What should my child be reading? A guide by age

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It depends on the reader more than the age, so start easy and move with them. Most 6 year olds are in 1st grade and start at level 3; most 8 year olds are in 3rd grade and start at level 7. The table gives every age from 3 to 13, with stories free through the end of 2026.

- Age: 3 and 4 · Usually in: Preschool · Start at: Level 0 · Three free stories to start with: Pit, Pat, Sit, Tap, Nap, Dad Naps · More for this age: Decodable readers
- Age: 5 · Usually in: Kindergarten · Start at: Level 1 · Three free stories to start with: Get Up, Gus!, Jen and the Jam, Pup in the Tub · More for this age: Beginning reader books
- Age: 6 · Usually in: 1st grade · Start at: Level 3 · Three free stories to start with: Go, Snail, Go!, In My Bag, The Hat Cat · More for this age: Short stories for 1st graders
- Age: 7 · Usually in: 2nd grade · Start at: Level 5 · Three free stories to start with: Where Is Ned's Hat?, The Enormous Turnip, Dot and the Log · More for this age: Short stories for 2nd graders
- Age: 8 · Usually in: 3rd grade · Start at: Level 7 · Three free stories to start with: Why Does Ice Float?, Look at Ants, Duck Says Sorry · More for this age: Short stories for 3rd graders
- Age: 9 · Usually in: 4th grade · Start at: Level 8 · Three free stories to start with: Eeyore's Birthday, Jonah and the Night Hamster, Four Blades Up · More for this age: Short stories for 4th graders
- Age: 10 · Usually in: 5th grade · Start at: Level 9 · Three free stories to start with: Goodbye, Waffles, Mavis and the Greedy Mayor, Rumpelstiltskin · More for this age: Short stories for 5th graders
- Age: 11 · Usually in: 6th grade · Start at: Level 10 · Three free stories to start with: Complaints Department, Thistle Counts the Tides, The Beginning of the Armadillos · More for this age: Short stories for 6th graders
- Age: 12 · Usually in: 7th grade · Start at: Level 11 · Three free stories to start with: The Deep End of Carrowglen, Thumbelina, The Year of the Split Friendship · More for this age: Short stories for 7th graders
- Age: 13 · Usually in: 8th grade · Start at: Level 12 · Three free stories to start with: The Slow Leak, Rule Fourteen, Nobody Calls It Luck · More for this age: Short stories for 8th graders

The ages are the usual ones for each US grade at the start of the school year. Peabody starts every grade a little under itself, so the first story is easy, and every story on this page is free to read online with no account.

Ages 3 to 5: listening, sounds and first books

Most of a young child's reading is being read to: picture books, rhymes and the same favourite again and again. Alongside that, the first books a child reads themselves are decodable, built only from sounds they have learned: preschool starts at level 0, with eight letters, and kindergarten at level 1, with every short vowel, on the way to the pattern books of level 3. The sight word checklist has the first words they will learn by sight.

Ages 6 to 8: learning to read, then reading on their own

First grade starts at level 3, with pattern books, and climbs through the little stories of levels 4 to 6. Third grade starts at level 7, where a page is a short paragraph for the first time, and most children are reading a whole story on their own in one sitting. Keep reading aloud too, from books a little above what they read alone.

Ages 9 to 13: reading to learn

From fourth grade the stories run longer, the sentences get longer and new words are explained by the sentence around them. Children of the same age differ most here, so let the story decide: a child who reads one smoothly and can say what happened is ready for the next level, whatever their age.

If the first story is too hard or too easy

Go down a level if a child stops on many words or loses the thread, and up a level if they read it without effort and want more. Reading levels, 0 to 18 shows what each level looks like, with a real story's opening at every one.

Questions parents ask

What should a 7 year old be reading?

Most 7 year olds are in 2nd grade, and Peabody starts 2nd grade at level 5: short stories with a few short sentences a page, in everyday words. Start there, and go up or down by how the first story goes.

What should my child read if they are behind or ahead?

Read at the level they read comfortably, not the one for their age. A child who is behind gains more from easy stories read smoothly than from hard ones read word by word; a child who is ahead can climb, with books for their age read aloud beside.

Is it free?

Yes. Every story here is free to read, with no account, and Peabody is free through the end of 2026, with no sign-up.

Free at peabody.kids/grades/reading/by-age