

## Learning to Read vs Reading to Learn

### *Can You Read This?*

*"Aoccdnrng to a rscheearch at Cmabrigde Uinervtisy, it deosn't mttar in waht oredr the ltteers in a wrod are, the olny iprmoatnt tihng is taht the frist and lsat ltteers be at the rghit pclae. The rset can be a toatl mses and you can sitll raed it wouthit porbelm. Tihs is bcuseae the huamn mnid deos not raed ervey lteter by istlef, but the wrod as a wlohe."*

### **Text unscrambled at the end of this article**

Were you able to read the above text? If the answer is yes, the next question you should ask yourself is "Why?" Were you able to read it because of your ability to sound out letters, your familiarity with numerous sight words, or your ability to make "good guesses" because "It made sense?" There are three variables in teaching students how to read. First there is the all too familiar phonics or "sound it out" approach. Then there is the "sight word" approach followed by "use of context" or does this make sense. All are based on your child's or young adult's background knowledge and familiarity with words, word structures and "meaning." When working with parents I remind them that sometimes "sounding out a word" will not work in all situations. Ask yourself if being able to sounding the above passage helped you. It did come in to play but reading is about the "meaning" or what are the words telling you? As adults we approach words that we do not know and make a natural cognitive adjustment to determine the meaning by simply "skipping it," looking at the rest of the text and "making good guesses" or using other words in the passage to unlock the code. That strategy is called using "context clues." When students can sound out words, read in a list formation or read isolated words by sight but do not know what they have read, they are missing the most important element which most noted researchers agree (Richard Allington et. Al) is "comprehending" or understanding what they have read.

This article is devoted to parents who must become their child's teacher when school ends. It comes down to simple arithmetic: the child spends 900 hours a year in school and 7,800 hours outside school. Where is more time available for change (J. Trelease)? **Did**

***you know that on average a child loses at least two months of reading during the summer months if they are not engaged in some type of reading?*** Students who have reading difficulty lose ***twice as*** much during the summer. The latter group loses more because their reading skills are not stable and sometimes have to start the process over when school starts.

In grades K-3 students “Learn how to read” but in grades 4-12 they are expected to be able to “Read to learn” what we call content text such as science, social studies and math. Not only do purpose of reading change but three very important variables change. There are less pictures, more text and smaller font. All can throw beginning readers for a loop. Although learning to read takes place in grades K-3, reading for meaning should always be a part of the routine.

### **Learning to Read (K-3)**

Ideally, we want all students to be able to read before entering fourth grade. During the first three grades of school there is a great deal of emphasis of learning the name of letters, the sounds (phonics), sight words and fluency. Success at this level has a lot to do with the vocabulary students bring from home. Children at this level learn how to decode words, and to make meaning of print. They begin to make predictions about what is coming next by looking at the words themselves but also by looking at the pictures displayed. It is okay to allow them to predict what the story is about based on the cover on the book or pictures. In fact it is fun to start the book by saying...”Let’s see if your (prediction) is right.” Retelling the story in their own words allow you to know if they understood what the book is about. Understanding what the main idea of text is what researchers and I like to call a “Power Standard” or critical. Everything students engage in from elementary through college is based on their ability to determine what is important combined with the ability to delete trivial. Making good decisions in life is about determining what is important and what is not.

### **Reading to Learn (4-12)**

When reading the scrambled letter passage, your phonics skills, though not on the front burner came into play because you knew

certain words started and ended with a series of sounds. You made adjustments because you also knew what made sense. You knew this because you have had so many experiences with word structures and vocabulary. You may not have noticed some words like “the” were written correctly. There is no meaning associated with these function words so they do not help the reader unlock the text. This explains why students come to these seemingly easy words but do not know what they say. . It also explains why you become frustrated and say “You just saw that word!” Seeing a word and drawing meaning from a word are two different things.

Reading to Learn involves reading content material and determining the message. Reading non-fiction requires a different mind-set than reading fiction. Many of the questions on standardized tests are non-fiction by design. The passages are often long and students show fatigue and lose focus. The solution is to increase the pages read in fiction. Find books or authors that “hook” kids. Harry Potter books captured young readers as young as seven or eight. Great fiction does that. Start with trade books and move to novels.

### **Hooked on Books: The Powerful Effects of Read Alouds**

The Read Aloud Handbook, written by a parent, Jim Trelease, is an all time classic that I recommend for every household. He has thorough a listing of books, with descriptions and anthologies for all ages. ***“The best S.A.T. preparation course in the world is to read to your children in bed when they're little,”*** said Tom Parker, former dean of admissions at Amherst University. He goes on to say that he's never met a student with high verbal S.A.T. scores who wasn't a passionate reader, and nearly always they recall being read to. **An A.C.T. or S.A.T. prep course can't package that passion, but parents can.**

Reading books above your child's reading level allows him to develop vocabulary and fluency. They hear you model what good reading looks like. According to Trelease, a consistent mistake made by parents and teachers is the assumption that a child's listening level is the same as his or her reading level. Until about eighth grade, that is far from true; early primary grade students listen many grades above their reading level. I read to my girls every night and when going on

long trips. Now we have books on audiotape. My husband and I never go on a long trip without a book to listen to.

Children and adults often become hooked on a series of books written by certain authors. Trelease's book, Hey Listen to This is a collection of 48 anthologies that include detail information about the authors. He writes that of the all time favorites of young and older kids is a book called Where the Red Fern Grows. It is a book about a dog that refuses to die. Did you know that the author of this classic book, Wilson Rawls, burned the original manuscript and had to be convinced to re-write it?

Frank Baum, Trelease writes, failed at almost everything he tried. But because of a nightly bedtime reading ritual, became the creator of America's first original fairy tale and its first science fiction writer. He knew he wanted to call it "Wizard" but finally came up with the second part when he looked at his filing cabinet and saw O-Z and the word "OZ" became the second word in the title.

Finally, the most important strategy is for your child is **to see you reading**. Children become what they see! Happy summer!

The next article will be written in the August Edition.

### Unscrambled Text

According to a research at Cambridge University, it doesn't matter in what order the letters are in a word are, the only important thing is that the first and last letters be at the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without a problem. This is because the human mind does not read every letter by itself, but the word as a whole.