

**Tips for Parents** by Susie Kohl

## *Reading Together a Precious Gift*

“Reading without reflecting is like eating without digesting.”

—Edmund Burke

“**M**R. FRANK” SCHOOLMASTER, a retired Meher Schools teacher, volunteers as a reader in one of our preschool classrooms. Recently he commented on what a lively challenge getting through a story can be with three- and four-year-olds. “Students want me to read, but they also want to interject their reactions.” What an important process for preschoolers!

One of the foundations for resonating with a good book at any age is tying it to our own lives. As adults, we make these connections internally or share them with others in a book club. Young children reflect out loud, often making associations that surprise us. Research shows that while listening to a book, children’s brain activity changes in ways that help them master language. Yet most of us know that books do more than boost cognitive abilities. Most of us remember stories from our childhood that affected us emotionally and opened our hearts to a deeper kind of know-ing.

Parents today understand the importance of reading aloud and talking to children about books, even into elementary school, and schedule book times into daily routines. Winter is a wonderful time to think of the stimulation and nourishment reading together provides on so many levels. Here are some tips for learning and enjoyment.

**Add a little drama:** Pass on your excitement about reading by showing interest in the book you’re talking about (no matter how many times you’ve read it before) and using your voice in an animated way. At rest

time in preschool, Denagh Patrick makes up voices for characters in books and stories she cre-ates, which pulls her listeners into a web of active listening and thinking.

**Stop to talk:** The goal of reading out loud, regardless of age, isn’t getting through the story with-out interruption. Ask your child to predict what might happen next or why she thinks a character is acting a particular way. Stop to inquire, “How do you think Winnie the Pooh felt when Tigger did that?” Talk about words and what your child thinks they mean in the context of the story—not in the sense of right or wrong answers but developing a sense that language is fun.

**Ask about feelings:** Books open doors for talking about feelings. Reading volunteer Karen Wells has collected a small library of books that deal with children’s feelings and distressing situations in their lives. Karen has spent years sharing stories that give children a vocabulary for their emotions and help them process the changes in their lives. She says, “Children don’t like preachy books. They turn off right away. You can sense when they feel a connection to what they’re hearing.”

**Roll with rhyme and repetition:** Children love to hear phrases, rhymes, and stories again and again. Young children learn to discriminate sounds and develop a sense of mastery through rep-etition. Join in saying the words and rhymes together. Read poetry to children of all ages. I still remember the words of Longfellow that my mother read me at an early age.

Think of your reading routine as a precious gift that will support your child’s love of learning and ability to reflect on what she reads far into the future.

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