

## Understanding Fourth Graders' Development

Most fourth graders are 9-10 years old. Emotional intensity marks the fourth grade year. Fourth graders are overly concerned about peer perceptions and need to be encouraged to speak up and to ask questions. Students who have questions or trouble understanding a topic may be afraid to ask for help for fear of looking less smart than their peers; others may not participate for fear of standing out and looking too smart.

## What They Learn

Fourth graders are independent learners who may have difficulty managing the work that is expected of them. Fourth graders begin to research using resources such as a dictionary, encyclopedia, library and the Internet, to gather information independently on a topic. Many books and stories fill their days with characters and other story elements to relate their own lives. Spending lots of time reading aloud to them—and talking about what you've read—is so important as they learn to empathize with the characters.

## What you should know about Fourth graders

There's a lot of variation in the pace at which kids develop throughout fourth 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
<b>Physical development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can't sit still for long</li><li>• Girls generally ahead of boys in physical maturity</li><li>• Improve coordination and reaction time</li><li>• Lots of physical habitual movements to relieve tension: fingers in hair, picking at nails</li><li>• Stomachaches, headaches, leg pains common</li><li>• High energy, often playing to the point of fatigue</li><li>• Inconsistent appetite and sleep patterns</li></ul>	<b>Physical development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take breaks for some physical activity (even if just pausing to stretch during your mentoring sessions). Make sure that your student knows that a break is available.</li><li>• Allow your student to choose the best (sitting/standing) position for spending time reading.</li><li>• Focus attention: direct your student to seek a particular book or author on the book cart or find the rhythm or beat in a poem read aloud.</li></ul>
<b>Cognitive development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can reason logically and organize thoughts coherently.</li><li>• Still very concrete in their thinking; cannot handle</li></ul>	<b>Cognitive development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Like projects to work on but may feel overwhelmed trying to finish. Keep activities short, and don't insist on finishing a book or project.</li></ul>

<p>abstract thinking very well unless abstractions are related to something they have directly experienced</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing signs of being more responsible, inner directed, an independent worker</li> <li>• Appreciate being trusted</li> <li>• May develop special interest in collections or hobbies</li> <li>• Better able to understand concepts</li> <li>• Becoming much less egocentric and are able to better understand the perspectives of others</li> <li>• Better understanding the concept of audience when writing</li> <li>• Less interested in fantasy; more involved in the real world</li> <li>• May have problems with homework demands</li> <li>• Often negative: “I can’t” or “it’s boring”</li> <li>• Maybe less imaginative than at earlier grades</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read aloud books that will build your student’s listening and thinking abilities.</li> <li>• 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, write them down and illustrate them.</li> <li>• Use jokes, limericks, puns, and silly poetry as a way to transition between books or activities.</li> <li>• Foster engagement with genuine debate about issues of justice and fairness.</li> <li>• Support your student’s interests with many different types of reading: fictional stories, magazines, how-to project books, and non-fiction informational books.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for your student to share his/her enthusiasm for a book through writing a book recommendation or a book love note.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Social and emotional development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tend to be self-critical and intense</li> <li>• Increased interest in competitive sports or clubs</li> <li>• Learning to take responsibility for own actions</li> <li>• Begin to see adults as fallible human beings; sees adult inconsistencies and imperfections</li> <li>• Peer conformity in dressing is important</li> <li>• Self-aware</li> <li>• Concerned about being right or wrong, being fair; may complain about fairness and justice</li> <li>• Have great need to be in a group, but are also individualistic</li> <li>• Need to be in control of some choices</li> <li>• May become deeply attached to a best friend</li> <li>• Can be sullen and moody</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Social and emotional development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be supportive of the reading choices your student makes.</li> <li>• Encourage your student to explore the world and people who are similar and different from your student.</li> <li>• Point out books and biographies about people who dealt with issues of fairness and justice.</li> <li>• Provide lots of opportunities for your student to explain his/her thinking.</li> <li>• Positively respond to your student’s questions, focus on his/her strengths, and avoid using sarcasm.</li> <li>• There can be a lot of drama in the day of a fourth grader. Your consistent attendance and relationship offers structure and supports developing communication skills.</li> </ul>
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## **Curricular topic of focus in Fourth Grade**

Heroic Adventures  
Early America  
My Story  
Revolution and Independence  
Rocks and Minerals

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

Books that delight and inspire your student are books your student will remember sharing with you.

*Math Curse* by Jon Scieszka  
*We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball* by Kadir Nelson  
*Brick by Brick* by Charles R. Smith, Jr.  
*I, Fly The Buzz About Flies and How Awesome They Are* by Bridget Heos  
*A Mango Shaped Space* by Wendy Mass  
*The Mighty Miss Malone* by Christopher Paul Curtis  
*In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* by Bette Bao Lord  
*Shiloh* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor  
*Frindle* by Andrew Clements  
*Savvy* by Ingrid Law  
*The Wild Robot* by Peter Brown  
*Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech  
*A Series of Unfortunate Events* series by Lemony Snicket  
*Bone* series by Jeff Smith  
*Baby Mouse* series by Jennifer Holm  
*Owen & Mzee: The Language of Friendship* by Isabella and Craig Hatkoff and Paula Kuhumbu

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

[9 Fantastic Chapter Books for Fourth Graders](#) from Brightly  
[50 of the Best Books for Fourth Grade](#) from We Are Teachers