

READ, READ, READ; RIGHT, RIGHT, RIGHT!

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In today's Information Society, reading is a basic survival skill. Low literacy is devastating for both the individual and society.

A literacy survey, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor, provided the first comprehensive assessment of the 20 million participants in the Department's programs that target people who are unemployed and seeking work, or those in search of better jobs.

The survey measured:

- prose comprehension skills, such as those a voter might need to read a newspaper or study issues;
- document literacy skills, such as those a patient might need to understand charts and tables showing health benefits; and
- quantitative skills, such as those a person needs to manage a checking account.

The finding: more than 40 percent did not have the literacy skills needed in today's jobs.

West Virginia Facts and Figures:

- ◆ 21 percent of W.Va. students who enter the ninth grade do not graduate four years later.
- ◆ According to an IBM study, if the dropout rate remains the same, \$214.2 million in new tax revenues will be needed by the year 2000 to make up for taxes not paid by unemployed and underemployed citizens and to cover costs of state services to help them.
- ◆ School dropouts are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates.

Two obstacles to acquiring the reading habit are distractions in the home (such as TV) and the "test and measurement" syndrome in the classroom. The result is students who know how to read, but choose not to read.

We should not stop at listing the problems. It is important to focus on solutions.

The following techniques are used to teach and improve reading skills:

1. Reading aloud
2. Sustained silent reading

3. A "print rich" environment
4. Encouragement
5. Reading models

These will lead to improved comprehension, grammar, spelling, writing skills, and vocabulary. These skills have always been important. Now they are essential.

1. **Reading aloud** is a commercial for the product called Reading, and we need to take a lesson from the masters of marketing: Do it often and early. Don't stop when the child has learned to read.

2. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR)

It seems that in school children are always practicing to read, but never getting beyond the practice stage. Reading occupies limited amount of classroom time. With SSR, children read to themselves for a pre-determined amount of time, frequently 10 to 15 minutes. Each child chooses the material before beginning to read; no changing is permitted. SSR allows the child to read long enough and far enough so that the act of reading becomes automatic. An important feature of SSR is that the parent (or teacher) reads at the same time.

3. A "Print Rich" Environment

A recent study provided an unexpected response. A number of children reported that the large amount of time spent watching TV rather than reading was due to a lack of printed material. Parents overlook the fact that free and low-cost materials make it easier to provide a "print rich" environment for their children. The public library has regular hours, and a library card is free. With the large number of inexpensive children's books now available, filling a child's bookshelf is not as costly as it once was.

4. Encouragement

This is the least expensive technique of all. A word of praise to show approval of a child's reading activities provides as much positive reinforcement as anything else we can do.

5. Reading Models

Children learn best by imitating others. The importance of teaching by example cannot be overemphasized.

How can you apply these five techniques?

1. Be a Read Aloud volunteer. At home, reading aloud to children from birth is the best preparation you can give them for success in school. A child also experiences the great joy and warmth that comes from being in a one-on-one situation with another person. In the community, you can help organize and support such programs, or volunteer as a reader for Read Aloud West Virginia. As little as one hour a week is required.

2. Get involved at your local school as a volunteer.

3. Observe International Literacy Day, September 8, in your community.

4. Place baskets of children's books in waiting rooms of doctors' offices, health departments, or pediatric departments of local hospitals.

5. Give books to your local library as a way to honor someone or celebrate special events.

6. Support local literacy efforts.

7. Buy children's books on tape.

8. Make a "storybook apron" (instructions are available).

9. Ask local teachers and librarians what they need. Then supply it.

10. Agree to serve on your Local School Improvement Council.

11. Use resources unique to West Virginia. Take advantage of the many books written by West Virginians or set in West Virginia.

1994: 15M

Selection of Literature by West Virginia Authors:

(Most, if not all, of these books can be found in your local library. Many are also available at bookstores.)

Benedict, Pinckney	<i>Town Smokes</i>	Ontario Review Press
Eversole, Robyn H.	<i>The Magic House</i>	Orchard
Giardina, Denise	<i>Storming Heaven</i>	Norton
_____	<i>The Unquiet Earth</i>	Norton
Harshman, Marc	<i>A Little Excitement</i>	Cobblehill Bks/Dutton
_____	<i>Only One</i>	Cobblehill Bks/Dutton
_____	<i>Snow Company</i>	Cobblehill Bks/Dutton
_____ and	<i>Uncle James</i>	Cobblehill Bks/Dutton
Bonnie Collins	<i>Rocks in My Pockets</i>	Cobblehill Bks/Dutton
McNeill, Louise	<i>Hill Daughter (Poetry)</i>	University of Pittsburgh Press
Milnes, Gerald	<i>Granny Will Your Dog Bite?</i>	Alfred A. Knopf
Musick, Ruth Ann	<i>Coffin Hollow</i>	University of Kentucky Press
_____	<i>The Telltale Lilac Bush</i>	University of Kentucky Press
Rylant, Cynthia	<i>An Angel for Solomon Singer</i>	Orchard
_____	<i>A Blue-Eyed Daisy</i>	Bradbury
_____	<i>Miss Maggie</i>	Bradbury
_____	<i>Missing May</i>	Orchard
_____	<i>Night in the Country</i>	Bradbury
_____	<i>The Relatives Came</i>	Bradbury
_____	<i>Waiting to Waltz</i>	Bradbury
_____	<i>Soda Jerk</i>	Orchard
_____	<i>When I Was Young in the Mountains</i>	Dutton
Showell, Ellen	<i>Our Mountain</i>	Bradbury
Smucker, Anna	<i>No Star Nights</i>	Alfred A. Knopf
_____	<i>Outside the Window</i>	Alfred A. Knopf

Books Set in West Virginia:

Anderson, Joan	<i>Pioneer Children of Appalachia</i>	Clarion
Byars, Betsy	<i>The Summer of the Swans</i>	Viking
_____	<i>Goodbye, Chicken Little</i>	Viking
Haseley, Dennis	<i>Shadows</i>	Farrar, Straus, Giroux
Keats, Ezra Jack	<i>John Henry, An American Legend</i>	Scholastic
Lowry, Lois	<i>Rabble Starkey</i>	Houghton Mifflin
Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds	<i>Shiloh</i>	Atheneum
Yep, Laurence	<i>The Star Fisher</i>	Morrow

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