

PARENT TEACHING TIPS

... on Preschooler Reading Readiness Activities

By Bill Welker, EdD

The purpose of reading readiness activities is to provide your preschooler with a variety of “prior knowledge” experiences. In fact, the more exposure to the environment a child encounters before entering school, the better equipped he or she will be to begin reading instruction. Research has demonstrated that children with greater background experiences will comprehend and remember more of what they read.

To illustrate this train of thought, consider the following informal classroom study. I’ve conducted this brief experiment many times with my students over the years. It involves a statement, three questions, and answers that never varied.

Statement: “The spectators at a bullfight in Madrid, Spain, began to whistle.”

Question 1: What were the spectators watching?

Answer: A bullfight (Correct)

Question 2: Where did the event take place?

Answer: Madrid, Spain (Correct)

Question 3: Why were the spectators whistling?

Answer: To cheer on the bullfighter (Wrong)

My pupils had no problems with the first two literal questions. However, because their insufficient prior knowledge of Spain and its customs, they were unable to

interpret that whistling is an expression of displeasure. The same type of problem occurs for children starting school with inadequate reading readiness experiences.

As parents, what can you do about it? Well, first and foremost, offer your children many opportunities to absorb as much background knowledge as possible before reaching school age.

To further assist in preparing your preschooler for learning to read in the classroom, consider the following helpful checklist for parents.

The Reading Readiness Checklist

Home Environment

_____ Read to your child daily.

_____ Coax your child to “play act” reading picture books, while someone in the family listens.

_____ Ask your child to describe illustrations and events.

_____ Promote “word scribbling” activities, which is also a sound prewriting approach.

_____ Place books and periodicals throughout the house.

_____ Role model silent reading in front of your child.

_____ Plan what your child watches on television or the internet, providing wholesome, vicarious experiences.

World Environment

_____ Travel on vacations to various and diverse places, including exposure to both urban and rural settings.

_____ **Take your child on mini-field trips to zoos, museums, art galleries, and public libraries.**

_____ **Take your child on tours of various businesses, factories, hospital facilities, police and fire stations.**

_____ **Go out to eat at different restaurants, from fast food chains to more formal supper clubs.**

_____ **Expose your child to various forms of transportation, such as buses, trains, boats, and planes/jets.**

_____ **Read and explain road signs, etc., when driving your child anywhere.**

_____ **Let your child go shopping with you – from grocery stores to much larger malls.**

But parents, please keep in mind that the above is only a basic or fundamental checklist that can be used as a starting or reference point for you incorporating even more preschool experiences.

The ultimate goal of reading is understanding or comprehending the meaning of what has been read, which is actually a two-directional connection. In order to gain meaning from text material (page to reader), the reader must possess a certain degree of background knowledge or experience regarding the text material (reader to page).

In reality, if young readers have previous experiences of a specific topic, understanding will most likely take place. Without question, background knowledge and/or experiences are major childhood stepping stones for reading

readiness – and will definitely promote a child’s future success in the school environment.

Parent Proverb

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.”

- Joseph Addison

Next Month’s Column: “Parental Pressure”

(Editor’s Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a “2009 Teacher of the Year” by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. His e-mail is mattalkwv@hotmail.com.)