

# PRACTICING READING WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MOM AND DAD

If I remember the old tale correctly, one of the famed Three Little Pigs was a clever fellow indeed. No house of straw for him. His had to be of sturdy stuff to withstand the huffing and puffing of the Big Bad Wolf.

No doubt, you're wondering what that clever little pig has to do with the need to increase summer reading among young adolescents. The answer: *everything*. We need to follow the pig's example and appeal to the key ingredient, the absolute strongest part of the foundation underlying a life-long reader--- the *parents*.

During the school year, there is surprisingly little difference in the reading gains between children from high and low-income families. However, students typically score lower on standardized tests at the end of summer vacation than they do on the same tests at the beginning of summer vacation (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse, 1996). During the summer we see that children from high-income families read more than children from low-income families. Why? They read more because they have more access to books, newspapers, and other print materials not only at home but outside the home as well (Krashen and Shin, 2005). When students are tested at the end of summer vacation, they typically score lower on standardized tests than they did on the same tests at the beginning of summer vacation (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse, 1996). We see that children from high-income homes make better progress in reading over the summer. Over time, the summer advantage can account for social class differences in reading achievement.

Armed with this body of information, we need to do everything possible to team with parents to encourage the growth of summer reading among all young adolescents. When parents attend orientation meetings in May prior to their children's entrance to middle school, we need to convey to them how vital their role is to their children's reading success and then equip them with ways to foster the growth of reading skills during the summer.

The following suggestions will help involve parents:

\*Provide parents with a list of 2007-2008 Young Hoosier Book Award titles.

\*Display books and explain how they can be found at the public library.

\*Secure forms from the public library to distribute to parents to fill out to obtain library cards.

\*Encourage parents to visit the public library with their children to help acclimate them to the surroundings. Children need direction. When they receive it, their comfort level in new surroundings increases.

\*Encourage parents to be good reading role models by making sure there is a daily newspaper in the home so they can discuss articles with their children.

\*Provide parents with a Summer Reading Log to help children learn how to maintain a record of their summer reading to show to their teachers in the fall. For many young adolescents, keeping track of things can be a tremendous challenge.

\*Remind parents that the school's Web site contains a list of recommended books and suggestions for summer reading and a link to the public library Web site. Let them know that the library has computers for use by parents and students.

\*Provide parents of struggling readers with a list of high interest/low readability books that can be found at <http://mgrn.evansville.edu/5fall2005.htm>.

For those parents who are not involved in school orientation activities, be sure to make the extra effort to promote summer reading with newsletters, school marquee messages, Summer Reading Logs, and Web sites.

So keep in mind the old story of the smart pig that recognized the need for a strong foundation. Remember that parents are the bricks in a sturdy reading structure. Involving your students' parents in every aspect of summer reading will pay big reading achievement dividends in September