

How to Encourage your Child to be a Reader and Why This Might be Important by Graeme Boyd, Middle and High School Librarian, Lincoln Community School

As we celebrate Literacy Week here at Lincoln Community School with an array of events, local booksellers, visitors and guest authors it strikes me that the power of the written word can never be diminished. I'm often asked by parents how to encourage their children to be a reader and why this might be important.

A relatively simple but effective way to encourage children to read is to be seen reading yourself. Parents (just like teachers) can act as role models for children to help them pick up the joyous habit of reading. Children will inevitably copy the habits of family members. You will do more to inspire your child's interest in books by modeling this through your actions. Think of it as 'raising a reader'.

I encourage you to have books in every room of your house, when on vacation make it a habit to visit the wonderful bookshops and libraries the world has to offer and to make the joy of recreational reading as special as it is for those who, like me, read voraciously each and every day.

Since becoming a School Librarian I have observed some key ways to encourage children to read. Here's some of my observations:

- Reading aloud. If you encourage your child to read aloud it gives room to pause, reflect and discuss a particular character or theme. This improves their critical thinking skills. Show that you are really listening to them which will encourage their confidence. Ask questions; how does the story relate to your daily life, make guesses and predictions about what might happen.
- Keep reading material everywhere. This could be an instruction manual or a recipe; the point is to always read. Reading is the key to success in almost every subject across the school curriculum. Research has shown that reading is the biggest driver of vocabulary acquisition.
- Visit bookshops. Don't rush in bookshops; give your child as much time as they need to browse. Serendipity is a marvelous thing. Also, talk to booksellers. Too often they are ignored as retail assistants but I've actually become very good friends with booksellers across the world who have, and are, leading fascinating creative lives.
- Join the public library. Have your child apply for their own library card. Let them take responsibility for their own account, of returning books on time, of using the Library catalog. Embrace the program of events your local library offers, especially story-time in which children come together to be read to, reading programs that provide awards and author visits.
- Make time for reading. Dedicate 10 minutes everyday for family reading time. Establish a DEAR (drop everything and read) routine and habit in a comfortable and relaxing environment of 'a home library'.

- Talk to your Librarian. Librarians can advise on new titles, local authors and online reading programs. Most importantly, they can direct your child to a new genre or theme. One of the most common issues raised to me from parents is that their child reads only the same type of books. Yet when I ask them if they have read these books themselves they say no. If you are familiar with your child's reading material then you can find, work out, what exactly it is that is drawing them to this particular author. Then, after some of your own research, you can start to suggest alternatives.
- Talk to your Counselor. School counselors are experts in undiagnosed learning difficulties like dyslexia or ADHD and even emotional issues which could be discouraging your child and inhibiting literacy skills development. Make an appointment with your Counselor and discuss your worries. They would be delighted to hear from you.
- Enjoy it. It's okay not to finish a book. Don't add unnecessary pressure to your child by expecting that they finish every book they start to read. Life is too short for bad books.
- Read graphic novels. Some of the graphic novels available today are wonderful. For some reason I still talk to parents who dismiss them as not being proper or real reading material. For reluctant readers, graphic novels are recommended because they are so engaging. The combination of text and pictures, symbols and icons is particularly captivating which provides context for stories that your child might not completely understand otherwise.
- Write. Have your child write a short story on a theme they are interested in, revise and edit it with them, then print it out and read it to them. Writing and reading work hand in hand. Keep a folder of your child's 'published' work, show it off.

I always remember watching my Dad read. I would agitatedly ask him a question to which his answer was "just one more chapter" as his eyes didn't leave the page. As I patiently waited for him to finish, I loved watching the expressions of his face change during his engrossment, as he sat in his favorite army green battered leather chair with our three legged cat on his lap and the coal fire raging. Nowadays my eighty year old Father's eyes have deteriorated and he no longer can thumb through the tomes of seafaring historical fiction he so loved (Patrick O'Brian was his favorite), but thankfully technology has advanced that he now has the added luxury of audiobooks and podcasts. He also has three sons scattered throughout the world who depose on him a variety of recommendations to which his opinion is refreshingly straightforward.

If you require any advice or assistance with tips and strategies to encourage your child to read please talk to me in the Middle or High School Libraries or email me at < gboyd@lincoln.edu.gh