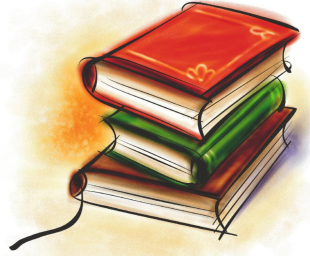


# What If My Teenager Won't Read?



I am a reluctant housekeeper. It isn't that I am incapable of cleaning. It is just that, faced with a mop and pail, I am overwhelmed by the tedium, the monotony, the sheer banality of the task. Reluctant readers feel the same way about books as I feel about washing the kitchen floor. Having a tooth filled - without freezing - seems like more fun.

So if you are the parent of a reluctant reader, what can you do? As a parent, everyone - from your teenager's teacher to Oprah - tells you that it is imperative that your adolescent read. But threatening your teen doesn't seem to work; neither does gentle cajoling. Bribery starts looking better and better, but we know that bribery doesn't work in the long run, either. We have to help teenagers find the intrinsic value in reading.

First, it is important to know if your teen is a reluctant reader or a struggling one. This is a critical distinction; reluctance presupposes an ability to read whereas struggling indicates a true problem with the reading process. But how do you know?

Here is a quick check: isolate 100 words from a front page newspaper article from the Edmonton Journal and ask your teen to read them aloud. If your teen has difficulty with more than two or three words, your teenager might be a struggling reader. If your teen has no difficulty reading those 100 words, then it is more likely he or she is a reluctant reader.

The good news? Reluctance is more easily overcome. The trick is to find out what is "fun" - and that is going to vary from kid to kid. While English teachers might prefer books with long, flowing descriptive passages and subtle nuances in characterization, books such as these may be at odds with the goal of motivating teenagers to read.

Typically, teens enjoy books that are heavy on plot, abundant in graphics, and simplistic in structure. Books that are part of a series are particularly good - young people who read series are more likely to be life-long readers.

Informational books and magazines are also motivating for teens. If your teenager has a love for a particular hobby or topic, you might look for books or magazines about it. Books with short, informational reading passages, like the *Uncle John's Bathroom Readers* or the *Chicken Soup* books, can encourage regular reading as kids find the shorter format less overwhelming.

Parents frequently bemoan the fact that teenagers would rather spend their time socializing than reading. Perhaps you might tap into this natural inclination by reading the same books as your child and talking about them. Or encourage your teens to share what they have read with other family members or friends. Surf the web to find some sites where kids can share their thoughts about books ([www.teensreadtoo.com](http://www.teensreadtoo.com) or the Edmonton Public Library site are good places to start). If a book has been adapted for the big screen, you might try discussing the differences between the book and the film.

Will any of these strategies fix your teenager's reading issues right away? Not necessarily. It will take creativity and consistency, but your efforts will pay off. In terms of housekeeping, my mother's efforts paid off - I am so convinced of the benefits of a clean house, I now hire a cleaning service. It gives me more time to read.

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## 10 Great Books For Reluctant Teenagers

1. *Maximum Ride* - James Patterson (series)
2. *Twilight* - Stephanie Meyer (series)
3. *American Born Chinese* - Gene Lueh Yang (graphic novel)
4. *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* - Sherman Alexie
5. *Speak* - Laurie Halse Anderson \*
6. *Bone* - Jeff Smith (graphic novel)
7. *The Merchant of Death* - D.J. McHale (series)
8. *Looking for Alaska* - John Green \*
9. *Uglies* - Scott Westerfield (series)
10. *Cirque Du Freak* - Darren Shan (series)

\*mature subject matter