Reading Buddies: Helping Reluctant Readers

Practical Ideas for Reading Buddies

A “reluctant reader” may be reluctant for very different reasons. Some students are still developing basic reading skills. Some would simply rather be doing something active. Others are selective and engage best when something catches their interest. A student may even move between these categories from one day to another.

Our goal is not simply to finish the assigned reading. Our goal is to help students experience reading as something they can do and enjoy.

Special note for second grade: expect a very wide range of abilities. Some second graders may read simple books independently, while others may still be working on individual words and may not yet be able to read complete sentences. For these students, success may mean identifying sounds, reading high-frequency words, or successfully reading a few words at a time.

The classroom teacher provides the books, packets, and reading materials. However, you have permission to go off script when the assigned activity is not productive.

1. The Developing Reader. “Reading is hard for me.”

These students may still be mastering phonics, sounding out words, high-frequency words, sentence reading, or fluency. Reading aloud may make them nervous.

Tips:

- Use the student's **Roll (the die) and Read** or other high-frequency-word materials when reading becomes frustrating.
- Break the reading into very small pieces. A second grader may need to work word by word rather than sentence by sentence.
- Try **You Read, I Read**. You read a sentence, paragraph, or page, then the student reads the next one.
- Try **Echo Reading**. Read a short sentence or section aloud, then have the student reread the same words.
- Try **Choral Reading**. Read the same words aloud together so the student is not reading alone.
- **Reread** a sentence, page, or familiar section to build fluency and confidence.
- When a student gets stuck, give them time to work through the word. Help with sounds or word parts rather than immediately giving the answer.
- Praise the effort and strategy: “You worked hard to sound that out.”
- Celebrate successful words, sounds, and small steps.

2. The Active Reader. “I would rather be doing something else.”

Some students may be able to read the material but struggle to stay focused for the entire session.

Tips:

- **Set a small goal**: “Let's read two pages, then take a short break.”
- Use a **timer** when helpful, but make it a personal challenge rather than a competition.
- **Read, Do Something, Read Again.** Break up the reading with a brief activity such as a math problem, drawing, exercise, question, or fidget activity.
- Let the student know what is coming: “We'll read this section, take a quick break, and then come back for one more section.”
- Give the student a manageable finish line rather than saying, “We have to finish this whole book.”
- A short break is not wasted time if it helps the student return ready to engage.

3. The Selective Reader. “I'll read if it interests me.”

Sometimes the assigned book or activity simply does not connect with a student. Start by learning what interests them. Sports? Animals? Minecraft? Cooking? Trucks? Space? Jokes? Art? Video games?

Tips:

- Use the Buddy/Student Questionnaire and keep adding questions as you learn about each other.
- Talk about how the assigned reading connects to something the student already knows or enjoys.
- Ask prediction questions: “What do you think is going to happen?”
- Let the student draw something from the story or explain their favorite part or retell the story.
- Turn the reading into an activity. After reading about a lemonade stand, plan what you would need to create one.
- If the assigned material is simply not working that day, it is okay to go off script for a while. However, going off script does not mean abandoning reading. It means finding another way to keep the student engaged in reading, words, conversation, or literacy.

4. When Nothing Seems to Work

Some days a student simply does not want to read. Relationship matters too. Talk for a few minutes. Add questions to your Buddy questionnaire. Make a list together. Talk about recess, pets, sports, games, family, or something that happened that day.

Then look for a natural way back into a small amount of reading.

A Simple Buddy Formula

Connect → Follow the Plan → Adjust When Needed → Read → Move/Talk/Do → Read Again → Celebrate Success

The best Reading Buddy session is not necessarily the one where the most pages are finished. It is the one that helps a student leave believing: “**Reading is something I can do.**”

One student. One caring adult. Thirty minutes. Every week.