

Surefire Ways to Engage eReaders



The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered classrooms around the globe into digital-based learning, though for years educators have supplemented their curriculum with digital content to engage their students. Educators are now tasked with providing robust and varied content for remote learners, and this content is now more critical than ever. MackinVIA, a free and multi-award-winning platform, supports your curriculum with a rich collection of digital texts and tools.¹

However, reading in a digital environment can be a new and sometimes challenging experience for students, and educators need to find ways to motivate and engage our digital readers. Here are surefire ways to engage and motivate eReaders.



Give Students Choice

Leading researcher on literacy engagement, John T. Guthrie, emphasizes how critically important it is that students get the chance to choose what they read. Choice is important for both independent reading and assigned reading.²

Readers of all levels will find that the user-friendly filter options in MackinVIA can help guide them to the books in your collection that suit their needs. Younger readers (or their adult helper) can filter by interest level or use the categories feature to find a book that is right for them. Finding the right book starts with having a robust collection for students to filter.

As educators, we can guide our less experienced and striving readers. Groups of titles can be curated and highlighted on the landing page. Just like a featured shelf in the physical library, a MackinVIA Group can be set up by theme, newest titles, award-winners, grade levels, literature circle books, inquiry units, or collections based on any special curriculum project.

Quick Tips to Provide Choice:

- Many publishers are offering free and discounted eBooks and digital subscriptions. Mackin can help you find these resources to add to your school's digital collection.
- Mackin's staff librarians and educators can help build your digital library and customize solutions for you with competitive pricing, so your students can access more books.
- You can set up a digital bookshelf using the MackinVIA groups feature to show the most popular titles from your collection.

Promote Personalization and Accessibility

Environment matters for every task that requires focus, so certainly reading requires an environment that feels good and motivates the reader. Some might enjoy a softly lit, quiet room in a cozy corner, while others like to listen to music while they read at a bustling coffee shop. The same is true in the digital realm. If students can personalize their reading experience, they will be engaged in their reading, and motivated to build their reading stamina.

MackinVIA offers students the opportunity to personalize the visual aspect of their digital reading environment. MackinVIA eBooks have an array of personalization options. Readers can adjust the print size, change the font type (including open-dyslexic font, which is weighted at the bottom and can help students track and maintain focus), brightness, background color, and more.

Providing diverse forms of text is one great way to provide accessibility. MackinVIA offers access to numerous resources to help students across all reading levels and abilities to better comprehend the content. Think beyond reading the pages of a book on a screen: MackinVIA also hosts audiobooks and databases; even videos and links you use in your instruction can be embedded from other sites. A student who might not be ready to read the classic *Romeo and Juliet* can hop over to the graphic novel version in MackinVIA to enhance their understanding. Perhaps a novel in verse, an audiobook, or an eBook with a read-along or text-to-speech feature, will provide an access point for students.

Quick Tips for Accessibility and Personalization:

- Don't be afraid to provide offerings below reading level – readers don't always have to read challenging texts.
- Encourage short reads for any reader: news articles, short stories, myths or folklore, picture books (even for older readers), poetry, interactive eBooks.
- Provide alternative editions or adaptations of texts. Example: a content-area text about the American Revolution might be supplemented with picture book biographies of the Founding Fathers.
- Encourage reading routines, even at home, that have a personalized reward at the end. Ask your students to be purposeful about setting their own rewards. Example: After I read for 20 minutes, I will eat my favorite snack, or do an activity I like. Bonus: this positive reinforcement will help create a habit of reading at home.



Make Reading Social

We know that our learners are social, and in a digital environment, teachers are looking for ways to maintain the social aspect of school. We also know that having students process, discuss, and reflect on their reading makes them more engaged. As Ann Ketch says in *Conversation: The Comprehension Connection*, “Conversation helps individuals make sense of their world. It helps to build empathy, understanding, respect for different opinions, and ownership of the learning process.”³ Collaboration, critical thinking, and communication skills are key components for getting our learners ready to become a part of the 21st-century workforce, so we want to find ways to continue this learning even when we can't physically share the same space.

One way to share and facilitate discussion around their reading is with their MackinVIA backpacks. When a student is logged in and has checked out a book, they can take notes and highlight. Students can easily share their notes with others or with their teacher. When teachers find fun ways for students to socially connect and talk about their books, it's a win for engaging and motivating readers.

Quick Tips to Make Reading Social in Virtual Discussions:

Have your students:

- Talk about reading with someone they know, not necessarily a teacher or peers and share the result. Examples: Ask someone if they've ever experienced the problem one of the characters in the book is facing; ask someone what they know about a place, time period, real person, event, or situation in your reading.
- Hold their book (or provide a photo) and share ONLY one word to describe their book or its primary theme.
- Find an object that represents a character (or subject, time period, place) in some way.
- Virtually tour a place featured in their reading (or similar to it) using Google Earth and share something noticed or learned.
- Use free digital resources to talk about their books. Flipgrid, Backchannel Chat, Slack, and Padlet are all free and can be useful during distance or digital learning.



Coach Your Readers

It is so important that we coach our students to see themselves as readers and to grow as readers with both print and digital texts. Consider translating how you coached readers in person to what you're doing digitally in your classroom. Conferencing can still happen with the digital tools available to you and your students. If you used inventory assessments, keep using them. When you do have a reader who just isn't picking up a book or maintaining attention in a choice text, think about the types of texts this student is being asked to read. If a student is reluctant to pick up a book (be it print or digital), consider suggesting engagement in a different type of text. For example, if a student isn't engaging in your assigned whole class novel, see if engaging in a short film such as "Hair Love" by Matthew A. Cherry would be of interest. Students can watch it and share their thinking in the same way they do with independent reading, which gets them to engage with the content. From there, students can be connected to an article related to themes from the film. Now they are ready for an independent reading book on the same issue. Building students' confidence and gradually scaffolding our students to a place where they're reading a book independently is the goal.

Quick Tips for Coaching Digital Readers:

- Point out to readers how much reading they do daily on social media and/or video games.
- Try introducing reluctant readers to a choose-your-own-adventure, comics, graphic novels, or a wordless book to get them interested and to hook them.
- Conference with your readers regularly and keep notes about what they are reading and how it's working for them.
- Have students chart their reading status or give them the opportunity to provide feedback to you on the accessibility and their own engagement in the texts you assign.
- Talk to students about the reading they naturally do when it's not part of an assignment, to encourage them to think about reading in their everyday life.
- Get comfortable having students in your Zoom waiting room working independently while you conference one-on-one with readers so you can focus your coaching on each learner's needs.

What are ways that you engage and motivate students in a digital environment?

¹ "MackinVIA." *Mackin*, n.d. <https://www.mackin.com/hq/digital/mackinvia/>.

² Guthrie, John T. *Engaging Adolescents in Reading*. Corwin Press, 2007.

³ Ketch, Ann. "Conversation: The Comprehension Connection." *Reading Teacher* v59 n1 p8-13. International Literacy Association, September 2005.

