

An Educator's Guide to the Joy and Power of Reading

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Introduction

Reading is an intellectual workout without equal. Decades of research and thousands of moving stories, such as those in *Open a World of Possible: Real Stories About the Joy and Power of Reading*, make clear what's possible for our students when they read. They grow not only as readers, but also as writers, mathematicians, learners and thinkers (Sullivan & Brown, 2013).

It all begins with helping our students develop a passion for reading and giving them access to books and the time they need to explore, select and read their favorites. Deep, extensive reading fosters confidence, reading proficiency and personal and academic growth in ways nothing else can match. We offer three lines of support to help you get started:

➤ ***Open a World of Possible: Real Stories About the Joy and Power of Reading***

True stories by some of America's leading literacy advocates, authors and poets that celebrate the joy and power of reading.

➤ **The Joy and Power of Reading: A Summary of Research and Expert Opinion**

Decades of reliable reading research to support you in your ultimate aim as an educator and parent: to help all children become proficient, avid readers who bring passion, skill and a critical eye to every reading encounter.

➤ **An Educator's Guide to the Joy and Power of Reading**

Brief, practical tips to help you create a reading culture in your classroom, school and home.

Commit to Joyful & Powerful Reading

Together, as a faculty, read *Open a World of Possible: Real Stories About the Joy and Power of Reading* and set aside time to discuss. You might post links to favorite essays on your school's website or embed links in letters home to parents—and, if possible, invite comments.

With every essay you read from the anthology, challenge your school staff and/or community members to think about what the essay means for:

- growing joyful and powerful readers in your own school and/or community.
- supporting a lifelong commitment to reading.
- shaping your time—and your students' time—at school and at home for reading.
- developing your knowledge of the young adult and children's literature authors your students will love best.
- providing abundant access to books—and time to talk about books.
- supporting English Language Learners as successful readers.
- scaffolding sensitive, informed instruction for reluctant readers.
- helping all students develop a confident growth mindset as readers.
- creating family-school partnerships that support students as readers.

The goal, of course, is not only to draw inspiration from the essays you read and discuss in *Open a World of Possible*, but also to act on the lessons learned. We offer some ideas to get you started, knowing you'll think of many more as you make a commitment to joyful and powerful reading and launch that commitment with a robust, schoolwide independent reading program.

The Joy & Power of Reading: A Summary of Research and Expert Opinion

Search the compendium for the research you need to anchor the instructional points you want to make. We provide key findings you'll need for effective work with readers: early, adolescent, boys, English Language Learners, diverse and reluctant readers. We also provide the research behind comprehension, background knowledge, vocabulary, fluency, a growth mindset, text, teaching and family literacy.

All three—the anthology of inspiring essays, the research compendium and the educator's guide—work together to help you establish a joyful and powerful reading culture in your own school and community.

To that end, here are some brief, practical pointers for principals, teachers and families.

Principals

Innovation and powerful change often begin with a strong instructional leader. As principal, you make the commitment and set the pace of implementation for joyful and powerful reading.

› Time to Read (and Time to Share Reading)

Students need time to read and ideally, time to talk, write about and share their reading lives. Uninterrupted time to read—30 to 45 minutes at school and an hour at home each day—optimizes the benefits of independent reading.

THE TAKEAWAY: Work together as a faculty to prioritize reading time and make sure that your students have extended, uninterrupted time every day for independent, sustained reading. Make independent reading a cherished habit at your school. As reading expert Ellin Oliver Keene (2014) says, “There is no greater impact on students’ reading growth than giving them time to read.”

› Easy Access to Abundant Books

Children thrive in schools and homes that surround them with books. Even 25 books in a home makes a difference; 500 books in a home is as powerful an advantage as living with a college-educated parent and spurs a child to stay in school three years longer than a peer without access to books (Evans, Kelley, Sikora & Treiman, 2010).

THE TAKEAWAY: Students need books. Scholastic recommends 1,500 books in every classroom library. How is that affordable? Dr. Richard Allington (2002), past president of the International Reading Association, offers simple but potent advice: Buy less “stuff” (consumable basal workbooks, for example) and invest in books.

For ideas to build classroom libraries, see www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit/classroom-library-everything-you-need.

› Define and Understand Reading

As you read *Open a World of Possible: Real Stories About the Joy and Power of Reading*, consider discussing the following questions:

- › What is reading?
- › What drives people to read? Why do you read?
- › What books, authors, topics and genres are mentioned?
- › What might this mean for your own students and the reading program you create together?
- › What support do students need to become proficient and passionate readers?
- › What surprised you?
- › What questions do you have?
- › What have you learned about reading that might affect the ways in which you work with your students as readers?

THE TAKEAWAY: Work to establish your beliefs about reading—what it is and how it flourishes in a school environment. As Regie Routman (2014) reminds us, our deeply held beliefs and theoretical understandings of language and literacy development, instruction, curriculum and assessment must always shape our practice.

› Model the Joy and Power of Reading

We can all learn from Dr. Robert Wortman of Tucson, Arizona. Today, he's a favorite lecturer at the University of Arizona but for years he was a remarkably successful principal and a most effective reading advocate because he loves to read, because he knows children's and young adult literature inside and out, and because he took time

every day to visit the classrooms in his school and share books with both his teachers and students. When Dr. Bob, as he's known, enters a classroom, the students immediately settle with a reverential hush at his feet. They know they are in for a literary treat: Dr. Bob is going to pull his latest favorite book from his ever-present book bag and read aloud to them.

THE TAKEAWAY: Set an example—read! Love books. Know books. Share books. Nothing you do is more potent than the example you set as a reader. If you genuinely love to read, your passion for and knowledge of reading will shine through and inspire your students.

Teachers

Work to establish a reading culture in your own classroom. Create a classroom environment that resounds with the joy of reading. Display books, talk about books, provide daily routine time to read books and do everything possible to help every student discover him or herself as a reader.

➤ Build a Rich Classroom Library

Dr. Richard Allington (2012) outlines what's needed. "Kids not only need to read a lot but they also need lots of books right at their fingertips. They need access to books that entice them and attract them to reading. Schools can foster wider reading by creating school and classroom collections that provide a rich and wide array of appropriate books and magazines and by providing time every day for children to actually sit and read."

There are numerous low-cost ways to build a classroom library; Both Donalyn Miller (2013) and Phyllis Hunter (2012) offer multiple suggestions, including garage and library sales, local business support (send book funding requests on school letterhead for the best results), online book giveaway programs and, of course, Scholastic Book Fairs and Reading Clubs! Watch for discounted books at the end of the school year. Hunter also reminds us that "all children deserve to see themselves in the pages of a book." Make sure your collection is diverse and culturally responsive.

THE TAKEAWAY: Building a rich, culturally diverse classroom library can foster students' love of reading. For more on building a classroom library, visit www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit/classroom-library-everything-you-need.

› Be a Reader

Make it your responsibility as a professionally charged teacher to get acquainted with young adult and children’s literature (depending on the grade you teach).

THE TAKEAWAY: Consider following online children’s lit experts and fabulous bloggers such as Franki Sibberson (readingyear.blogspot.com). For additional inspiration, you might also want to join online reading communities such as Goodreads or the Nerdy Book Club, co-founded by Donalyn Miller and Colby Sharp (nerdybookclub.wordpress.com) or subscribe to *The Horn Book*, a publication that showcases high-quality young adult and children’s books and authors. And then, too, Scholastic.com offers a world of outstanding young adult and children’s books, including interviews with the authors and all sorts of indispensable teaching tips.

› Give Book Talks

Introduce your students to the joy of “wide reading” (Marzano, 2004) by sharing multiple books throughout the day through frequent Book Talks. Keep in mind that the Book Talk provides a quick snapshot of the book; it has more in common with a sound bite or commercial than it does a lecture.

THE TAKEAWAY: In your Book Talks, you want to provide just enough intriguing information about each title to spark interest and hook readers, but not so much that children no longer feel a burning desire to read the book. Leave them longing for more!

› Know Your Students as Readers

Community-building and thoughtful instruction both begin with getting to know your students as readers. Reading surveys, one-on-one conferences and reading interviews help. Donalyn Miller

features an extensive reading survey in her book *Reading in the Wild* (2013). Debbie Miller and Barbara Moss in *No More Independent Reading Without Support* (2013) recommend regular reading conferences asking questions such as the following:

- › What kinds of books do you like best? Why?
- › What are you reading now? What books do you have in your stack?
- › What do you know about what readers do?
- › Is there someone you know who reads a lot? What does that person do?
- › What's one thing I should know about you as a reader?
- › How can I help you grow as a reader?

THE TAKEAWAY: As the saying goes, “knowledge is power.” The most effective instruction is responsive. When we’re able to respond to our students in sensitive and informed ways because we’ve “opened a window into their reading process” (Goodman, Martens & Flurkey, 2014) and we know what instructional support they need at any given moment, we know we’re on the right track. Jennifer Serravallo opens that window through student writing (2012–13). By asking students to read whole texts and then write about what they’ve read, Serravallo maintains that we access the knowledge we need to deliver the powerful, precise instruction that enables our students to develop as confident, proficient readers.

At the end of this guide (Appendix A), see the reading interview that Nancie Atwell gives her students the very first day of school. With this information in hand, she’s in a position to build a classroom reading community and provide informed instruction that supports every reader.

➤ Help Students Develop Reading Plans, Set Goals and Make Thoughtful and Varied Reading Choices

Joyful and powerful readers often establish reading plans and set reading goals for themselves. Depending on your students' ages, you might consider asking them to read 30 to 40 books a year across multiple genres. For inspiration, see Penny Kittle's *Book Love* (2013) or Laura Robb's *Differentiating Reading Instruction* (2008).

THE TAKEAWAY: Miller and Moss (2013) suggest that early or inexperienced readers, especially, need instructional support, beginning with how to select books thoughtfully. While on their own at home, children may read nothing but one favorite genre. At school, on the other hand, you will want to introduce them to a range of genres and challenge them to select books from multiple genres. Also, show them how to choose books that match their interests and abilities so that their selections energize rather than discourage them as readers. It's also important, Miller and Moss maintain, to provide genre-specific reading instruction. Reading an informational magazine article with bar graphs, pie charts, captions and labels is a different experience than reading a fairy tale.

➤ The Power of Choice and Self-Selection

Powerful readers know their own reading tastes: their favorite authors, genres, topics and formats. While they're always open to reading suggestions from trusted friends and peers, reading is a highly personal endeavor. Research demonstrates that readers are most engaged with their reading—and derive the most pleasure—when they are able to choose their own books and shape their own reading lives (Wilhelm & Smith, 2013; Pruzinsky, 2014; Sullivan & Brown, 2013).

THE TAKEAWAY: Students need to choose their own books. You guide and support. To that end, you might consider implementing a strategy called “Yours, Mine and Ours”. The child chooses one book, you choose one for the child and the two of you choose a third book together. This is a simple yet effective way to give your students the freedom they need to get to know themselves as readers while also providing the support they need to make good book choices.

Families

We've adapted Hess and Holloway's (1984) "Five for Families!" that ultimately grow successful readers. They are as follows:

› Value Reading

Parents show their own interest in books by reading in front of their children, talking about what they are reading and encouraging their children to read and talk about their books, too.

› Cultivate a Growth Mindset

Together with your children, set high expectations for their reading success: Help them develop confidence and a can-do spirit while cultivating a growth mindset for reading (Dweck, 2006). Model your own passion for reading, talk about the books you are reading and why and encourage your children to share the books they are reading. Make frequent trips to the library.

› Access Books and Writing Materials

Fill your home with a ready supply of reading and writing materials for your children, such as books, magazines, newspapers, scrap paper for writing, pencils and crayons. All create more opportunities to help your children develop as successful readers and writers. Reading and writing are mutually supportive language processes; children benefit from access to both. Be sure to sign your children up for a library card and then use it frequently!

› Read With and To Your Child

Parents who read to babies, toddlers and preschoolers and listen as

older children read aloud help their children become confident and enthusiastic readers.

➤ **Talk, Talk, Talk!**

The quantity and content of conversation between parents and children influence language and vocabulary development, both building blocks for reading success. Engage and converse with your children throughout the day as you all go about your various household tasks and activities. While read-aloud time is the “crown jewel” of literacy development, the read-aloud plus talk about books is even more valuable (Cunningham & Zibulsky, 2013).

Closing Thoughts

This little guide provides only brief practical pointers, but together with *Open a World of Possible: Real Stories About the Joy and Power of Reading* and *The Joy and Power of Reading: A Summary of Research and Expert Opinion*, we hope you'll find both the inspiration and information you need to establish your own joyful and powerful independent reading program.

There are many ways to structure your reading program. You might appreciate the predictable routine of a reader's workshop or decide to organize your class reading time around spirited student book clubs. Or you may simply find ways to invite your students to lose themselves in an engaging book throughout the day whenever time allows. Some teachers, for example, begin every school day with a facilitated 30-minute independent reading period. In this way, students make a gentle transition into a new school day through the pages of a favorite book.

Whether you are drawn to reader's workshop, book clubs, or teacher-facilitated independent reading, what matters most, as third grade teacher Colby Sharp (2014) reminds us, is that your school and classroom become a reading haven—"a place to fall in love with reading."

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Appendix A:

September Reading Interview

Name: _____

1. If you had to guess:
 - How many books would you say you own?
 - How many books would you say there are in your house?
 - How many books would you say you've read since school let out in June?
 - How many books would you say you've read during the last school year, September–June?
 - How many of those books did you choose for yourself?
2. What are the best three books you've ever read or had read aloud to you?
3. In your ideal book, what would the main character be like?
4. What are your favorite genres, or kinds, of books?
5. Who are your favorite authors these days?
6. What are some of the ways you decide whether or not you'll read a book?
7. Have you ever liked a book so much that you reread it? If so, name some of them here:
8. What do you think someone has to know or do in order to be a strong, satisfied reader of books?
9. What do you think are your three greatest strengths as a reader of books?
10. What would you like to get better at as a reader?
11. Do you know the title of the next book you'd like to read? If so, please tell me.
12. In general, how do you feel about reading and yourself as a reader?

Note: Format interview so your students have room to thoughtfully answer each question.

from Atwell, N. (2007). *The reading zone: How to help kids become skilled, passionate, habitual, critical readers*. 29–30. New York: Scholastic.

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