

The Power of Reading Aloud — A Legacy for the Next Generation

For three decades, The Children's Reading Foundation has advocated a simple yet powerful message: *Read with a child 20 minutes every day*. Digitally, socially, and culturally, our world has changed over the last 30 years, yet this message remains as fundamental today as it was when the foundation was established.

Research on early brain development ¹and school readiness consistently proves reading aloud to be more than a cherished tradition; it is also a simple and powerful strategy to ensure that every child enters school ready to learn. Studies confirm what a group of concerned Kennewick School District citizens intuited thirty years ago: Reading aloud to children during their early years is critical to language acquisition, brain development, and long-term academic success.

Established in 1996, The Children's Reading Foundation emerged as a solution to a specific problem: high school dropout rates. Soon enough, its founders understood that prevention is more powerful and less costly—economically for schools and emotionally for children—than intervention. However, closing the achievement gap and supporting early literacy development to impact high school abandonment later required more than understanding and good intentions; it demanded a community-wide commitment, with a special emphasis on family engagement.

With initiatives like *READY! for Kindergarten*, *Team Read*, and *Read Up: Stop the Summer Slide*, the foundation has shifted the national conversation around literacy. These programs continue to empower parents, educators, and caregivers with tools to build early reading habits and to understand their critical roles in a child's first five years.

Despite technological advances and increased access to information, many children still arrive at kindergarten unprepared, lacking the vocabulary, comprehension, and social-emotional readiness to fully engage and take advantage of everything school has to offer². At the same time, research continues to affirm that one daily habit has the power to change this trajectory: **reading aloud with children**.

¹ Mendelsohn, A. L., Cates, C. B., Weisleder, A., Johnson, S. B., Seery, A. M., Canfield, C. F., Huberman, H. S., & Dreyer, B. P. (2014). Reading aloud, play, and social-emotional development. *Pediatrics*, 134(2), 404–409. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-1384>

² Overdeck Family Foundation. (2023). *The road to readiness: A landscape review of early learning and care in the United States*. https://overdeck.org/wp-content/uploads/RoadtoReadiness_OverdeckFamilyFoundation.pdf

Reading aloud is more than just an act of decoding words; it's an interaction rich in eye contact, “serve and return” interactions³, emotional bonding, vocabulary exposure, and critical thinking. It nurtures imagination, builds resilience, and invites questions. When parents and caregivers read aloud with their children, they are not just sharing stories; they are building their children's brains and preparing them for all future learning, one word at a time.

Today's parents are navigating an era of distractions with sophisticated digital devices⁴, busy schedules, and competing demands. The need for intentional connection has never been greater. In just 20 minutes a day, parents can give their children an immeasurable head start in life.

We call on a new generation of parents to embrace this legacy. No fancy programs or expensive books are required. You have what you need: time together, consistency, and your loving voice. Whether it's a bedtime ritual, a moment while waiting for the bus, or a story shared at breakfast, every word read aloud is an investment in your child's future.

As we celebrate the impact of The Children's Reading Foundation, we recommit to its mission of ensuring that every child learns to read early and well, but we still need the support of engaged parents and thriving communities. Together, we can reach new families, break generational cycles, and close the readiness gap one story at a time.

Let this be our collective legacy: that we raised readers not just by what we said, but by what we read.

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³ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2023). *Serve and return*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/key-concept/serve-and-return/>

⁴ Pew Research Center. (2020, July 28). *Parenting children in the age of screens*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/parenting-children-in-the-age-of-screens/>

Read Together 20 Minutes Every Day™

www.ReadingFoundation.org