

At Home Activities

Sock Toss

Sit across from your child. Toss a pair of rolled up socks back and forth to take turns retelling a story.

Adult Toss 1: "First, Little Red Riding Hood went into the woods to visit her grandma."

Child Toss 2: "Next, she met a wolf who asked where she was going."

Continue tossing the socks until the whole story has been re-told.

The 5 Finger Strategy

After reading a story, practice using all 5 fingers to retell a story. Hold up your hand and use each finger as a "checklist."

- Thumb: Characters (Who is in the story?)
- Pointer: Setting (Where are they?)
- Middle: Problem (What went wrong?)
- Ring: Events (What happened in the beginning, middle, and end?)
- Pinky: Solution (How was the problem fixed?)

The 20-Token Challenge

Gather 20 small items (pennies, dried beans, Lego bricks, or paperclips). Give your child the 20 items. Tell them they are going to retell the story, but every sentence they say "costs" them one token. The goal is to successfully retell the story using all 20 items.

Don't Say THAT Word

Pick 1-2 common words from the book that your child is banned from using while they retell the story to you. For example, if you read Cinderella, they aren't allowed to say the words shoe ball. Instead of saying "She lost her shoe," they have to think critically and rephrase: "She dropped her glass slipper on the stairs while running away."

Shadow Puppet Retell

Using a flashlight (or a smartphone flashlight) and a dark wall, turn off the lights and use your hands to create simple shadows on the wall. Have your child use the shadow shapes to act out the events of the story. If hand shadows are too tricky, use their favorite stuffed animals or action figures to cast the shadows.

The Emoji Retell

Have your child retell the story to you without using words for emotions. Every time a character has feelings in the story, your child has to freeze and make that exact dramatic face (super angry, terrified, overjoyed) to show the mood of that scene before continuing the plot.

Did You Know?

Around age 7 and 8, children are still developing a firm grasp on how time transitions work. When asked to retell a story, their brains naturally want to jump straight to the most exciting, high-emotion parts rather than processing the events as a logical chain reaction.



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The "Whodunit" Case File

Treat the book like a crime or mystery that needs solving. You play the Chief of Police, and your child is the Lead Detective. Instead of a standard retell, they must present their "Case File" to you using specific transition words. They must use the "Because / But / So" framework: "The main character wanted [Goal]... BUT [Problem happened]... SO they tried [Action]... BECAUSE [Motivation]."

The Story Mountain Climb

Draw an imaginary mountain in the air with your finger. Have your child re-trace the mountain in the air as they talk:

- Mountain Base: Introduce the characters and setting.
- Climbing Up: The events building up to the problem.
- The Peak: The most intense or exciting moment.
- Going Down: How the problem starts getting fixed.
- The Base: What did the character learn, or what is the moral?.

The Villain's Side of the Story

Have your child retell the events of the story from the villain's perspective to make them look innocent or misunderstood. For example, "Mr. Wolf just had a terrible cold. He went to ask for sugar, and his sneezes accidentally leveled those poorly built houses!"

The Reverse Retell

Start at the very end of the story. Your child has to retell the story backward using cause-and-effect language.

Example: "The story ends with the turtle winning the race. That happened because the hare fell asleep. The hare fell asleep because he was so far ahead and arrogant. He was far ahead because he is faster than the turtle..."

Retell Auction

Tell your child they have an imaginary budget of \$10 to "buy" the story back from you. Every sentence they use in their retell costs them \$1. However, if they use a high-level third-grade word (like Therefore, Consequently, Meanwhile, However, or Furthermore), they earn \$2 back. The goal is to finish the summary with more money than they started with. *Bonus! Your child can practice math skills with this strategy as well.

The Movie Pitch

Pretend your child is a Hollywood screenwriter pitching this book to you to turn it into a blockbuster film. They have to "sell" you on the plot, but you are a tough crowd. You can interrupt them with producer questions like: "Who cares about the setting?" or "what happens if the main character fails?"

Did You Know?

If your child reads perfectly but can't retell the story, they may be using too much energy sounding out words instead of picturing the action. They need automaticity or the ability to read words instantly and effortlessly.



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The Domino Effect

You and your child will alternate sentences to retell the story, but every turn must start with the phrase, "Because that happened..."

Adult: "The main character chose to sneak out of the house at night."

Child: "Because that happened, he missed his alarm and was late for the championship game."

Parent: "Because that happened, the coach benched him for the first half..."

The "Slow-Motion" Replay

Pick the most action-packed or chaotic scene in the book (a chase scene, a big argument, or a discovery). Challenge your child to retell that specific event in "slow motion." They are not allowed to move on to the next major plot point until they have listed at least five specific, granular details about the setting, the characters' movements, or the exact words spoken in that exact scene.

The "Who Said It?" Retell

Challenge your child to retell a major event in the book using only the dialogue and spoken interactions between the characters. They have to change their voice or mimic the expressions of the characters to show who is speaking.

Multi-Character Timeline

Pick one scene in the book or story. Have your child retell that exact scene multiple times, but each time they must do it through the eyes of a different character involved.

- Round 1: Retell what happened from Character A's perspective.
- Round 2: Retell the exact same scene, but include the details Character B would have noticed.

The "Rewind" Button

Have your child retell the story normally from the beginning. At random intervals, you shout, "REWIND 30 SECONDS!" or "FAST FORWARD 2 CHAPTERS!" Your child must physically mimic a VCR tape rewinding ("Bzzzzt"), stop, and then either repeat the last few details with different wording, or instantly jump forward and accurately pick up the exact sequential details of that later chapter.

The "Director's Commentary"

Pretend the book is a movie, and you are both watching it together. Your child is the director giving the "behind-the-scenes commentary". They retell the story, but they must narrate the background details that the author included to set the scene. For Example: "Notice how the author keeps mentioning the storm rattling the windows? That's because the character is feeling incredibly trapped and anxious about the phone call she's waiting for."

Did You Know?

Retelling trains a child's brain to organize information logically, which directly builds the foundational thinking skills they need for essay writing and public speaking.



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Retell Perspective

Have your child retell a major chapter from the perspective of a minor character, a bystander, or an antagonist who views the main character's actions with suspicion or disapproval. They must include all the same plot facts, but retell them with a completely different emotional tone or interpretation.

The Connections Interrupt

Have your child begin a chronological retell. At any point, snap your fingers and call out a secondary character's name (e.g., "The quirky neighbor!" or "The estranged brother!"). Your child must instantly freeze the main story and retell exactly what that secondary character was doing, thinking, or experiencing during that exact moment in the timeline, before snapping back to the main plot.

Fifth Grade Prompting Tips:

Instead of asking what happened, ask more detailed questions like:

- How did the author use the setting in that chapter to match the character's internal conflict?
- Where do you think the turning point was for that character's relationships?

The Foreshadower

Start at the end of the book and trace clues backward. Retell the story in reverse. For example: "The ending happens because of X. But if we go back to Chapter 10, the author dropped a hint when the character noticed Y. And if we go all the way back to Chapter 2, it was actually setup by Z..."

The Motif Tracker

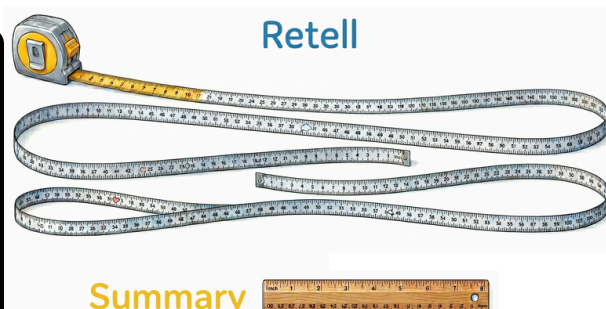
Stories often use recurring symbols or motifs (like a specific color, an animal, bad weather, or an old watch) to represent a deeper meaning as the plot progresses. Have your child retell the story only through the lens of that recurring object or symbol.

The "Breaking News" Live Feed

Pretend the most exciting part of the story is happening right now in real-time, and your child is a news anchor delivering a breaking news broadcast. They must retell the event using frantic, immediate language ("This just in..."). For example: "We are live at the castle where the dragon has just broken through the gates! For those just tuning in, this crisis actually began three days ago when the prince mistakenly took the golden egg from the valley..."

Did You Know?

There is a major difference between a "retell" and a "summary"—a retell is a detailed, step-by-step account of a story, while a summary is a brief overview of only the most critical main ideas.



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The History Book

Pretend the events of the novel happened 100 years ago and are now being taught in a history class. Your child is the professor delivering the comprehensive lecture on the "historical event." They must retell the plot chronologically, but they must use formal, objective language to detail the timeline, the conflicts, the catalyst (the inciting incident), the major battles or turning points, and the ultimate fallout (the resolution).

The Puppet Master

In complex novels, there is often a powerful entity pulling the strings behind the scenes without the main character realizing it until the very end.

Have your child retell the story entirely from the perspective of this "Puppet Master." They must recount the sequence of events by explaining how they secretly orchestrated, manipulated, or anticipated the main character's moves from the beginning to the end.

The Multi-Perspective Scenario

Pick a major, chaotic event where multiple characters were present. You act as an investigator questioning your child. Your child must retell that single event three times in a row, switching seamlessly between three different characters. However, they must strictly limit what they retell based only on what that specific character actually saw, heard, or knew at that exact micro-second in the book.

The Ripple Effect

Choose a single piece of dialogue or a minor mistake made by a character in the middle of the book. Your child must retell the rest of the book by exclusively tracking the "ripples" of that one moment. They must detail how that single event directly or indirectly caused every conversation, conflict, and resolution that followed it down the line.

20/20 Hindsight

Have your child retell the story from the perspective of an older, wiser version of the main character who is looking back on their past mistakes. As they retell the events in order, they must pause at every major decision and analyze the "blind spots" they had at the time. For example: "In Chapter 3, I trusted the stranger and gave him the key. Retelling it now, I can see all the red flags."

The "Catalyst"

A character's growth is usually spurred by a series of specific, jarring catalysts. Have your child retell the story by focusing entirely on the character's internal transformation. They must sequence the retell by identifying the 3 or 4 exact moments in the book where the character's worldview was shifted and how they acted differently afterward.

Did You Know?

You can practice retelling with your child using almost any media—asking them to explain the plot of a cartoon, a video game, or a family event uses the exact same brain pathways as retelling a story.

