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PLANT SEEDS THIS SPRING FOR READING THIS SUMMER— REAP REWARDS NEXT FALL!

Patricia Cunningham

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Once upon a time in a far-off land, there was a school system that worked very hard on its reading program. Everyone worked hard on reading. The School Board declared reading its top priority and put the lion's share of its budget into reading. The superintendent supported reading and lay awake nights thinking of ways to make the reading program better. All the principals thought reading was important and showed they felt this way by sponsoring schoolwide USSR and motivational reading programs and by listening to children read and reading to children. The teachers spent most of their day teaching reading. They used a variety of methods and materials and tried to fit these methods and materials to the needs of each child. The children also worked hard at becoming good readers. They read everything – books and magazines, of course, but also papers and signs and labels and television commercials, all through the school year everyone worked very hard on reading and went home in the evenings tired but satisfied – satisfied that, while the reading problem was still not solved, they were doing their best and the children were learning to read.

One week in April, however, just as the azaleas were starting to bloom and all the trees were becoming green once more, a sadness crept into the minds of the teachers. The reading director, on her weekly visits to the schools, noticed that the teachers had lost their sparkle and didn't run out into the halls to lure her into their classrooms to see how well their children could read. Instead they appeared worried and frustrated. After talking with many of the teachers, the reading director discovered the problem. The teachers were worried about how much their students would forget over the long summer months. "Every fall," lamented Miss D. _____ "when I give these children an informal reading inventory, I discover that many of the children are a full level lower than they were the previous Spring. I can even predict which children it will happen to and they are the very ones I have worked so hard with all year." The other teachers concurred and they moped around shaking their heads and feeling very discouraged.

This Spring Discouragement Disease was highly contagious and soon all the teachers and children and principals out in the schools wore long faces and moped around. The superintendent, who is in charge of solving all serious problems, was consulted. He confirmed the fact that, while reading was the priority subject in the schools, there just was no money for an ex-

tensive summer program. He suggested that the schools might each try to keep their libraries open one afternoon a week so that children could come and check books in and out. This seemed like a very likely solution to the problem and was suggested to several of the principals. They were most enthusiastic and began at once to talk to parents and round up volunteers to keep the libraries open one afternoon a week.

The teachers, however, were unconsolated. "The children I am most concerned about would not come here to the library to check out books," explained Miss D_____. "Keeping the libraries open is a good idea but only if the parents will bring their children and they won't do that unless they see how important it is. We had a PTA meeting devoted to the topic of the importance of reading in the home and the only parents who came were the ones who already know how important it is. We just don't seem to be able to communicate with those parents we need to communicate with."

As Miss D_____ spoke the other teachers nodded their heads. Just keeping the libraries open one day a week was not going to solve the problem. The superintendent, when he heard that his suggestion would not solve the problem, also got Spring Discouragement Disease. He moped around and shook his head. In fact, the superintendent developed a most serious case of Spring Discouragement Disease because it was his job to find solutions to the really serious problems.

For a while this gloom enveloped the land.

Then one morning, the superintendent drove into the parking lot, bounced into his office and convened a meeting of all the people concerned with reading. "I woke up in the middle of the night with an idea I hope will help solve our problem," he proclaimed. "Let's have a whole week devoted to communicating with parents the importance of reading with and to children over the summer. We could print bumper stickers saying, 'Have you read with your child today?' and get lots of television, radio and newspaper coverage. Let's use everything at our disposal to get our message across."

Everyone thought this was a marvelous suggestion and plans for "Read With Your Child Week" began. There was much to do and everyone in the administration and in the local schools worked very hard. Local governing boards were contacted and at their monthly meetings, they officially proclaimed May 15-21 "Read With Your Child Week."

Bumper stickers were designed and printed by the high school graphics department for only the cost of materials. Stores were contacted and most agreed to hold special sales on children's books during this week. Restaurants and motels agreed to put "Read With Your Child Week" on their marquees.

The county librarians were just delighted when they heard about this great week. They too planned some special events. Puppet shows, parent workshops, "Read With Your Child" corners in the library, and an intensive library card drive were some of the many activities the library planned.

Exhibits were planned for the three shopping malls in the county. These

exhibits contained posters and coupons telling parents to "SAVE the Future" and "Free some time to read with your child today."

Seven thousand copies of a letter from the superintendent were printed. One was sent home with each elementary school child. In this letter the importance of reading with and to children during the summer months was emphasized and parents, guardians, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, or babysitters were asked to sign a contract agreeing to do one or more of seven things during "Read With Your Child Week" and during the summer.

The Letter:

Dear Parents, Guardians, Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, Brothers, Sisters, and Babysitters,

May 15-21 is a special week for our children. All over the county, we will be celebrating "Read With Your Child Week." A parade on Saturday, May 14th at 10:00 a.m. will kick off the festivities. During the week, schools, libraries, and stores throughout the county will sponsor special events which encourage reading.

Reading is the top priority in our county schools. Teachers and children have worked especially hard on reading this year. Now we need your help. Children who do not read during the summer lose much of what they learned during the school year. To be really good at anything (tennis, swimming, baseball) you *must* practice regularly. This is also true of reading. You can help by setting aside a few minutes every day to read to your child and listen to your child read to you. Since children want to learn to do those things they see adults doing, it is also important to have some time each day when everyone at home reads. Therefore, we are asking all adults to make a promise to help children practice reading during this special week and during the summer.

The Contract:

Please check which things you promise to do during "Read With Your Child Week" and during the summer. Sign this contract and return it to the school.

CHILD'S NAME _____
 GRADE _____
 SCHOOL _____

I will read to my child each day.	May 15-21 _____	Summer _____
I will listen to my child read each day.	May 15-21 _____	Summer _____
I will turn off the television for a few minutes each day and have everyone in the house read.	May 15-21 _____	Summer _____

I will read appropriate parts of the newspaper to my child.	May 15-21 _____	Summer _____
I will encourage my child to read real-world things – signs, menus, cans, boxes, telephone books, etc.	May 15-21 _____	Summer _____
I will take my child to the library once a week.	May 15-21 _____	Summer _____
I will get more books for my child to read.	May 15-21 _____	Summer _____

Signature _____

Check Relationship to Child: Mother _____ Father _____ Guardian _____
 Grandparent _____ Aunt _____ Uncle _____ Brother _____ Sister _____
 Babysitter _____

Since it was desired that every person in the County be involved in this special week, something had to be done for the middle and high school students. While they would not appreciate taking home a letter to their parents asking someone to read with them, it was hoped that they would respond to a letter from the superintendent written directly to them and a contract which they, themselves, would be asked to sign.

The Letter:

Hey Kids!

Have you heard all the uproar about how today's kids don't read as well as their parents did? Well, it's true - and we are beginning to discover why. Kids today just don't read as much as they used to. The television is always on. There are lots of things to do and places to go.

Reading is just like any other skill. To be good at it and stay good at it, you have to practice. Just as you practice swimming and tennis regularly to stay in top form, you have to practice reading regularly to stay in top form.

Did you know that –

If you don't read anything during the summer you will probably drop back a level in reading.

Students who read have more impressive vocabularies than students who don't read much.

Students who read do better on college entrance exams.

Students who read do better at all jobs.

May 15-21 is a special week for our county. All over the county,

we will be celebrating "Read With Your Child Week." A parade on Saturday, May 14th at 10:00 a.m. will kick off the festivities. During the week, schools, libraries, and stores throughout the county will sponsor special events which encourage reading.



Photo by Neva Dennis

TEACHERS BOOST READING



Photo by Neva Dennis

FAVORITE BOOK CHARACTERS

As secondary students, we hope you will participate in some of the “Read With Your Child Week” activities with your younger brothers, sisters, cousins, and neighbors. We also hope that you will commit yourself to doing some things this summer which will help *you* stay in top reading form.

The Contract:

Please indicate what you will promise to do during “Read With Your Child Week” and during the summer. Sign and return to your teacher.

_____ During the summer, I will read part of the newspaper each day (especially the sports section and the comics)!

_____ I will read 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 or more books during the summer.
(Circle One)

_____ I will read parts of a magazine each week.

_____ I will encourage my sister, brother, cousin or neighbor to read, read to them, and/or take them to the library.

_____ Other (Please specify) _____

Signature: _____

Grade: _____

School: _____

Meanwhile, the teachers and principals and children out in the schools were all busy and excited planning activities in their schools for the week and planning their entries for the big event – the parade! Yes, the kick-off event for this special week would be special, indeed – a Saturday morning parade. Plans for the parade took much time but the support of the whole community helped a great deal. People who had organized parades before gave advice (Get parade insurance!) and cautions (Put all horses at the back of the parade!). The rescue squad agreed to line the parade up.

Finally, the great week came. The scene downtown on Saturday morning was unlike anything ever seen there before. Traffic was slowed for miles as the parents of 1500 kids delivered them to the lining-up point. State and local officials convened on the lawn of the superintendent’s home for coffee before going to their assigned cars. By 10:00, the streets were lined with curious spectators and doting parents. The parade, 58 units long, began. In addition to local and state officials, bands and firetrucks, the parade included: floats (The Family that Reads Together Learns Together; A Bedtime Story; Athletes for Reading and many more), children dressed up as their favorite book characters, reading cheerleaders, a middle school chorus singing reading rounds (*Are you Reading?* to the tune of *Are You Sleeping?*, *Read, Read Read Good Books* to the tune of *Row, Row Row Your Boat*), a midget baseball team with a banner proclaiming “Let’s read the Sports Page,” clowns, a reading convoy, an MG car decorated to look

like Peter Rabbit, and many, many more. A giant chicken (Doodles) and Gilbert Giddyup were special attractions in the parade.

The reaction of the spectators and participants in the parade was unanimously great! Comments like, “Why haven’t you done this before?” and “You should do this every year.” were heard over and over.



Photo by James W. Cunningham

MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETES

With this kind of kickoff, the week was bound to be a success and indeed it was. During the week, most of the activities centered in individual schools. Many schools had something special planned for each day of the week. School-based events included: Read Outs, Book People Pageants, Story Hours, Adult Book Character Dress Up Days, Creative Writing Activities, Old-Time Story Hours, Reading Pep Rallies, Poster Contests, Door Decorations, Book Sing-A-Longs, Book Auctions, Book Exchanges, Book Fairs and Reading Awards Days.

There was also much media coverage during this week. In addition to the coverage of the parade and school activities, television and radio programs and newspaper articles devoted to explaining to parents the importance of reading activities in the home and how to get these activities started were featured during this week.

When the special week was finally over, the people who had worked so hard during that week sat down to evaluate what they had accomplished. Had the one simple message that reading to and with children is important gotten across? Miss D_____ said she thought it had been a tremendous help. All her children had returned their contracts and she planned to write a note on each contract encouraging the parents to honor

that commitment all summer and telling them how much it would help their child. She would include this contract and note in the end-of-year report card.

The director of community relations said she knew it had strengthened the ties between the schools and other community agencies. The libraries, stores, restaurants, motels, rescue squad, fire and police departments, local governing bodies, newspaper radio and television people had all been involved and all felt a part of the success of the week.

The superintendent said that the teachers and principals all thought it was a great week and, considering it was extra work for them, you know that means it was a success.

A school director, who is also a parent of a middle school child, remarked that her daughter was most impressed with getting a letter from the superintendent and took the contract she had signed very seriously.

Several comments written on the bottom of the elementary contracts were shared:

“I feel that this project is very important to my child’s education and also it gives us, the parents, a chance to see just how our child reads and how we must help.”

“I will do all I can to help my child in his reading and I think this is a great idea. It gets the child and parents to get together and learn and know more about what your child can do as well as for the parents to show that they care and love them.”

“We think this is a good program and are glad to cooperate with you in every way possible.”

“I am so strongly for turning the TV off and for the whole family to take a book they each prefer.”

“When I can’t, my mother or his father will listen or read to him during the summer.”

The best thing is that the teachers and principals and children out in the schools are now smiling again. They are working hard but they are satisfied because they know they are accomplishing something. Parents are reading with their children and hopefully they will all live happily ever after!