

Why Reading Is So Important For Children

Why do we tell children to read?

We're always telling children that books and reading are good for them, but have we ever really thought about why that's true? Exactly what do older children get out of reading novels? What do younger kids get from being read to? Does reading matter?

The purpose of this article is to say that, yes, it's true, reading really is important, and that there are some solid reasons why that is so. Let's begin with the practical benefits and then move on to the less tangible rewards of a life filled with reading.

Books help children develop vital language skills.

Reading is an important skill that needs to be developed in children. Not only is it necessary for survival in the world of schools and (later on) universities, but in adult life as well. The ability to learn about new subjects and find helpful information on anything from health problems and consumer protection to more academic research into science or the arts depends on the ability to read.

Futurologists used to predict the death of the printed word but, ironically, Internet has made reading more and more a part of people's daily lives. The paperless society is a myth. The computer's ability to process and analyze data means that endless variations on reports and other types of documents can be and are generated. Internet, itself an enormous new source of information and recreation, is based on the humble written word. To effectively utilize the web and judge the authenticity and value of what is found there, both reading and critical thinking skills are of prime importance.

The more children read, the better they become at reading. It's as simple as that. The more enjoyable the things they read are, the more they'll stick with them and develop the reading skills that they'll need for full access to information in their adult lives. Reading should be viewed as a pleasurable activity - as a source of entertaining tales and useful and interesting factual information.

The more young children are read to, the greater their interest in mastering reading. Reading out loud exposes children to proper grammar and phrasing. It enhances the development of their spoken language skills, their ability to express themselves verbally.

Reading, by way of books, magazines or websites, exposes kids to new vocabulary. Even when they don't understand every new word, they absorb something from the context that may deepen their understanding of it the next time the word is encountered. When parents read aloud to children, the children also hear correct pronunciation as they see the words on the page, even if they can't yet read the words on their own.

Reading can open up new worlds and enrich children's lives.

As mentioned above, reading opens doors - doors to factual information about any subject on earth, practical or theoretical. Given the wealth of available resources such as Internet, libraries, schools and bookstores, if children can read well and if they see reading as a source of information, then for the rest of their lives they will have access to all of the accumulated knowledge of mankind, access to all of the great minds and ideas of the past and present. It truly is magic!

Through books, children can also learn about people and places from other parts of the world, improving their understanding of and concern for all of humanity. This, in turn, contributes towards our sense that we truly live in a "global village" and may help us bring about a more peaceful future for everyone. This can happen through nonfiction but, perhaps even more importantly, reading novels that are set in other places and time periods can

give children a deeper understanding of others through identification with individual characters and their plights.

Through stories and novels children can vicariously try out new experiences and test new ideas, with no negative consequences in their real lives. They can meet characters who they'll enjoy returning to for comforting and satisfying visits when they reread a cherished book or discover a sequel. Books also give kids the opportunity to flex their critical thinking skills in such areas as problem solving, the concepts of cause and effect, conflict resolution, and acceptance of responsibility for one's actions. Mysteries allow children to follow clues to their logical conclusions and to try to outguess the author. Even for very young children, a simple story with a repetitive refrain or a simple mystery to solve gives a confidence boost. Children can predict the patterns and successfully solve the riddles.

Children are influenced by and imitate the world around them. While a steady diet of violent cartoons may have a detrimental effect on children's development, carefully chosen stories and books can have a positive influence on children, sensitizing them to the needs of others. For example, books can encourage children to be more cooperative, to share with others, to be kind to animals, or to respect the natural environment.

Reading can enhance children's social skills.

Although reading is thought of as the quintessential solitary activity, in certain circumstances reading can be a socializing activity. For example, a parent or grandparent reading a story aloud, whether from a traditional printed book or from an ebook, can be a great opportunity for adult and child to share some quiet, relaxed quality time together away from the rush and stresses of the business of daily living. They share a few minutes of precious time, plus they share the ideas that are contained in the story. In addition, older children can be encouraged to read aloud to younger ones as a means of enhancing their relationship.

At school or at a library story hour, books can bring children together and can be part of a positive shared experience. For some preschoolers this may be their primary opportunity to socialize and to learn how to behave around other children or how to sit quietly for a group activity. Make the most of this experience by encouraging children to talk about what they've read or heard.

Reading can improve hand-eye coordination.

It may sound funny, but ebooks can be a way for children to improve their fine motor skills and their hand-eye coordination, as they click around a child friendly website or click the backward and forward buttons of online story pages. They may also be picking up valuable computer skills that they'll need in school and later in life.

Reading can provide children with plenty of good, clean fun!

I've saved the most important point for last. Reading can provide children with endless hours of fun and entertainment. All of the pragmatic reasons above aren't at all necessary to justify reading's place in children's lives. Stories can free up imaginations and open up exciting new worlds of fantasy or reality. They allow children to dream and may give them a good start on the road to viewing reading as a lifelong source of pleasure; so read to your young children every day.

Inspire your older children to read. Give them access to plenty of reading material that they'll enjoy and discuss it with them. Sample everything - traditional printed books and ebooks on Internet, classic children's novels and fairy tales, as well as more modern stories.

If a child wants to hear the same story over and over again, don't worry about it. Children take comfort from the familiarity and predictability of a beloved story that they know by heart. There's no harm in that. Reread old

favorites and, at the same time, introduce your children to new stories. Your child's mind and heart have room for both.

So reading really does matter after all!

There are so many ways in which reading continues to be both a vital skill for children to master, and an important source of knowledge and pleasure that can last a lifetime. Nurture it in your children. Make the most of all the resources that are available and waiting for you: printed books, online books, magazines and so forth. Encourage follow-up activities involving creative writing skills and the arts, as well, so that your children can reflect upon or expand on what they've absorbed and, at the same time, develop their own creativity. As you help your kids appreciate the magic of reading, you'll find that there's a whole wonderful world full of children's literature out there that YOU can enjoy too.

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