

## Understanding First Graders' Development

Most first graders are 6-7 years old. This is an age marked by tremendous growth, lost teeth, and an interesting mix of independence and an increased need for attention. Typical first-grade development includes big changes in social and thinking skills.

### What They Learn

Reading levels at this age vary a lot based on pre-school and kindergarten reading exposure, and that's okay! First grade is a BIG reading year and many children begin the year sounding out basic consonant-vowel-consonant three letter words such as "cat." First graders learn most new word meanings through listening and talking rather than through reading books themselves. First graders need to be surrounded with excitement, encouragement, and lots of new words. That's why spending lots of time reading aloud to them is so important!

### What you should know about first graders

There's a lot of variation in the pace at which kids develop throughout first grade. Language 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>• Is very active, easily fatigued</li> <li>• Has difficulty sitting still</li> <li>• Still has limited eye-hand coordination</li> <li>• Handles and attempts to use tools and materials</li> <li>• Lacks development of small muscles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build in opportunities for physical activities, or take breaks for some physical activity (even if just pausing to stretch during your mentoring sessions).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cognitive development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is full of curiosity and wants to learn many new skills</li> <li>• Is interested primarily in self, but becoming more curious about the world</li> <li>• Lives in the present</li> <li>• Has difficulty making decisions</li> <li>• Learns through active participation</li> <li>• Likes to talk; carries on long conversations</li> <li>• Has little concept of time</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cognitive development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Like projects to work on but may not care about finishing them. Keep things short, and switch activities to maintain student interest. Don't insist on finishing a book or project.</li> <li>• Learning to read can be either a source of great pleasure or frustration. Read aloud books that will build your student's listening and thinking abilities.</li> <li>• Student will respond better to doing things together than to "just talking." Take turns telling stories about real and</li> </ul>

- Enjoys listening to stories
- For the most part, enjoy school and learning unless there are developmental impediments to learning

- imaginary events, talking about your week and their week—what happened, what was surprising, what was funny. Also try making up stories together and even writing them down.
- Provide opportunities for your student to share his/her enthusiasm for a book through writing/dictating a book recommendation.
  - Play language games to increase vocabulary, develop problem-solving skills, and practice letter sounds. Try playing "Categories," a simple game in which you select a category, such as "clothing" or "things that start with letter P." Then take turns naming items that belong in the category.

**Social and emotional development**

- Craves praise
- Is easily discouraged, cries, and has tantrums
- Wants to feel secure
- Is greatly stirred up by excitement
- Displays sense of humor
- Usually likes his/her teacher
- Wants to play with other children and likes some group play. May fight with friends, but make up quickly
- Likes variety in play
- Likes responsibility and is eager to earn adult approval
- Likes to imitate and dramatize
- Beginning to compare self to others, beginning to want self-improvement
- Wants and needs to be first, loved best, praised most and to win
- Can be bossy and does a good deal of tattling

**Social and emotional development**

- Relate what you are talking about to things in your student's immediate world so he/she has a frame of reference to understand what you mean.
- Encourage your student to explore new ways of looking at the world and people through reading and observations.
- When reading aloud, invite your student to add sound effects to your reading, making the sounds animals, weather noises, vehicles, etc.
- Make a game of expressing and naming emotions by acting out different emotions while your student guesses what emotion it is.
- Positively reinforce your student's good qualities and new skill development.
- Your consistent attendance and supportive relationship helps to provide your student with needed security.

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

Inspiring People: Spotlight on People Who Persevere

Taking Flight

Astronomy: Sun, Moon, and Stars

Animal Survival

All About Money

American Symbols

Human Body: What Makes Me, Me?

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

Many first graders enjoy listening to long stories. Try longer, more complex picture books or chapter books.

*Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon

*Interrupting Chicken* by David Ezra Stein

*The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer

*National Geographic Book of Animal Poetry: 200 Poems with Photographs That Squeak, Soar, and Roar!* by J. Patrick Lewis

*Bartholomew and the Oobleck* by Dr. Seuss

*Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by John Steptoe

*Henry and Mudge* series by Cynthia Rylant

*Mr. Putter and Tabby* series by Cynthia Rylant

*Zapato Power* series by Jacqueline Jules

*Junie B. Jones* series by Barbara Park

*Stink* series by Megan McDonald

*The Chocolate Touch* by Patrick Skene Catling

*The Year of Billy Miller* by Kevin Henkes

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

[Great Read Alouds for First Graders](#) booklist from Reading Rockets

[50 of the Best Books for First Grade](#) from We Are Teachers