



By Donna Pitino

The Parent Connection

A Monthly Newsletter for Parents

Dear Parents

Holiday quiet time

The days are getting shorter and our children are in the house more often. Add to that a schedule filled with holiday plans, and you may find things getting a bit crazy. How to calm the chaos? Turn to books.

Reading at Home

There are two great ways to help your child become a reader. The first is to read aloud, whether your child is two or 12. This introduces them to vocabulary words they're not yet able to sound out, and lets them hear the speaker's rhythm and intonation.

The second way is to find out about your child's interests. *Baseball? Who's your favorite player? Let's go to the library to see what we can find out. Detective work? I bet the librarian can recommend some great mysteries. Stories about knights and kings? Let's take a look and see what we can find!*

Do you remember what your favorite books were as a child? Introduce your child to them. Don't push, though, if their reading interests differ from yours. The important thing is that they *are* reading. Help them to find the right books for them, the books that will make them lifelong readers.

Quote of the Month

"Books, to the reading child, are so much more than books – they are dreams and knowledge, they are a future and a past."

– Esther Meynell, author



"We're studying ancient history, Gramma – will you help me with my homework?"

No Time to Read?

If your child doesn't have time to open a book just for fun, he or she may be involved in too many activities.

Dr. Maria Tasso, a pediatrician with Pediatric Associates of CT, says, "While it's great that some kids like to be involved in many activities, we, as parents, should limit the overscheduled child to a reasonable degree. After all, kids need time to be kids."

And, having time to be a kid means having time to read! Try sitting down with your child and going over his or her schedule together, discussing which activities the child enjoys most, and why. Are there activities that can be cut back or eliminated to make more time for reading?

Books Worth a Look

Anna the Bookbinder by Andrea Cheng (Walker, 2003). Beautifully illustrated by Ted Rand, this book shows the value of quality in a world that is "speeding up." It's also the story of how children can contribute to their families, and how love and patience keep people level-headed during stressful times. A great gift for any book lover.

Andrew Lost in the Garden by J.C. Greenburg (Random House, 2003). The young inventors and bug enthusiasts in your life will love Andrew's latest adventure. Endnotes include facts about garden bugs, animals and plants, as well as a list of related nonfiction books. In addition, Andrew's best friend – a robot named Thudd – provides interesting insect facts throughout the story.

The Shoe Tree of Chagrin by J. Patrick Lewis (Creative Editions, 2001). Susannah DeClare's talent is making shoes that last a lifetime but, when a doubter challenges her, she must prove herself true to her word. The language and unexpected ending will draw the reader right into the legend of "Shoes-annah."

The First Last Part by Angela Johnson (Simon & Schuster, 2001). *Continued on reverse*

Donna Pitino was a teacher for 14 years and is now a freelance writer. She is the mother of two daughters.

Time Out – For You!

Your children shouldn't be the only ones getting carried away by books. When you hear about a good book, just write down the title and author. Keep a list and make a point of heading to the library or bookstore. You might even organize a group of your friends to share the cost of a book and take turns reading it. We all read for information all the time, so take the time to read something just because you want to read it. Why not read books whose names you know but never made the time to read? So many choices...that's the best part of reading for fun.

I Wish I Had Known...

I wish I had known about the benefits of various programs that are available free of charge to the parents of younger children. I've been reading to my children since they were very young. There were even cloth and plastic books in their cribs! Yet, though I knew the local library had story times, I confess I didn't bring my children because I hadn't fully investigated the advantages of such programs.

Now I know that bringing my daughters to story time at the library would have exposed them to authors and illustrators I hadn't discovered on my own. It would have let them hear a different voice reading and shown them that other people liked stories as much as they did. They also would have interacted with other children while participating in art, music, math or science activities related to the books.

Boy, did we miss out! Check your local library and bookstores, too – more and more bookstores are offering programs for children. Try them and see what you're missing!

Wholesome Habit

On a rainy or snowy day, pack a picnic, bring plenty of read-aloud books and...spread a blanket on the floor. Books make any occasion special – including a Family Indoor Picnic Day!

School Time

Whether your child already loves to read or needs some encouragement, being a well-informed parent is important. Find out what's going on at your child's school. Consider asking these questions at your parent-teacher conference:

- What books will my child be required to read in school this year?
- Is there a timeline so I'll know when certain books will be covered?
- How do you assess a student's knowledge of a book? (Book reports, oral reports, projects, opinion essays, tests, etc.?)
- Do you encourage reading regularly simply for the joy of reading?
- Do you have a recommended reading list of books to read for enjoyment at home? If not, you may be just the person to get one going at your child's school. What a great way to be involved and to show your child how much you value reading!

Helping At-Risk Readers

Poor readers are at increased risk for dropping out of school, delinquency, substance abuse, teen pregnancy and poverty. Colorín Colorado seeks to help one at-risk group – Spanish-speaking students. The Colorín Colorado website provides information in English and Spanish on how parents can use stories, songs, rhymes and games to increase literacy in children. To learn more, visit www.ColorinColorado.org

This project is part of a larger initiative called Reading Rockets, a program that “looks at how young children learn to read, why so many kids struggle, and what can be done about it.” For articles by reading experts, daily reading news from around the world, practical tips and interviews with children's book authors such as Patricia Polacco and Jon Scieszka, go to www.ReadingRockets.org

Books Worth a Look, cont'd

2003). This is the story of Bobby, the single father Johnson introduced to us in *Heaven*. Children of single parents will certainly relate, but these characters will be recognizable to all children.

***The Truth About Rats, Rules, & Seventh Grade* by Linda Zinnen (HarperCollins, 2001).** It can be hard for middle school students to talk to their parents, but this funny fiction book reveals how important it is to keep the lines of communication open.

***Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt (Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1975).** If your child has seen the recent movie inspired by this classic book, encourage him or her to read the book for comparison. Natalie Babbitt's poetic prose takes the reader through a thought-provoking what-if story. Try my daughters' favorite Natalie Babbitt book, *The Search for Delicious*.

PICKS FOR PARENTS

***How to Get Your Child to Love Reading* by Esme Raji Codell (Algonquin Books, 2003).** This 500-page resource offers thematic book lists and activities that cultivate the joy of exploring literature. With 3,000 hand-picked, teacher-recommended titles and hundreds of ideas that make reading fun, this book will inspire parents of reluctant readers and reinforce the reading habits of children who already devour books.

What Works?

Has something worked well for you as a parent, that you'd like to share with our readers? E-mail your parenting tips to me at mdbcp@aol.com

