

ELEMENTARY edition

A PUBLICATION FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENTS



How to spark a love of reading

Many young children take to reading with eagerness, devouring each new tale of *Junie B. Jones* or those in Lemony Snickett's Series of *Unfortunate Events*. However, some children – for a variety of reasons – are simply reluctant to pick up a book unless it's required for school.

In this issue of *Elementary Edition*, we will look at some of the ways families can help spark a love of reading in their young children – setting them on the path to better learning in all of their subjects. These home-based ideas come from reading teachers and parents, just like you, who are working diligently to raise enthusiastic readers!

Read aloud, even when your children are able to read to themselves.

In *The Read Aloud Handbook*, author Jim Trelease says reading with children is one of the most important activities families can do together. When reading aloud to your children, you

introduce them to new vocabulary words and ideas – all while having fun. Many times, hearing a story will encourage children to read independently as a way of learning more about the subject. With more independent readers, you can take turns reading portions aloud to one another. Let everyone in the family take turns choosing the books to read together. This guarantees a good variety of stories and everyone will learn more about each other's interests.

Create a home library with many different types of written materials.

Some children love curling up with a chapter book, while others (even more experienced readers) want their stories full of colorful pictures or illustrations. Regular trips to the local library can keep your home library stocked with a fresh (and free) source of each. Look for interesting children's magazines while at the library or bookstore. Classroom book orders are also a great resource for

quality, low-cost books. Instruction books for games and crafts, magazines, newspapers and age-appropriate graphic novels (link to <http://www.ala.org/ala/booklinksbucket/graphicnovelsforyounger.htm> for a good list) are a few ways to add variety to your home-based library.

Practice what you preach.

When you and the rest of your family read regularly – for enjoyment, for information or to perform a task (e.g., following a recipe or programming the DVD player from instructions) – you are a positive role model for your children and are showing them how reading relates to all areas of life.

Tap into your child's interests.

One mother credits the *Geronimo Stilton* series, with its comic-book format, with turning her third grader into an eager reader. Librarians and other parents and children are wonderful sources for suggestions on books your own child might like. Though many of the books children read are fiction, non-fiction books can also be a terrific way for them to learn what is meaningful to them. Books by Capstone Press, at www.capstonepress.com

and at local bookstores and libraries, include titles like *BMX Freestyle*, *Crafts from Papier-Mâché* and *Forming a Band*. Not only do these tap into what interests children most, but many of these books are also written for beginning readers – a plus when younger children want to learn but have yet to develop independent reading skills.

Informal book talks can be a great way to stay connected with older, independent readers.

Though they may not want to read *with* you, try reading the same book independently and discussing it as you go. Local libraries also offer book discussion groups geared toward young teens and their parents. Check with the local library for information about such offerings – or think about organizing one of your own!

Try movies, plays and books-on-tape.

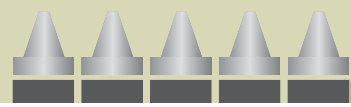
Many books for children have been turned into movies (think *Harry Potter*) or recorded as books-on-tape – available at school and local libraries. Likewise, check out performances by high school or community theater groups. (Family event listings in the local paper often include information about these types of performances.) With reluctant readers, stories in these forms may be just what they need to spark an interest in picking up the book (or tackling the next in a series). This can also be a fun way for children who have already read the book to experience the story from a different perspective.

FUN WAYS TO ENCOURAGE READING:

- ★ **Name their world.** Help early readers build their vocabulary by creating signs/index cards together that identify toys or furniture like "bed," "radio" "hamster," etc.
- ★ **Play cards and board games together.** Kid-versions of Scrabble and Boggle are two that are particularly good at encouraging vocabulary and spelling.

- ★ **Write messages for your children and ask them to write to you, too.** Notes in lunchboxes, lists of responsibilities and posting important activities and events encourages your children to read for meaning. Writing back to you or other family and friends gives them real-life ways to use all the new words they are learning.
- ★ **Learn a new craft or hobby.** Encourage kids to learn more

- about their passions by reading instructions in do-it-yourself kits, from the Web or in related books.
- ★ **Get cooking.** Some kid-friendly cookbooks to look to for inspiration include the *Magic Spoon Cookbook* by Suzanne Gooding and *Honest Pretzels: And 64 Other Amazing Recipes for Cooks Ages 8 & Up* by Mollie Katzen.



The Journey of Learning is Guided Through Books

Walk into any one of the Greater Johnstown School District's five "book rooms" and what will you see?

Shelves upon shelves of colorful books filled with facts and fancy.



Three years ago, Assistant Superintendent Katherine Sullivan initiated the guided reading library concept as a complement to the "Open Court" reading program after several hours of professional development was provided to the staff. The purchase of hundreds of books was made possible through grant funding and by organizing existing resources.

Why a book room in addition to a school library?

The book rooms are part of a districtwide reading plan to improve reading skills for all students. They are stocked with resources to help youngsters expand their reading horizons.

Each book room offers a notebook that lists all of the available titles and their locations, along with the level, genre or theme. The notebook also indicates if there are teacher resources available. There are folders filled with different worksheets, activities and tests that correspond with the books. The availability of multiple copies of books allows teachers to use the book rooms as a resource for the entire class or for a small group.

Benefits of the book room

There are many instances where a teacher will leave the "Open Court" basal series, go to the book room, select a literature book and then return to the basal series, tying everything

together. For instance, the series includes an excerpt from the novel "Sarah, Plain and Tall" by Patricia MacLachlan. Several elementary teachers commented that they wanted their students to experience the entire book. The book room experience allows them to do so.

The book rooms were systematically created. Prior to their creation, teachers kept their own collection of books in their individual classroom. By combining their resources, all students and teachers benefited by having one central book room in each building.

"The book room provides more of a variety," said Corrina Pelkey, AIS reading teacher at Jansen Avenue Elementary. "There are more choices."

Jansen Avenue fifth grade teacher Mary Eagan added that the book rooms have expanded their non-fiction collection so students can read a wide variety of topics that may interest them, from New York State history to how electricity works.

"The best thing about this program is that all of the schools share books. It is district wide," said Lisa Buggeln, a fourth grade teacher from Warren Street Elementary who was instrumental in organizing the

project. "We are modeling that reading is fun."

Practice makes perfect

"The book rooms encourage children to read something they like," said Jane Sitterly, Pleasant Avenue Elementary resource teacher, who provided professional development to teachers on the use of the book rooms. "It also helps them practice their reading at the same time." Many

teachers will go into the book room and find something they know a hesitant reader will enjoy because the topic will interest them. "I can come to the book room, gather books and help my students establish a base," said Sitterly. The goal is for students to read on a regular basis, refine their reading skills and get everyone reading on grade level.

The resources of the book room allows teachers to target a child's specific needs. "I can check out a book for a student at one level and another book for a student at a different level, both with the same theme," said Kim Mosher, a fourth grade teacher from Glebe Street Elementary. "These leveled books allow for every student to learn the same skills but with books at their reading level."

An extension of the book rooms for a lifetime of reading

"The book room really provides a love of reading for the future," said Jim

"We are modeling that reading is fun," said Lisa Buggeln.

Westman, a fourth grade teacher at Jansen Avenue Elementary.

"We were fortunate that we were able to extend the book rooms to the junior high, where the English curriculum is primarily literature based," said Sullivan.

The guided-reading novels allow for small groups of students with the same interests to read and discuss their books in literature circles.

Improved Coordination

"The book rooms have helped to align the curriculum," said Sarah Slingerland, an English teacher at Knox. Seventh graders will not reread the same novel they read in sixth grade. Junior high teachers know what each student has read and can plan and teach accordingly.

"The process of building the book rooms has enabled teachers to coordinate reading materials," explained Sullivan, "and it provided an opportunity for better communication to enhance the curriculum across the grade levels."

