

### Understanding Fifth Graders' Development

Most fifth graders are 10-11 years old and seem to have a need to talk. They love to chat, but also seem to need to be able to talk in order to think things through. They are also good listeners and enjoy working together in groups. Being part of a group, what their friends think of them, and what they think of their friends are very important issues for fifth graders. Striking a balance between social distractions and academic tasks can be challenging for fifth graders.

### What They Learn

Fifth graders are asked to read a lot in a variety of subject areas, which provides them with opportunity to discover and explore what they like to read. Reading for pleasure helps students build their vocabulary and fosters a lifelong love of literature. That's why spending lots of time reading aloud and talking about books they choose is so important!

### What you should know about fifth graders

There's a lot of variation in the pace at which kids develop throughout first grade. Communication skills are closely tied to and affected by cognitive, social, and emotional development, so it is important to be aware of how your student mentee is growing and developing.

Developmental Milestones	Implications for Reading Mentors
<p><b>Physical development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls are generally ahead of boys in physical maturity; onset of puberty for some girls</li> <li>• Increase body strength and hand dexterity</li> <li>• Large muscle development is advanced</li> <li>• Handwriting often sloppier than at nine</li> <li>• Have improved coordination and reaction time</li> <li>• Desperately need outdoor time and physical challenge</li> <li>• Appetites tend to be big</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take breaks for some physical activity (even if just pausing to stretch during your mentoring sessions).</li> <li>• Try activities that include using a ruler and scissors, such as creating a collage illustration that shows the characteristics of a favorite character.</li> <li>• If possible, move your reading session outdoors during nice weather.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cognitive development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be voracious readers</li> <li>• Expressive, talkative, like to explain</li> <li>• Cooperative, competitive and inquisitive</li> <li>• Classification and collections of interest; like to</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cognitive development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will enjoy complex projects when provided with necessary resources to complete. Don't insist on finishing a book or project.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for your student to share his/her enthusiasm for a book through writing a book</li> </ul>

- Able to concentrate, read for extended periods
- Good problem solvers
- Like to complete a task but doesn't usually wish to enlarge or elaborate on it; wish to try everything
- Interest span is short
- Have a stricter ethical sense than most other ages
- Very concerned about fairness
- Love to memorize, but don't generalize or correlate facts, or care what to do with the knowledge
- Not able to plan own work, need schedules
- Better able to see the perspectives of others
- Most interested in concrete learning experiences and learning of specifics

- recommendation or a book love note.
- Your student will respond better to doing things together than to "just talking." Take turns telling stories about real and imaginary events, talking about your week and their week—what happened, what was surprising, what was funny. Also try making up stories together and writing them down.
- Include activities that help build memory skills. Play "When Did You Last?" together, and compare what you each remember about the last time you ate a banana split, wore a scarf, went swimming, etc.
- Take advantage of shorter interest spans by introducing books and information on a wide variety of topics, geography, current events, music, art, sports, etc.

**Social and emotional development**

- Fairness issues peak and can be solved
- Like clubs, activities, sports; often interested in caring for animals
- Humor is broad, labored, and often not too funny to adults
- May discuss contemporaries in terms of capabilities
- Usually direct, matter of fact, clear-cut
- Generally easygoing, content, friendly, and balanced
- Talkative; likes to tell stories about something they have seen, heard, or read about; can talk something "into the ground"
- Developing more mature sense of right and wrong, good at solving social issues
- Shrug off responsibility; can usually toss off criticisms and bad grades

**Social and emotional development**

- Relate what you are talking about to things in your student's immediate world so they have a frame of reference to understand what you mean.
- Point out books and biographies about people who dealt with issues of bullying, fairness, and justice.
- Expect some arguments (and that they will end quickly).
- Help your student reflect on his/her passions to find extracurricular activities/hobbies in areas in which they can excel.
- Your fifth-grade student will soon be moving on to middle school and may feel both thrilled and overwhelmed by the transition. Listen to, reassure, and support your student.
- Your consistent attendance and supportive relationship help to relieve anxiety about changes and transitions.

### **Curricular topic of focus in Fifth Grade**

The Process of Discovery and the Development of Inventions  
Westward Expansion, Was It Worth It?  
Civil War and Reconstruction  
The Universe:  
The Solar System and Beyond  
Civil Rights Movement: Equal Education for All

### **Good titles to read aloud with Fifth Graders**

As they experience the joy of story, the read aloud experience has a huge impact on fifth graders' motivation, interest, and engagement. The power of shared words is lasting.

*Swimming with Sharks: The Daring Discoveries of Eugenie Clark* by Heather Lang  
*Brave Girl: Clara and the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909* by Michelle Markel  
*Rosa* by Nikki Giovanni  
*The Boys in the Boat* by Daniel James Brown  
*Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson  
*The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander  
*Tortilla Sun* by Jennifer Cervantes  
*When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead  
*Ghost* by Jason Reynolds  
*Percy Jackson* series by Rick Riordan  
*Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling  
*Among the Hidden* by Margaret Peterson Haddix  
*Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen  
*Amazing Places* by Lee Bennett Hopkins  
*Save Me a Seat* by Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan

### **Other recommended books to choose from:**

[Best Books for 10 Year Olds \(Fifth Grade\)](#) from Imagination Soup  
[20 of Our Favorite Books to Teach in 5th Grade](#) from We Are Teachers

Fifth  
Grade