

showing no detrimental effects on learning (and some positive effects) from TV viewing up to 10 hours a week, after which the scores begin to decline.

In short, the Greeks had it right 2000 years ago: *Moderation in all things*. Ten hours of weekly TV equals 520 hours of TV a year. That stands in contrast to the annual amount of screen time (TV-DVD-video) for today's child: 1,460 hours—the equivalent of watching "Gone With the Wind" 392 times a year.

Any parent looking for the courage and example to use in limiting family viewing need look no further than Sonya Carson, a poverty-line, single-parent with a third-grade education who limited her children's TV-hours to three hours a week, required them to read two books a week, and produced an engineer and one of the world's preeminent brain surgeons (Dr. Ben Carson). Her story can be found in her son Ben's memoir, *Gifted Hands*, as well as online at sites such as:



Dr. Ben Carson

- www.trelease-on-reading.com/rah-ch9.html;
- www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/car1bio-1.

The hidden reading tutor in each TV set

Whether you're a high- or low-end user of TV, one thing should be done to make the most of it whenever it's in use: turn on closed-captioning. Finland's children don't start formal schooling until age-seven, yet achieve the highest reading scores in the world. Finnish families also are among the highest users of closed-captioning because more than half of everything shown on Finnish TV is captioned (most of the shows' dialogs are in languages

other than Finnish). To understand such shows, a child must be able to read Finnish—and read it fast!

Therefore it's logical to assume that reasonable doses of captioned television will do no harm and most likely will help with reading just by print exposure. Originally intended for the hearing impaired, decoders cost \$250 back in the 1980s but now the chip is built into every TV sold in the U.S. and available for free via the menu button on the TV remote. Captioning is available on most DVDs as well. One could say it's the free reading tutor in every home.



A first-grade teacher told me about a little girl entering her class one September. "On the first day of school, she was already reading on a third-grade level. That's always unusual but what made it more so was that her parents were both deaf. Normally the hearing child of deaf parents is language deficient and therefore behind—but this child was three years ahead. I could hardly wait to conference with the parents. They beamed and explained that she'd had closed-captioning all her life."

Do the same things apply to computers and iPods and cell phones? To some degree, but that's a subject for a separate brochure in this series, as well as in *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (Penguin 2006).



All of the statistics and facts included here are footnoted in Trelease's *Read-Aloud Handbook* (Penguin 2006). © Jim Trelease 2009. For details on downloading free copies of this and other brochures, see: www.trelease-on-reading.com/brochures.html

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN TV & SCHOOL SCORES

How much is too much? What the research shows.

BY JIM TRELEASE

Author of the New York Times Bestseller
The Read-Aloud Handbook



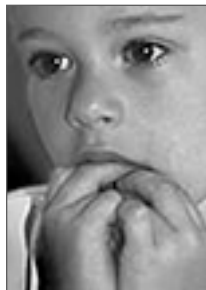
With electronic media now the dominant force in a child's life (outside of family), it should be included in any discussion of schooling. Does it help literacy at all or is it all harm? Anything that played such a pivotal role in public awareness about Vietnam, the Civil Rights struggle, the fall of the Berlin Wall, hurricane Katrina's tragic aftermath, and more recent events across the globe—such a source can't be *all* bad, can it?

What exactly is so wrong with TV?

Let's start with toddlers and work upward. When the daily viewing habits of 2,500 children were tracked and examined by researchers at Seattle's Children's Hospital, the doctors concluded that for each hour of daily TV viewed by the child, the risk of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder by age 7 increased by 10 percent. (ADHD is now the most common childhood behavioral disorder.)

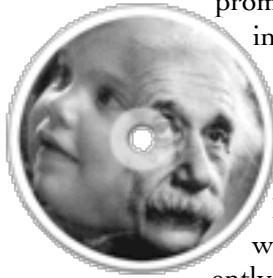
In light of that, the Kaiser Family Foundation's media research offers statistics that don't bode well for future classrooms:

- Among children age two or younger, 59 percent watch TV daily and 42 percent watch DVD's or videos;
- Among children age two or younger, average daily screen time is 2:48 hours (TV plus DVD-video);
- Televisions are a permanent part of the bedroom for 30 percent of children by age three and 43 percent of children by age six;
- In homes with children age six or younger, the TV is left on at least 10



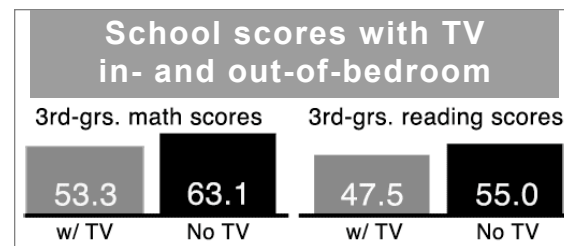
percent of the time, even if no one is watching, and 30 percent have the set on "almost all" or "most" of the time;

As for the hucksters now encamped in the nursery promoting DVDs or videos they promise will make your child into an infant Einstein:



Considering the wealth of research showing otherwise *and* the unhappy school life of Einstein, who would wish it on a child? Apparently millions of parents, unaware of comments like this from the director of child research at one of the nation's biggest toy companies: "There is no proof that this type of toy helps children become smarter."

Once in school, the impact of heavy viewing is reflected in student achievements in both reading *and* math. In a study of 348 diverse third-graders, the presence of a television set in the child's bedroom was signifi-



cantly associated with lower math, reading, and language arts scores.

Kaiser media studies show bedroom TV's always correlate to more viewing hours. By age eight, 60 percent of children not only lived in a home with three televisions but also had a TV in their bedroom. Kaiser found children with a TV in their bedrooms watched 90 minutes more daily (10 hours more weekly) and if a video game is in the bedroom, the

child played 32 minutes more daily. The availability of a bedroom computer doubled the usage when compared with a child who doesn't have it in the room (90 minutes vs. 47 minutes). The addiction that comes with instant gratification and easy access is both predictable and tragic.

In 2005, New Zealand researchers published a 26-year study of 980 children born between 1972 and 1973, a full representation of every socioeconomic level.

The children's schooling level by age 26 was consistently related to how much TV they viewed during childhood. Children who viewed less than one hour a day were the most likely to achieve a college degree, those who watched the most were least likely.

Is there a safe amount of TV for children?

The greatest academic damage done may not be from the shows viewed but by what is *not being done* during those many hours each week of sitting passively in front of the TV: games not played, chores not done, drawings not drawn, hobbies not worked, friends not made or played with, homework not done, bikes or skateboards not ridden, balls not caught, books not read, and conversations not held. I hear parents call it "my babysitter"—but if there were a babysitter who deprived your child of all those activities, you'd ban her from your home, wouldn't you?



The TV-dosage recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics calls for ten hours a week, and *no* TV for children under two. This is based on a research analysis of 23 studies with 87,025 children,