

As an educator and parent of two in a military family, I struggle with balancing my children's reading and their desire for playing plugged-in devices. It all began with a tour to Germany. Overseas my children were somewhat shielded from the constant use of T.V. (because all we received were news shows) and PlayStation (there weren't any stores to buy American games). At the time, I thought that would solve the problem. But no, eventually we had to relocate to the United States. In 2003, the entire U.S. pre-teen population was waiting to share with my kids all that they had been missing.

In order to be included in the conversation, and invited to different outings, my children needed exposure to what others had already had the opportunity to explore. What to do?

I decided to be a compromiser. During the school year I felt very strongly that one hour per night was plenty of time spent on T.V., Playstation, Nintendo, Ipod, Gameboy... you get the picture. In order for my children to enjoy one hour of plug-ins or have-battery devices, they needed to read for one hour. After school, homework, and dinner, this plan fit in very well with the remaining time available. I usually do not enforce this for the radio...I feel you can read and listen to music effectively. In our family, the background tunes of a radio (on a reasonable volume) have not been an issue affecting schoolwork.

During the summer we run the routine with a twist. Mornings are spent completing chores and the required one hour reading time (my husband still wants to institute the "quarter-bounce" test on the mattress but I think we'll pass). If they wish, the kids may read longer, to earn more time. We are fortunate enough to have a pool and a lake for swimming. The kids spend the entire afternoon swimming, and come home to read or use their viewing time.

In the three years we have used this method, I have found it extremely helpful. The kids know the rules up front, there are no arguments... well, not many, and I stick by it.

The plan has worked SO well, the kids take books with them in the car everywhere we go. This is especially helpful at restaurants. If they happen to finish the book? I always have a deck of cards handy!