



How to support your child effectively in English

What are 'the power of words'?

At Jo Richardson Community School, we strongly believe in giving our students the power of words. We want our students to be successful communicators who can use their power of words to express themselves effectively and confidently.

The power of words means:

- Speaking clearly;
- Being able to listen and respond to others appropriately for the situation;
- Choosing powerful vocabulary to influence (and impress) their audience.

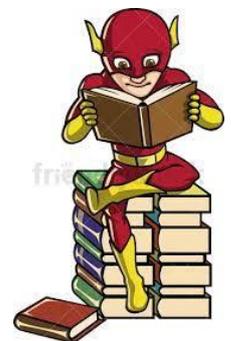


The power of words also means:

- Writing clearly and understandably;
- Using accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG);
- Adapting writing to suit the purpose and audience they are writing for.

The power of words is also about:

- Developing reading skills;
- Being able to make sense of what they read;
- Being able to use reading to build a bigger vocabulary;
- Reading for pleasure.



Someone with the power of words would know the appropriate way to express themselves in a job interview, would know how best to structure a letter and a job application form and would be able to use information from newspaper articles to inform their opinion about politics, sport or fashion.

This is particularly important given the demands of the current GCSE curriculum. Research has shown that the average reading age of the English Language and Literature GCSEs is very high. At JRCS, we want to build students' confidence and capability with words from the very beginning of their JRCS journey.

Why do the power of words matter?

- Research consistently shows that people who can read, write and speak well tend to have a wider range of options and opportunities open to them in life. Access to a number of professions depends heavily on an individual's power of words.
- Studies by the Literacy Trust have also shown that literacy skills – and, in particular, the amount you read – have a direct link to attainment at GCSE and beyond.
- In addition to this, government changes and GCSE reforms mean that by the time your child reaches Year 11, their spelling, punctuation and grammar will be more heavily assessed than ever before.

How can I support my child's communication skills at home?

The greatest impact on a child's power of words comes when schools and parents work together in partnership. The following strategies are recommended by literacy experts to help boost your child's skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Reading

- Read aloud to your child;
- Model good habits by reading books, newspapers and magazines in front of your child;
- Spend 15-20 minutes each day listening to your child read aloud;
- If your child is struggling with a word, sound out the different syllables. For example, 'photosynthesis' broken down into sounds would be 'foto-sin-the-sis';
- Ask questions about the books your child is reading. Do they like the book? Why/why not? Get them to summarise what has happened so far, and to make predictions about what they think might happen in the rest of the book;
- When your child is reading to you, stop and ask them questions at the end of each page using the 5 Ws: who, what, where, when and why;
- Visit your local library frequently and allow your child to enjoy the process of choosing which book they would like to read;
- Look out for free events running at the Dagenham Heathway library;
- Establish a daily routine for homework where your child can work in peace and quiet, away from the TV and computer games;



- Give book tokens or Amazon vouchers as birthday or Christmas presents to encourage reading for pleasure;
- Watch the film version of books your child has read, and discuss which they preferred – the book or the film. Has the film surprised them in any way? Were the characters and settings how your child had imagined them when they read the original book? The *Harry Potter* series, The *Hunger Games* trilogy, the *Twilight* series and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books are all good options here;
- Whilst your child is reading a book, have them create the movie version in their head. Which actor or actress would play the main character? How would they stage key scenes from the story?
- Read local and national newspapers with your child and discuss what's in the news;
- Do not try to force your child to read books they are not interested in. Spark their interest in reading for enjoyment by allowing them to choose books they want to read.

Writing

- Provide writing activities that relate to your daily family life. For example, have your child write the menu for dinner or write your weekly shopping list;
- Suggest that your child writes a journal. This is a private reflection of their daily lives: what has happened at school that day, what has made them happy, what has annoyed them, and so on. Nobody else should read this journal - the purpose is to encourage him or her to write regularly to express their inner thoughts;
- Encourage letter or email writing. If you have relatives or friends who live in other countries or some distance away, have your child write to them ;
- Buy gifts related to writing for birthdays and Christmas – notebooks, nice pen sets, pencil cases, etc.;
- Encourage your child to write about what interests them. For example, football fans could write a podcast or a commentary of an exciting football match they've watched;
- Google punctuation games. There are plenty of free online resources which will help develop your child's spelling, punctuation and grammar;



- If your child is struggling with their spelling, guide them to use look-say-cover-write as a spelling strategy;
- Have your child write a list of the words they tend to misspell most often. They should look up the correct spelling and then write the word out several times over to commit it to memory;
- Remind your child to separate their writing into paragraphs. TiPToP (a new paragraph for each new time (Ti), place (P), topic (To), person (P)) is a good rule to help them remember when they need to start a new paragraph;
- Encourage your child to read their own writing aloud to help them check for grammatical mistakes. Often it is easier to hear our mistakes than it is to see them on the page;

Speaking and Listening

- In conversations with your child, use open-ended topics to build their vocabulary and reasoning skills and to help them express their views. Have your child finish off sentences like:
 - The only thing I could think of was...
 - One night I woke up so scared that...
 - Sometimes I think...
 - I am happiest when...
 - My favourite television show is...
 - I liked this book because...
 - This book was not enjoyable because...
- Choose random objects in the room and play word games to describe them. Try to come up with similes, e.g. *the car is as red as an apple*, or *the clouds are like cotton wool balls*;
- Play word-based family games: Scattergories, eye spy, charades, Scrabble and Bananagrams are good, fun ways of building your child's vocabulary;
- Encourage the use of turn-taking as a listening strategy. Pick your child up on it if they talk over others or interrupt when somebody else is speaking;
- When you are watching TV together, ask your child to describe what has just happened in the TV show and to express their views on what they have seen.



Useful websites

Book Trust Book Finder – really helpful for finding new books to read
<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/books/#/d/books/bookfinder/111/>

School Reading List – suggested books for Year 7 students
<http://schoolreadinglist.co.uk/reading-lists-for-ks3-pupils/suggested-reading-list-for-year-7-pupils-ks2-age-11-12/>

Fun English Games
www.funenglishgames.com

BBC Bitesize
[KS3 English - BBC Bitesize](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize)

Jump Start – free punctuation and grammar worksheets
www.jumpstart.com

Barking and Dagenham Post
www.barkinganddagenhampost.co.uk

The Guardian newspaper
www.theguardian.co.uk

National Literacy Trust
www.literacytrust.org.uk

Words for Life
www.wordsforlife.org.uk

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