

A newsletter for parents about what school library programs have to offer.

www.theschoollibrarylink.com



The School Library Link to Reading Readiness

How does the school library support reading readiness? What does reading readiness mean? In one definition, reading readiness refers to the transition children experience from being pre-readers to becoming beginning readers. But let's talk about it at all ages. School libraries aim to help all students, at any age, always be "ready to read" in three important ways.

Building Basic Reading Skills

One of the goals of school library programs is to provide books and resources for all reading levels. In an elementary school, that means buying picture books, easy readers, transitional books, early chapter books, and chapter books. Making sure we have reading levels accessible to all students is key. School library teachers constantly reevaluate their student's changing needs. It's amazing to think that no two school libraries are alike for this reason. All school libraries have the same goal of providing resources to build and support basic reading skills.

Encouraging Free Reading

Reading and classroom teachers teach students *how* to read. School library teachers teach students *why* to read. Encouraging students to read for pleasure is an important role of the school library. To do that, we have to have books that kids are excited about. School library teachers watch trends and current interests, they ask students about favorite authors, and they constantly read professional journals and reviews to keep up to date on the books that will best suit their students. Then school library teachers do booktalks, host book clubs, and promote reading in any way that works in their school.

Free reading isn't just about fiction either. Nonfiction is important too, not only because of curriculum needs, but because many students prefer reading nonfiction. Although most fiction titles will stand the test of time and stay on the shelf to be



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used year to year, nonfiction has much more potential to change. Student interests change and information changes. (Who knew that Pluto would cease being a planet?) School library teachers try to balance the interests of students (what they want to read about) and how fast information changes to keep the nonfiction collection up to date, relevant, and well-used. The better the selection in the school library, the more students will read.

Helping Decipher Information

A third way to support reading is the school library's job in teaching information literacy. Learning how to read is the first step.

Understanding that information is what information literacy is all about, and arguably a key part of learning. School library teachers teach lessons on a variety of topics, from how to use an encyclopedia (elementary/middle school) to how to use an article database (middle/high school). They teach students about how to find the books or online resources they need to write a report. They teach students how to figure out if that information is credible (so important with *millions* of Web sites) and how to cite that information to avoid plagiarism. Learning how to use the school library and online information resources is a solid first step towards college and beyond, where students are expected to know how to take notes, where to find reliable information, and how to write responsibly.

Each unique school library collection and its programs are selected and implemented specifically for your school, your students. They equip students with the tools they need to always be *ready to read*. ☺

Discover Reading Databases

Here are two online tools you can use to help your kids find books they are excited about.

Book Wizard is a free online database by Scholastic Books where you can search for children's books in several ways. You can find similar books to past ones you've enjoyed using BookAlike®. (This feature also enables you to find books similar to your title, but on a higher or lower reading level.) Using *Leveled Search*, you can select grade level, the type of book (easy reader, chapter book, etc.),



and which subjects you want to read about. Check out www.scholastic.com/bookwizard.

Novelist K-8 is a reader's advisory database with more than 150,000 fiction titles and 30,000 nonfiction titles for children from infancy to age 18. Each book page has a summary, publication information, basic reading level, book reviews, links to similar books, and more. A neat feature: Plug in a plot like, "boy finds tiger" and the database finds all books with that plot! Ask your local public or school librarian if they subscribe to this database or visit www.ebscohost.com/novelist for more information. ☞

THE LINK TO... Free Voluntary Reading

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) is a term used by Stephen Krashen, author of *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research* (Libraries Unlimited, 2004). It refers to a type of reading program in which students are encouraged to select and read books of their own choosing. Sounds simple, right? Well, so often students aren't allowed to choose their own reading, either because of curriculum requirements for a class or because they've been told--directly or indirectly--that what *they* want to read isn't "real reading."

For example, have you ever had the urge to say to your child, "Put that book back, you need a book with more



words." Or, "That book is too easy for you, pick another." Sometimes the best thing we can do is allow children to read what they want to read for pleasure. So what if it's "too easy?" As adults, do we really read difficult books on the beach? Supporting the enjoyment of reading is as important as encouraging improving reading skills. If students get the message that what *they* enjoy to read isn't considered "real reading," they may start saying, "I don't like to read." But FVR not only supports reading enjoyment, it's been linked to improving reading scores too. Check out Krashen's book to learn more!

Live (and Read) Out Loud

Most reading specialists and organizations (such as The Children's Reading Foundation, www.readingfoundation.org) recommend that parents read aloud to their children 20 minutes a day from infancy on. Why? Do babies really benefit from those squiggly lines on the page we call words? Shouldn't beginning readers be practicing reading on their own once they get the basic skills, instead of listening to us parents?

Reading aloud at every age has great advantages. Infants begin to learn language by the sound of our voices. By being read to, they also begin to learn that books open from left to right. As pre-readers, reading picture books aloud helps children learn to associate pictures with words to help them understand the story. As beginning readers, reading aloud helps children to expand and reinforce their vocabulary. At



every age, reading aloud models to children that reading is important, fun, and that everybody, even Mom and Dad, reads.

To learn more about the benefits of reading aloud, not only to young children, but also to older kids--especially in the classroom--check out Jim Trelease's book, *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (Penguin, 2006). As Trelease describes on his Web site, "This is not a book about teaching a child how to read; it's about teaching a child to want to read," (<http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/rah-intro-pg2.html>). Read up on reading. If you're excited about it, then your children will be too. ☞

Watch for next month's issue of
The School Library Link to
Online Technologies