

Raising a Reader

without pulling your hair out

Reluctant Readers



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Introduction

I'm Frances Wong, and I've been a teacher since 2005. In that time, I've had the joy of helping thousands of children discover the magic of reading, including my own two!

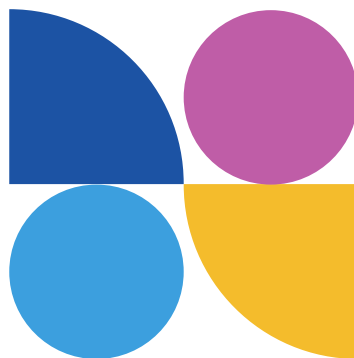
I'm also the author of a number of children's books, which means I get to see reading not just from the classroom, but through the wonder of stories themselves.

Some children become reluctant readers, and it can feel frustrating or worrying for parents and teachers. But here's the good news: it doesn't have to stay that way. Reluctance often comes from confidence, experience, or simply not finding the right book, or the right way to read, yet.

With encouragement, patience, and the right support, most reluctant readers can be turned around.

The key is to nurture curiosity and confidence alongside skill.

Celebrate small wins, keep reading fun, and remember: even reluctant readers can become enthusiastic, confident readers in time.



Frances Wong

Children's Author
Teacher with over 20
years experience
teaching children to
read

What is a Reluctant Reader?

A reluctant reader is a term usually used for school-aged children who already have some phonics skills, they can blend and segment words, but for one reason or another, they simply don't want to read. Your child might avoid picking up books altogether, complain when it's reading time, or choose the shortest text possible just to get it over with. They may be perfectly capable of sounding out the words, but their body language says it all with lots of sighing, eye-rolling, and maybe even the classic "Do I have to?" or even an all out refusal.



How does a child become a reluctant reader?

Think about it: children are experts at running, jumping, and playing. Those things feel natural and exciting.

Reading, on the other hand, asks them to slow down, sit still, and focus, which is a skill in itself, even for adults!

If they're finding reading difficult on top of that, it's no wonder they'd rather be climbing the sofa or building a Lego tower.

Confidence also plays a huge role. Many children convince themselves, "I can't read," and that belief can stick. This is called a fixed mindset. The good news is,

mindsets can change. With encouragement and support, your child can shift from thinking "I can't" to "I can't yet."

This is a growth mindset, where tricky tasks and mistakes aren't failures but stepping stones to learning. In fact, mistakes are the fastest way to grow!

Finally, we can't ignore that for some children, the difficulty is physical or neurological. Undiagnosed vision or hearing issues can make reading frustrating or nearly impossible. Similarly, learning differences may mean your child needs extra support.

Bedtime Stories



Without wanting to sound too forceful, if you have a reluctant reader, make it a priority to read them a bedtime story every single night. **No exceptions.** This is one of the most powerful ways to tackle reading avoidance. My biggest tip, my strongest piece of advice, my firmest insistence is: **read a bedtime story.**

Bedtime stories are valuable for every child, in my view. But for reluctant readers, they show that reading can be a cosy, enjoyable experience and a special time to share with someone they love.

Tips for Bedtime Stories

- Make reading part of your nightly routine from an early age.
- Let your child choose the book (even if it's Digger, Digger for the 100th time)
- Use voices, facial expressions, or sound effects to make the story lively.
- Pause to talk about pictures, events, or characters.
- Encourage your child to join in and ask questions or let them “read” the pictures.
- Focus on enjoyment and connection rather than accuracy or speed.

Strategies to Support Reluctant Readers

- **Keep reading sessions short and enjoyable**
- **Let children choose books to give them ownership**
- **Read together aloud, taking turns to reduce pressure**
- **Use games, apps, or audiobooks to make reading fun**
- **Avoid criticism; focus on encouragement and effort**

The longer you push a reluctant reader to stay with a book, the more they'll see reading as a dreaded chore. Reading can be like broccoli to a reluctant reader, too much at once and they'll never eat it again!

I'd suggest aiming for just 10 minutes with a reluctant reader. That way, reading stays manageable, you're less likely to tear your hair out (self-care matters!), and the next session is far more likely to be positive.

Top Tip



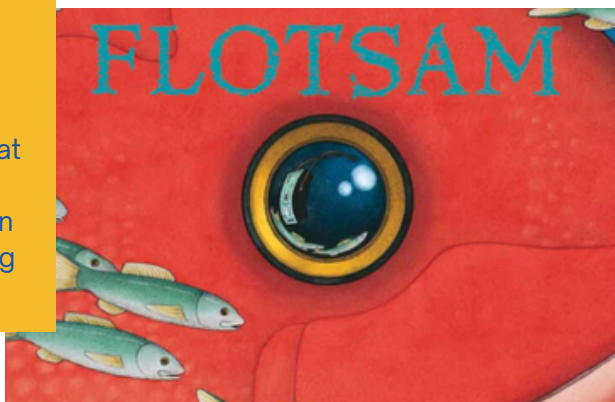
Let Your Child Choose!

One of my biggest tips for parents is to give your child as much choice as possible when it comes to reading. Choice is powerful. It gives your child ownership and makes reading feel less like a chore and more like a preference. That choice can be almost anything: leaflets, comics, brochures, even plumbing magazines if that's what grabs their attention. The content matters far less than the fact that they are reading.



Wordless Books

Wordless books, as the name suggests, are books without any words in them, or very few words. They are often books with rich, interesting and detailed images that draw the eye and inspire reading through oral storytelling rather than the reading of words. Each retelling is different every time!



Why Wordless Books are Good for Reluctant Readers

Wordless books are valuable for every child, not just reluctant readers.

The benefits they bring are enormous. They spark language development, nurture creativity and imagination, and help children notice the little details that make stories come alive. And perhaps best of all, they lift the pressure.

There's no need to recall letter sounds, puzzle over tricky words, or feel disheartened by mistakes. Instead, children are free to dive straight into the joy of storytelling. Wordless books are wonderfully inclusive, they can be enjoyed by children of any age, at any stage, and at any ability.

Do's and Don'ts for Wordless Books

Do: Encourage your child to tell the story in their own words. Pause and ask questions about the pictures. Use expressive voices, gestures, and sound effects. Extend the story with drawing, acting, or writing. Celebrate creativity, imagination, and the effort, not "correctness."

Don't: Pressure your child to "read" words that aren't there. Correct their ideas or interpretations. Rush through the book. Focus on accuracy or speed. Compare them to others. Avoid turning it into a test. The joy of storytelling and exploring pictures is what matters most.

Wordless Books: How To



A phonics scheme is a structured, step-by-step programme that schools use to teach children to read.

It carefully introduces letters and sounds in a specific order, helping children build skills gradually and confidently.

How to Read Wordless Books

1. Take a Picture Walk

- Flip through the book together without telling a story yet.
- Notice characters, objects, actions, and settings.
- Ask simple questions: “What’s happening here?” or “How do you think they feel?”

2. Model the Story First

- Tell the story aloud using the pictures as a guide.
- Use expressive voices, gestures, and sound effects to bring it to life.
- Show how the story can flow naturally from the pictures.

3. Let Your Child Take the Lead

- Invite them to tell the story in their own words.
- Encourage them to add details, make predictions, or imagine what happens next.

4. Celebrate their ideas, there are no right or wrong answers.

- Pause and Discuss
- Ask questions as you go: “Why do you think they did that?” or “What might happen next?”
- Encourage your child to notice small details and explain their thinking.

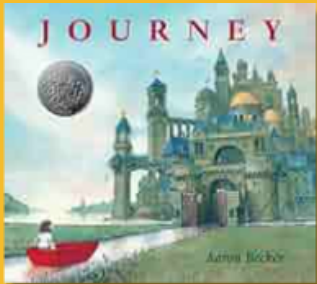
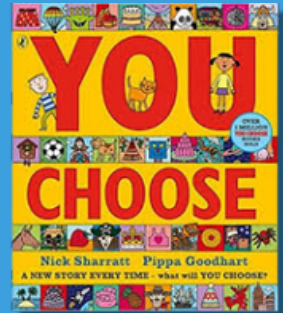


My Favourite Wordless Books

You Choose by Nick Sharratt

Technically not a wordless book, but this book is full of conversation starters and suggestions for ideas.

Its playful illustrations and open-ended prompts make it perfect for encouraging children to talk about choices, describe what they see, and create their own stories.



Journey by Aaron Becker

Journey is a gorgeous wordless book that takes children on a magical adventure. As they follow the girl through colourful, detailed scenes, you can encourage them to talk about what's happening, guess what might happen next, and make up their own story.

The Snowman by Raymond Briggs

We have all grown up watching The Snowman at Christmas with the iconic song, and the book is just as magical. Its gentle, wordless story encourages children to explore the illustrations, talk about the characters' adventures, and use their imagination to create their own version of the story.



Choice Makes the Difference



Let your child choose what they want to read.

Your child is more likely to read if they are interested in what they're reading.

However, your child is going to bring home a school book to read at home. If I'm being completely honest, these scheme books are not the most inspiring. Your child wouldn't choose them when faced with wordless books or books about trains (if they like trains).

So, how do you introduce choice when the choice isn't that great?

First or Second?

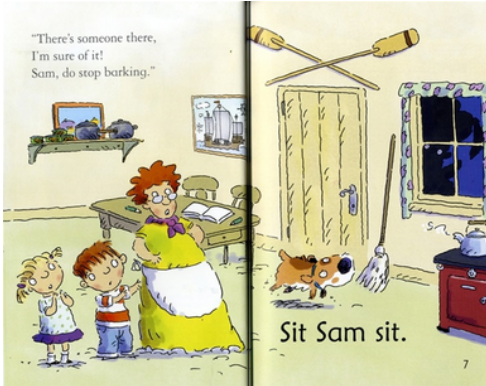
"Would you like to read your school book before our bedtime story or after it?"

This allows your child to feel a little like they're in charge, and it ensures that you read your school book too.

And, let your child choose their bedtime story. For me, this meant that I read *Digger, Digger* and *The Gruffalo* so many times, I could read them by heart, but it did create a warm, cosy experience for my children and they both have a love of reading now.

I Read, You Read

How to Use I Read, You Read Books



My favourite books for early readers and reluctant readers are the I Read, You Read series.

They really take the pressure off the child. Sounding out and blending letters can sometimes make reading feel more like a challenge than a joy, especially for a child who struggles with it.

With I Read, You Read books, the parent reads most of the text, including tricky words, while the child joins in with the words they can manage. This way, they're still involved, but the reading stays fun and achievable.

I've seen success after success with these books and can't recommend them enough.

- Take turns naturally: Let your child read the words they know, and you read the rest. Don't worry about perfect timing.
- Point and follow along: Use your finger to track the words as you read to reinforce word recognition.
- Pause for discussion: Ask questions about the story, pictures, or characters to build comprehension.
- Celebrate effort: Praise your child for trying, even if they only read a few words.
- Re-read favourites: Familiarity builds confidence and fluency.
- Keep it relaxed: Make it a cosy, enjoyable time without pressure.



For your reluctant reader, these books make reading a partnership where children work together with their parents. The weight of reading isn't only on them and is a much more fun way to read.

My Favourite I Read, You Read Books

Usborne: Starting to Read with Phonics

These are the books I used with my own children and I loved them so much, I bought them for work. This is a lovely set of books that gently takes your child on a gentle reading journey.



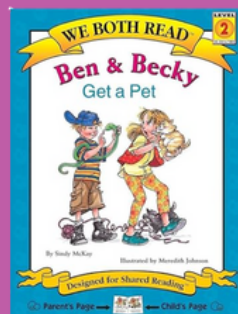
Usborne: My First Reading Library

Another offering from Usborne, not all of these books are I Read, You Read but many of them are and their stories are simply wonderful. They increase the difficulty of the words gradually, allowing your child to slowly get to grips with reading and increase independence.



The We Both Read Books by Sindy McKay and Meredith Johnson

These books are yet another wonderful set of I Read, You Read books that contain a range of different stories, including non-fiction. They are for slightly older readers and would work well for Year 1 or Year 2 children who have a stronger reading ability.



Can't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em



It's all about encouraging your reluctant reader to read. What they read at this stage is less important than the fact that they are actually reading. So, with that in mind, it might be time to turn to a device and allow your child to access reading apps.

Reading Apps

When choosing a reading app for your child, follow these easy tips:

- **Accent matters:** Pick an app that reads in the same accent your child hears at home or at school. Familiar pronunciation helps them connect sounds to words more easily.
- **Interactive, not passive:** Choose apps that let your child tap, swipe, or answer questions, rather than just listening. Interaction helps reinforce comprehension and keeps them engaged.
- **Level-appropriate content:** Make sure the app matches your child's reading level and interests. Books that are too hard can frustrate, while books that are too easy won't challenge them.

Recommended Apps



1. Alphablocks: Meet the Alphablocks

Uses UK phonics to help children 3+ learn to read through interactive stories, songs, and games.

2. Reading Eggs – Learn to Read

Supports reading with games, lessons, and 4,000+ e-books, using British-English spelling and pronunciation.

3. Teach Your Monster to Read

Phonics game for children 3–6, guiding them through letter sounds and blending with fun, interactive gameplay.

Celebrate Every Success

When it comes to reluctant readers, every small step forward deserves recognition. Building a reading habit isn't about speed, finishing a certain number of pages, or always loving every book. It's about progress, persistence, and creating positive experiences. Children thrive on encouragement, and celebrating success helps children see reading not as a chore



but as something joyful and rewarding.



If your child reads a single page without giving up, that's a success. If they sound out a tricky word, pause to notice it. If they laugh at a story or ask a question about what they've read, celebrate that curiosity. The key is to focus on effort, not perfection.

Here are some practical ways to celebrate:

- Praise the moment. A simple "I'm proud of you" goes a long way.
- Create milestones. Use a chart, stickers, or a jar of marbles to mark every reading session. Watching progress grow is motivating.
- Share their achievement. Tell a family member: "Guess what, Sam finished his book today!" Hearing their effort recognised builds pride.



Start Right Now



Remember, change doesn't happen overnight. If your child is a reluctant reader, it's easy to feel frustrated or worry that they'll never enjoy books. The good news is that with calm, consistent, and positive support, things will change. Every small step counts, and over time, those tiny victories add up to real progress.

Start tonight if you can, even if it's just a short story or a single page. Five or ten minutes of shared reading is enough to make a difference. The key is to make reading a safe, enjoyable, and predictable part of your routine. Celebrate the small wins, whether your child reads a word, a sentence, or simply engages with the story.

Each success builds confidence and curiosity. Be patient and keep it light. Encourage, praise, and create a positive reading atmosphere. Use silly voices, gestures, and props if it helps. Let your child choose the book when you can. The more control they feel, the more likely they are to want to read.

Before you know it, your child may

start asking to read, showing interest in stories, or even sharing books with you. The journey may be slow, but the results are lasting.

For further guidance, there are resources, book recommendations, and tips available online to support you and your child on this journey.

As Roald Dahl said, "If you are going to get anywhere in life you have to read a lot of books." Start tonight and enjoy these precious moments together.



Useful Links



[BBC Nursery Rhymes](#)

[The Book Trust](#)

[The National Literacy Trust](#)

[Reading Fairy](#)

[My Website](#)

[The Alphablocks](#)

Don't forget to check back to my website for more resources, tips, and book recommendations to support your child's reading journey.

If you have any questions, want to share your experiences, or need a little extra guidance, feel free to reach out on Threads, Instagram, or through the contact form on the site. I love hearing from parents and carers, and I'm here to help make reading a fun, joyful part of everyday life for you and your child.