Talking about books with independent readers……

**Grades 4 and 5:**

Once kiddos begin reading on their own or getting into chapter books, things finally get interesting — and, for some, rather quiet. For a lot of kids, reading is private. This is when to start honing your power to draw your child out.

1. **Discuss difficult words.** If your child is reading to you, it’s easy to stop and talk about words that are above their pay grade. Bring in the dictionary. Talk about words you are confused about, too — it makes it okay for her to not know.
2. **Make the questions personal.** At this stage, it’s time to move beyond basic plot-based questions like, “What do you think happens next?” You can invite them to engage a little more personally with the book, to see themselves in a situation. “What would you have done differently?” Explore how their motivations may be different from what’s on the page.
3. **Compare and contrast.** Early readers love book series, and series easily lend themselves to comparison. How was this book different from the last one you read?
4. **Avoid the book report questions.** There are many well-meaning lists of questions to ask young readers, with totally reasonable inquiries like, “What was the most exciting part?” “What was the saddest part” and “Were you surprised by anything? Why?” But your kiddo gets a lot of this at school. If what you want is a true dialogue with your child, where you understand their point of view and help them see yours, the questions should go deeper and be more intimate.
5. **Make connections to the real world.** As the books they read become more complex, you can discuss more complex ideas — even tough concepts like death or prejudice. This is when the conversations get really interesting, and fun.
6. **Just riff.** Especially if you’re reading aloud or reading together, conversation is easy. The unplanned, stream-of-consciousness discussions are the most authentic and most likely to be engaging.

**Grade 6 and BEYOND….**  
Kids this age are reading independently and choosing their own books, so you may have to do some legwork.

1. **Read what they read.** Even if you aren’t reading aloud or side by side, you can stay on top of what they’re thinking about by [putting your nose in the same book](http://www.readbrightly.com/reading-what-my-kids-are-reading/) — whether it’s comics, fantasy, or YA. You can’t offer insight or critique if you haven’t cracked the spine. You may even be surprised at how interesting these books are!
2. **Stay authentic.** The best conversations are knit together by the interests and points of view you share with your child — and where you differ. Share opinions but…
3. **Don’t judge.** Your child is developing his own worldview, trying on personas and values that didn’t necessarily spring up underneath your roof. That’s important — and good. Don’t squelch an opportunity to engage by dismissing your child’s take on a book or character as wrong or bad. You’re missing out on an opportunity to see how she or he ticks.
4. **You be you — a reader.** Bring your passion for books to the table, and let them learn by watching what you do. Read voraciously. Talk about the people, places, and things in your books. Be engaged — and you’ll engage them.