027, 10 books for ages 5 to 7, 6 for ages 8 to 10 and 4 longer books from 11 up, logged with a tap on a tracker that fills a snowy mountain, or on a chart that prints. It is free, like the rest of Peabody through the end of 2026. This guide is how to run it, or one of your own, so that it is still going on New Year's Day.

Why most holiday challenges stall

Winter break is short, and the middle of it is the busiest week of the year. A challenge that starts strong on the first Saturday meets travel, visitors, late nights and new presents by the Wednesday. The ones that survive have a number small enough that a missed day or two does not end them, and a picture that shows how close the finish is.

The ones that stall usually ask for too much (thirty books, an hour a day), count something invisible (minutes nobody saw), or end in a prize that matters more than the books. None of that is the child's fault.

Pick a number that fits the reader

The number should be reachable with a day or two to spare. Peabody's targets:

- Age: 5 to 7 · Books: 10 · Why: Picture books and early readers are short, and a book read aloud counts. About one every day and a half.
- Age: 8 to 10 · Books: 6 · Why: Early chapter books and longer picture books. About one every two or three days.
- Age: 11 and up · Books: 4 · Why: A real novel takes several sittings. About one every four days.

If your child is a big reader, let them set a higher number themselves after they finish the first one. A number a child chose is a number they own.

Count books, not minutes

A book is something a child can point at: it is finished, or it is not, and it can be a step on a chart. Minutes need a timer and trust, and the first argument about whether the last ten counted is the end of the fun. If a school asks for minutes, keep a weekly log with a minutes column beside the chart, but let the child's own challenge be books.

Two rules keep counting fair for the youngest:

- A book read aloud to a 5 to 7 year old counts. Being read to is reading at that age.
- A favourite read again on another day counts again. Re-reading builds fluency, and it is what young children choose.

Make the finish line visible

A chart on the fridge, coloured by the child, does more than any reminder. Peabody's tracker draws a mountain with one step per book and a snow line that rises as the steps fill, and the same mountain prints with numbered steps to colour by hand. On a shared tablet, each child picks an animal face, so brothers and sisters each have their own mountain and nobody types a name.

The certificate stays dark until the top. That matters: a certificate for half way is worth nothing, and children know it.

Plan for the busy week

- Front-load the first weekend. Two books on the first two days make the middle of the break easier.
- Pack the books for the trip, or a chart and a pencil. The paper chart works with no internet.
- Use the waiting. Airports, car rides and the hour before a family dinner are reading time; an audiobook of a book counts if your family says so, as long as the rule is the same for everyone.
- Read aloud at bedtime. For the youngest, the bedtime book alone gets them most of the way to ten.

Help them pick the next book

The challenge stalls between books more than during them. Keep the next book in sight before the current one ends: a stack by the bed, a library trip in the first week, or Peabody's free stories at their level in the library, which are a tap to log. What should I read next asks three tap-to-answer questions (what kind, how long, alone or together) and picks one, and books by level has the stories and the kids' lists that fit each reader.

After the break

On 4 January the challenge says "finished", and a reader who reached the top is offered the January challenge: a book or twenty minutes a day, twenty days out of thirty-one to finish, so the first missed day back at school costs nothing. A reader who did not finish keeps their chart and their books; nothing tells them they failed.

Questions parents ask

How many books should a 7-year-old read over winter break?

Ten is a comfortable stretch for most 7-year-olds reading picture books and early readers, counting books read aloud to them. For a child just starting to read, five or six is fine; the right number is one they can finish.

What if my child finishes in the first week?

Celebrate it, print the certificate, and let them pick a second challenge: Book Bingo for variety or 100 Books for the long haul.

Should there be a reward?

The certificate and the full chart are the reward. If you want something more, make it shared and about reading: a trip to the library or a new book they choose, for everyone in the family who finished.

Does Peabody see what my child reads?

No. The log stays on the device. Peabody counts that a book was logged in the challenge, and whether it was the first or a later one, and nothing about the book or the child.

Free at peabody.kids/guides/winter-break-reading-challenge