

Five Reasons to Read to Children¹

By Denise Meridith

Baby boomers and seniors may remember the days before 500-channel and 24-hour television, when their parents would read Grimm's Hansel and Gretel or Disney's Lady and the Tramp to them just before bedtime. But no time to read now? [In 2015, the Pew Research Center reported that 46% of American families have two parents working full-time and over a quarter of children are living in single-parent households.](#) Combined with the modern pressures to schedule every minute of children's lives from soccer practice to computer camps, it is understandable that reading with children has become as nostalgic as a scene in a Norman Rockwell painting. With the holidays coming up, there are at least five important reasons why Americans can and should schedule some time for reading with children:

- 1) Language and literacy are important foundations for youth. [The American Academy of Pediatrics has said that children introduced to reading at an early age tend to continue to excel throughout school.](#) Yet more than a third of American children arrive in Kindergarten without the skills they need to learn to read.
- 2) Reading provides stress release. Americans recognize that stress has serious consequences for physical, mental and emotional health. They will spend a lot of time and money on retreats, yoga, and, even drugs, to reduce stress. It is particularly important to destress before going to bed. Spending time reading with young children before bedtime will create healthy, new habits for both the adults and the children.
- 3) Reading with children can help them learn new items, colors, words, and expressions and new ways of doing things, whether the story is about a bull that loves smelling flowers or a superhero defeating a villain.
- 4) Valuable lessons are imparted in an entertaining fashion. Everyone knows that it is difficult to capture and maintain children's attention, especially to discuss any lessons or morals about life. The right books can teach children a lot about right and wrong, conflict resolution, tolerance, and provide help for both children who bully and are bullied. Bedtime stories can subtly encourage important real-life questions and discussions.
- 5) Reading together strengthens bonds. Children love to look up to their parents and grandparents and learn from them. Likewise, parents and grandparents can gain self-satisfaction and improve self-esteem by sharing the simple skill of teaching children to read.

Late night comedian [Seth Meyers, who now features authors on his show, credits his mother reading Roald Dahl's *The Witches* to him before bed for gifting him his love of books.](#) Today, there are many excellent children's books (both hardcover and Kindle) available that, with a minimum of expense and time (e.g., 15 minutes a night), can help parents and grandparents, particularly of children three to six years old, establish a new habit that can have long-term impacts on the intellectual, emotional and mental well-being and relationships of both the youth and adults.

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