

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Island Parenting: Reading Is Fundamental

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I write this piece as I see parents hunting for technological devices or 'apps' which are bound to make their children early or better readers. I write this piece as I see far too many children attached to 'smart' phones, kindles, or the latest technological device. I write this piece as I realize that parents are spending money ordering the latest reading programs which are guaranteed to have their children reading in a flash. Do not get me wrong, these things may prove useful but I really do not think that the sole use of these devices or methods will instill a love of literature, promote curiosity or develop a passion for lifelong learning.

What is required to develop a love of learning or assist a child in improving his or her reading skills is plenty of books and no more than fifteen minutes planted firmly on a

parent or guardian's lap engrossed in a good book. What is required is the parent or guardian assisting in bringing the book to life. What is required to instill a love of literature is an environment with plenty of good books. What is required is a library card and frequent trips to the library. This is FREE. What is required is plenty of opportunities, whether it is church or a drama group for the child to express his or herself through words. What is required is dictionary so the child can learn new words, not an 'app' or some technological device.

What is required is assigned or independent reading time as the child gets older and this has nothing to do with his or her assigned academic assignments. What is required is maximum use of the summer break spent reading so that the child does not forget everything he or she has learned over the past school year. What is required is adequate research on the part of the parent to ensure that his or her child is reading at or above the grade required grade level. I write this piece because reading is fundamental. I write this piece as I have begun to realize that there are many children who struggle with reading. This in turn affects their academic performance. As a former teacher I can tell you that the children who were avid readers were those who performed well throughout the school year because they had developed a love for reading and learning. They approached their work with zeal. They were the ones who went beyond the assigned work, did research, and brought additional knowledge to the classroom which they aptly shared with their peers. They were the ones who challenged me and were a joy to teach. They are the ones who went on to be lifelong learners.

I write this piece as I have come to realize that parents think that it is the school's job to teach their children to read. They think that it is the school's job to instill a love of learning. This is not so, this love should start at home. There are so many commercials which begin, "Give the gift of..." I think that every parent should give his or her child the gift of reading. This is one of the most precious gifts that can be given. We focus on nurturing their bodies let us focus on nurturing and nourishing their minds as well.

Top Ten Things You Should Know About Reading by Reading Rockets

An achievement gap exists

Many students enter kindergarten performing below their peers and remain behind as they move through the grades. Differences in language, exposure to print and background experiences multiply as students confront more challenging reading material in the upper grades. There is a well-established correlation between prior knowledge and reading comprehension: students who have it, get it. Students who don't, don't. The differences are quantifiable as early as age 3 (Hart & Risley, 2003).

Learning to read is complex

Reading is a complex process that draws upon many skills that need to be developed at the same time. Marilyn Adams (1990) compares the operation of the reading system to the operation of a car. Unlike drivers, though, readers also need to:

- Build the car (develop the mechanical systems for identifying words)
- Maintain the car (fuel it with print, fix up problems along the way, and make sure it runs smoothly)

- And, most importantly, drive the car (which requires us to be motivated, strategic, and mindful of the route we're taking)

Cars are built by assembling the parts separately and fastening them together. "In contrast, the parts of the reading system are not discrete. We cannot proceed by completing each individual sub-system and then fastening it to one another. Rather, the parts of the reading system must grow together. They must grow to one another and from one another."(Adams et al., 1990, pp.20-21).

The ultimate goal of reading is to make meaning from print, and a vehicle in good working order is required to help us reach that goal.

Teachers should teach with the end goal in mind

Because learning to read is complex, the most accomplished teachers learn to teach with the end goal of readers and learners in mind. Teachers working with young children learn to balance the various components of reading, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension in their everyday teaching. The very best teachers integrate the components while fostering a love of books, words, and stories.

Kids who struggle usually have problems sounding out words

Difficulties in decoding and word recognition are at the core of most reading difficulties. Poor readers have difficulty understanding that sounds in words are linked to certain letters and letter patterns. This is called the "alphabetic principle."

The reason many poor readers don't attain the alphabetic principle is because they haven't developed phonemic awareness -- being aware that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes (Lyon, 1997). When word recognition isn't automatic, reading isn't fluent, and comprehension suffers.

What happens before school matters a lot

What preschoolers know before they enter school is strongly related to how easily they learn to read in first grade. Three predictors of reading achievement that children learn before they get to school are:

- The ability to recognize and name letters of the alphabet
- General knowledge about print (understanding, for example, which is the front of the book and which is the back and how to turn the pages of a book)
- Awareness of phonemes (the sounds in words)

Reading aloud together builds these knowledge and skills. As a result, reading aloud with children is the single most important activity for parents and caregivers to do to prepare children to learn to read. (Adams, 1990).

Learning to read is closely tied to learning to talk and listen

Families and caregivers need to talk and listen to young children in order to help them learn a lot of the skills they will need for reading. When a child says "cook" and her father

says, "Would you like a cookie?" he is building her knowledge of vocabulary, sentence structure, syntax, and purposes for communication -- all of which will help her become a reader in later years. When a caregiver sings rhymes and plays word games with the children she cares for, she is helping them recognize the sounds in words (phonemic awareness). Children with language, hearing, or speech problems need to be identified early so they can receive the help they need to prevent later reading difficulties.

Without help, struggling readers continue to struggle

Many children learn to read by first grade regardless of the type of instruction they receive. The children who don't learn, however, don't seem able to catch up on their own.

More than 88 percent of children who have difficulty reading at the end of first grade display similar difficulties at the end of fourth grade (Juel, 1988). And three-quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school (Shaywitz et al., 1997). These facts highlight the importance of providing a strong foundation for reading birth through age five.

With help, struggling readers can succeed

For 85 to 90 percent of poor readers, prevention and early intervention programs can increase reading skills to average reading levels. These programs, however, need to combine instruction in phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies, and must be provided by well-trained teachers (Lyon, 1997).

As many as two-thirds of reading disabled children can become average or above-average readers if they are identified early and taught appropriately (Vellutino et al., 1996; Fletcher & Lyon, 1998). These facts underscore the value of having a highly trained teacher in every classroom.

Teaching kids to read is a team effort

Parents, teachers, caregivers, and members of the community must recognize the important role they can play in helping children learn to read. The research shows that what families do makes a difference, what teachers do makes a difference, and what community programs do makes a difference. It's time for all those who work with children to work together to ensure that every child learns to read. It is our shared responsibility.

Reading Aloud to Children is Important – U.S. Department of Education

Reading aloud to children is vital because it helps them acquire the information and skills they need in life:

- Knowledge of printed letters and words, and the relationship between sound and print.
- The meaning of words.
- How books work, and a variety of writing styles.
- The world in which they live.

- The difference between written language and everyday conversation.
- The pleasure of reading.

Reading to young children promotes language acquisition and literacy development and, later on, achievement in reading comprehension and overall success in school. The percentage of young children read aloud to daily by a family member is one indicator of how well young children are prepared for school. Yet, recent studies on family reading suggest too many youngsters go without the benefit of a family member reading to them.

Quotes on Reading

"You have to remember that children are newcomers to the world. They didn't come bringing any information, so they need to learn as much as possible. The best way to do that is by reading so that you know as much as possible. Then make up a story about Europe, the queen of England, a king in Sweden. No matter what it's about, if you make a story exciting enough, they'll be inspired to go out and learn more." Maya Angelou

"As a child, I loved listening to my mother read to me. Little did I know she was doing much more than providing comfort and entertainment; she was paving the way for my learning and success at school. George and I later discovered what my mother already knew: that some of our sweetest memories came from reading together as a family." Laura Bush

"Any book that helps a child to form a habit of reading, to make reading one of his deep and continuing needs, is good for him." Maya Angelou

"When I look back, I am so impressed again with the life-giving power of literature. If I were a young person today, trying to gain a sense of myself in the world, I would do that again by reading, just as I did when I was young." Maya Angelou

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." Frederick Douglass

"So please, oh PLEASE, we beg, we pray, go throw your TV set away. And in its place you can install, a lovely bookshelf on the wall." Roald Dahl

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents." Emilie Buchwald

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you'll go." Dr Seuss

"There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island." Walt Disney

"There is no substitute for books in the life of a child." May Ellen Chase

"Today a reader, tomorrow a leader." Margaret Fuller

"When I say to a parent, 'read to a child', I don't want it to sound like medicine. I want it to sound like chocolate." Mem Fox

"Fill your house with stacks of books, in all the crannies and all the nooks." Dr Seuss

"Reading should not be presented to children as a chore or duty. It should be offered to them as a precious gift." Kate DiCamillo

"Books make great gifts because they have whole worlds inside of them." Neil Gaiman

Recommended Reading for Children

My Caribbean Grandma written by Sandra Campbell – Notice, Illustrations by Anura Srinath

Br'er Anancy and the Magic Pot written by V.S. Russell, Illustrations by Clovis Brown

Grandpa Sydney's Anancy Stories written by Geoffrey Philip

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