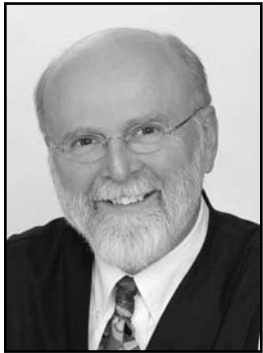


## No More Pencils, No More Books?

# Simple Solutions to the “Summer Slide”

by Michael Mann



**O**n my way to Ohio for a speaking engagement recently, I looked down the airplane aisle, calculating where my seat was located. Halfway down sat a man for whom airline seats are not made. He wasn't overweight; he was just oversized. He wore a plaid shirt and baseball cap. I quickly realized my seat was next to his. As I tucked my carry-on into the overhead, I saw that he was reading a very thick book. A big man, a big book. My super-sized seatmate unfolded himself from his seat to let me by; he leaned his head forward to keep from bumping the ceiling. I squeezed by and asked what he was reading. He refolded into his seat and said, “Harry Potter – summer is coming and my fourth grader and I read books together. I've been out of town and she's already got a head start on me. I've got to keep up.” We were instant friends. I thought to myself, “Here's a father who understands how to avoid the summer slide.”

### Summer Brain Drain

According to a number of studies, “summer slide” occurs when students forget some of what they learned in school and fall behind by two to three months during the summer break. Teachers often spend four to six weeks in the fall re-teaching material that students have forgotten, says Timothy Shanahan, president of the International Reading Association and director of the University of Illinois at Chicago Center for Literacy. “Those months have to be regained again the following fall,” Shanahan says. “Summer reading prevents some of that forgetting.”

### Reading is Reading

At the Go Wild at Your Library reading event in Minneapolis, I spoke with several authors of great books for teens. I asked how they avoided the summer slide in their teen years. Here are some responses:

“It doesn't matter so much what teens are reading. Reading is reading is reading,” said Patrick Jones, author of *Things Change*. “I read about professional wrestling, something I was

deeply interested in. I also read about politics because it was during the Watergate era.” Julie Schumacher, author of *The Book of One Hundred Truths*, said, “I grew up in a book-loving family and my parents often put the television away during summer.”

“Paperback westerns, Classics Illustrated comics and other escapist literature,” said Will Durbin, author of *El Lector*. “I also spent a lot of time outdoors.”

### Reluctant Teen?

Patrick Jones suggested that parents of reluctant teens should passively endorse reading. For example, you could strategically place books near the computer monitor or on a pile of clothes on the floor to be ‘discovered’ later. He also mentioned an American Library Association website containing booklists, including an awesome one for reluctant young adult readers: [www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/booklists).

### Reading is the Gateway

Dr. David Walsh, child psychologist and founder of MediaWise says, “Literacy is a gateway skill to all other learning.” Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the nation's oldest and largest children's literacy organization, and Scholastic, a national publisher of educational materials, agrees.

**Here is my take on the tips these organizations offer:**

### Six books to summer success

Research shows that reading just six books during the summer may keep a struggling reader from regressing. A critical time for children, especially boys, is when they make the transition from picture books to chapter books. Visit the library and get help selecting books that match your child's age, interests and abilities. Libraries have fun, child-friendly summer reading programs. Encourage kids to read a book about a fun activity – for example, if you're going to a baseball game, suggest your child read a book about a favorite player.



### Read something every day

Have plenty of reading material around, like newspapers, magazines and informational material that might spark the interest of a young reader. If kids see adults around them reading often, they will understand that literature can be fun and important. Avoid specific requirements about how much children should read in the summer. Make sure they pick up books for fun. Remember to take your kids' favorite reading series along on road trips.

### Keep reading aloud

Reading aloud benefits all children, even teens, especially those who struggle. Take your children to see a local storyteller, or be one yourself. Improvise different voices or wear a silly hat to make the story more interesting for younger children. Reading to children helps them do better when they read on their own.

My super-sized friend on the plane said he and his daughter read aloud to each other when he's home. I told him his daughter is a very lucky girl, and he added, “I'd rather spend time with my daughter than with Tony Soprano.” Yes, time is the real currency we have for our children and books are a great way to spend it. ➤

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