Bedtime Story Questions That Quietly Build Reception Reading Skills

A gentle guide for parents and carers of children in Reception on how to use simple, playful questions during bedtime stories to help your child develop early reading and understanding skills.

What is story-time talking?

When we read with children in Reception (the first year of primary school for children aged 4 to 5), we often focus on the words on the page. However, talking about the story is just as important. This is about having a relaxed conversation while you share a book. Instead of just reading the text, you can pause to ask a few simple questions. This helps your child move from just listening to actively thinking about the plot and the characters. It is not a lesson or a test; it is simply a way to make the story more interactive and enjoyable for both of you.

How it works in practice

You can use a few 'go-to' questions to spark a conversation. To help with prediction, you might ask, 'What do you think happens next?' To encourage them to use picture clues, try, 'Look at the drawing; how do you think the character is feeling?' If you spot a new or unusual word, you can stop and wonder together what it might mean. Finally, after the book is closed, you could ask them to retell their favourite part in their own words. These small moments turn a quiet story into a shared exploration of the book's world.

Why this helps your child

These conversations build comprehension, which is the ability to understand and make sense of what is being read. While your child is learning phonics (the method of teaching reading by linking sounds to letters) at school, talking about stories builds a different set of skills. It helps them understand how stories are structured and how to imagine things they cannot see. By spotting clues in pictures and predicting outcomes, they are developing the mental tools they will need later to understand more complex texts independently.

Easy ways to help at home

The most important thing is to keep it low-pressure and fun. You do not need to ask questions on every page; just one or two a night is plenty. Let your child lead the way—if they are excited about a specific picture, spend a moment talking about it. For children who find it harder to speak or those learning English, you can point to the pictures and ask 'yes or no' questions, or ask them to point to something in the illustration. Remember, every family is different, and the goal is simply to enjoy the book together.

Common questions

Many parents wonder if they should correct their child if they guess the story wrong. The answer is no; there are no 'wrong' answers when predicting! The goal is to get them thinking, not to be correct. Others ask if they should read the same book every night. If your child loves a particular story, reading it repeatedly is actually very helpful for their confidence and memory. If you are unsure which books are best for your child's current level, your child's teacher will be happy to give you some suggestions.

Sources

- Department for Education: Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage
- GOV.UK: National curriculum in England: early years foundation stage