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A MOTHER LOOKS AT READING

Joan Archambault

Every mother wants her child to read. In addition to providing a means of entertainment for him, easing his adjustment to school where reading is learning, enriching every personal experience, the reading skill is highly valued. It is very "In."

Pick up a newspaper. See how often you find feature stories about reading . . . new reading . . . speed reading . . . "Johnny Can . . ." "Johnny Can't . . . Why?". See how many articles deal with the troubled reader, the slow reader, the reader who fails because of language disability, poor physical condition, or emotional immaturity. Notice the cover-story approach to good and bad reading in popular magazines. Switch on your radio and listen to a discussion about reading today, and reading tomorrow; someone might even mention reading yesterday. Now that TV logs have left westerns and quiz shows by the wayside, they have turned to the more intellectual concerns of "talk" shows. The subject of reading is among the most popular topics of conversation. And so . . . we are reading-conscious. At least, many of us are. We take time to be. Some others, too caught up with earning a living, fighting fears of financial or social deprivation, or battling real physical hardships, "could care less."

For those who do care, there is great concern with reading. Parents of all ages, with children of all ages, search today for a good reading "recipe." Those of us with children just entering school, kindergarten or first grade, feel the pressures of giving our children the "right start." We feel we must not make a mistake. There is one right way. We must find that way, or doom our little ones to life without written color, imagination, or learning; life without reading.

We have the answer in our own homes. Our children indicate the direction to take . . . and each child may choose a different path. Many parents may say they did not plan the arrival of their children . . . yet none would give them up. Therefore, parents love each child for the individual he is. If parents can show their feelings, the child is aware of this love. He takes it for granted. He spends time looking for new interests, because he has no reason to need constant reassurance of his personal security. As each new interest claims his attention, his mother observes. She sees what excites, what absorbs, what fascinates him. If Steve likes wires and tubes and sound, let him take a radio apart. If Wendy likes other children, let her seek them out. If Leslie loves bugs and worms and animals, take her to explore for herself. See that Joey, who lives for speed and wheels, gets a chance

to talk to the garage man and learn how things work! Sooner or later, when mothers and fathers can't provide the answers, children discover a reason for pictures and books.

The experts tell us the first child is handicapped, because he IS the first. They show us how tense we are with this beginning baby. They point out the "middle child" is often left to his own devices . . . so much so, he develops his own pattern of insecurity because the youngest in the family is so little, and so loved, (and so spoiled.) Well, the experts may point these things out, but there still has to be that first child, and very probably the second and then the youngest. So what can a mother do . . . but love and watch each as he comes along . . . discovering what kind of a person he appears to be . . . and encouraging him along his natural lines of inclination. A child, growing in this warmth of genuine interest, is more nearly ready, surely, for the "giant step" of reading, when he is asked to take it.

Perhaps a child from a happy, busy, household finds it easy to adjust to school, though his home may not have a book in it! Maybe Mama and Papa don't speak English easily; but Mama and Papa love son Juan, and he knows it. He learns early that being naughty means punishment. He sees every day how proud his Mama is of him. She doesn't spend her waking hours trying to get away from him. He never hears her complain the "kids drive me crazy" . . . because they don't. She likes them. Juan may spend part of each day in a nursery because his Mama has to work . . . but when she is with him SHE IS WITH HIM: and she LISTENS to him.

Could it be there is a feeling that comes before reading readiness? Could mothers actually provide the climate for it . . . by doing the best they can to be interested, active, MOTHERS to their children? Could this feeling be described as reading willingness?

I believe we are lucky to be reading-conscious. We are fortunate to have reading experts to help solve the very real reading problems that plague readers of all ages. Mothers aren't experts, and don't want to be. Who has the time? But if we do what we are supposed to do for our children, (and this comes naturally, doesn't it?) with our love, our guidance, and our real interest, perhaps we can set the wheels in motion. The teachers can take it from there.

Mrs. Joe Archambault is a graduate of Michigan State University and a mother of four children. She has specialized in speech and household economics. Her "reading family" are lovers of books.