

READ TO ME NEWSLETTER



Spring 2005
Volume 2
Issue 1

WHAT'S INSIDE

- WORDS FROM THE DIRECTOR
- LETTERS FROM RTM LEADERS
- DRAMA MAMAS
- ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WORDS FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends of READ TO ME,

READ TO ME continues to bring books into the lives of babies. 2004 has seen a variety of new initiatives. I've shared mutual interests and ideas with Jessica Doyle, the wife of the governor of Wisconsin; with therapists working with children and families at the Under Fives Study Center at the University of Virginia; with the excellent librarians at the Brooklyn Public Library; and with colleagues working in family literacy at the Literacy Assistance Center and Literacy, Inc in Manhattan. Jeffrey Rosales and Parker Balderston of Teachers & Writers Collaborative continue to field requests for new programs in the NYC area. New initiatives and collaborations are beginning with the Harlem Children's Zone and an ambitious Immigrant Family Literacy Alliance. Good work is happening all over.

The AGES&STAGES videotape is nearly complete. Filmed by Andy Reichsman and Kate Purdie, who made the original READ TO ME videotape three years ago, and aided by the resourceful Kathy Kinsner, formerly of the award winning Reading Rainbow program, the video shows what babies under two actually do when they read books with their parents. More than 50 families in NYC and Vermont show us what reading to babies looks like. It's unique, hilarious and instructive.

Our hope is that new families will enjoy seeing the universality of how all babies 'read' books. We

hope they will be encouraged to have the same fun with their own children. Babies love books in their own curious ways but need a parent to bring reading into their lives.

Our fund raising has been gratifying. After sharing a DVD/VHS with all of the participating families, we will donate 2001 copies to a Reach Out & Read Program at the Morris Heights Medical Health Care Center in the South Bronx to distribute to their families. The 1st copy will be shown in their waiting area. We promise to post information about obtaining a copy on the website. You can watch a 3-minute trailer on the website.

KJ Dell'Antonia and I are mid-way through our book, tentatively titled **READING BABIES**. Our publisher, Sourcebooks, has scheduled it for Mother's Day in 2006. If you have anecdotes about reading to babies 0-3 please send them **NOW**. We need your stories to make the book sing!

The rest of this newsletter features dramatic read-aloud tips and reports from programs located in libraries, elementary and high schools and prisons in New York, Oregon, and Virginia. We are so proud of our leaders. Thank you for allowing us to publish your stories for all to read. Here's hoping that your initiatives and adaptations will persuade others to leap in.

Fondly,
Susan



From left to right: Jennifer McFarland of the UW Foundation, Susan, and First Lady of Wisconsin Mrs. Jessica Doyle

LETTERS FROM RTM LEADERS

The following are letters to Susan from RTM Leaders in NYC and in other parts of the country sharing their personal experiences with the READ TO ME Program.

Hello Susie,

. . . The prison work is going extremely well and I think prisons and jails are a dynamite setting for RTM! It would be terrific to be able to offer the inmates a follow-along program in their home when they're released - perhaps that's something for the future.

I continue at the women's prison where I finished a group four weeks ago, and started a new group two weeks ago . . . The program is received extremely well by inmates and staff - and the waiting list is long! Most of the participants want to repeat the program, but the prison rules don't allow that, and I couldn't do it when there's a waiting list. We meet once a week for two hours, for eight weeks. Attendance is good and moms come to the group even if they have bad headaches, just-pulled teeth and without having had time for lunch! (We meet from 1-3) They tell their friends and encourage me to come more often. Their insight and ideas continue to amaze me and they adore being able to choose a good book to send home. I've had to provide books for the older children as well since most of the women with children under 5 have older ones as well. The older kids miss Mom and feel bad if they don't get a book. One woman is sending books to the unborn child of her 17-yr-old son and his girlfriend. She has younger children as well and everyone lives in the same house. There are many amazing stories I could tell you about how RTM impacts on the participants' understanding of their children and when those "lightbulbs" go off, it's a joy - but I'll stop here for now.

With the men's prison, the stories are similar and although this first group is small, there is now a long waiting list. Eliot Singer is working with me on this site and I think that's really good for the dads. We're finishing our first group in two weeks, and will start another soon. The word is spreading and I think we'll be working there as long as we can. . . These guys care about their children, and seem willing to trust what we do and say. Their behaviors are somewhat different in that they have a harder time reading in front of the other participants, but they do read with their kids during visitation and one of the participants has read to the group a couple of times.

That's it for today. It's always great to hear from you and I hope you'll visit here sometime soon.

Judith Bauerle
Charlottesville, VA

PS: Judy and Eliot were told by prison authorities that RTM was the most popular program offered to the inmates.

Dear Susan:

Hello! It's great to hear from you and I'm happy you are interested in getting some story of my experience. I really think the program has great potential; it's a matter of lassoing the parents in . . .

The RTM program this spring at PS191 was a success though things went along at a different schedule and pace than planned. . . Each week one or two more parents joined in . . . one of the challenges was really encouraging them to open up and join the discussions. I thought it was challenging to get them to join the discussions because two of the parents seemed to speak very little English (one French one Hindi) so communication was hard anyway and because the core group of parents had been involved since the beginning they were very enthusiastic and talkative and I think it may have been a bit intimidating for newcomers to jump in. The bookmaking session was such a huge success it actually went practically an hour overtime, everyone was thrilled with their creation and because these were parents of older kids, the kids joined in this bookmaking session and it was a really nice family event, as was the library visit & the final guest author appearance. The Library session was great and I saw most of the parents get library cards and the others had them already and some of the kids got their first library cards as well. The final session Denise Lewis Patrick was the guest author and she was really wonderful, of course. I had fun at all the sessions and the discussions were all really interesting and thought provoking and inspiring. Everyone always left in a good mood and excited for the next week.

One thing the school faculty did to encourage attendance was to offer a \$20 gift certificate to the Scholastic Store to the parents that came for 3 or more sessions. I thought that was a great idea but it didn't seem to have a big impact on motivation to come but it also didn't seem well advertised either. Word of mouth from week to week made the most difference. The faculty tried to stalk certain moms and personally invite them and encourage them to come. I know the school wishes it did a better job of getting more parents to come. The one Polaroid/wordless picture book session is so good though- I wish there was a way I could have done it again at the end for all the parents who came after the first sessions. The school seemed to love the family sessions more than when the parents were separate from the kids but I thought it was nice to have some sessions with just parents because it really is hard to focus on a discussion when your kid is wanting your attention- the "activity" sessions (bookmaking, library, guest author reading) are easier for family to join in. RTM is really designed for reading to babies and I missed that there seemed to be no parents of babies that attended. It was easier than I had expected though to talk just as much about reading aloud to older children too. Parents really appreciated a handout I did (made from things that were given to me during my RTM training) with lots of quotes and statistics about reading to your children and how it impacts their lifelong learning. I think this program might reach the more targeted group if it ran through libraries and was advertised by flyer at playgrounds and in grocery stores and Laundromats. I hope I get to run another RTM series. I enjoyed it very much. Thanks!

Jane LeCroy
New York, NY

Dear Susan,

. . . I worked with a Portland Public School, Madison High, where a niece is vice-principal. In that area of the city, there is a Teen Parent Coordinator who travels from school to school helping/mentoring/guiding, etc. It was with her that I set up the once-a-week sessions with a small group (varied from 2 to 5) of teen moms, aged 15 to 17. . .

I did not need by any means the amount of money that you suggested, though. I looked for suitable books at garage sales, used book stores, GoodWill, and most of all the public library used book

store--just a half dozen stops in all in the search for books. Plus the supplies for tagbook construction, I spent less than \$100. The Portland library used book store was the best source, because not only were the books inexpensive (\$.75 -\$3) but they were in good condition & there was a variety--board books, picture books of many types, foreign language books. All but one of the moms were Spanish speakers (though not necessarily readers), so I did quite a bit of looking to locate books in Spanish. The girls seemed to be interested in having the Spanish books, some of which had both English & Spanish.

Also, I created bookplates on my computer--never have done stickers before, so I learned how--which was a help in making the used books look personal. At the last session, I gave each girl my card with an invitation to call me with any literacy-oriented questions or to let me know how the reading is working out for them. They were quite reticent & not very trusting as a group, so I don't expect to be overwhelmed with calls, but I really wanted them to know I'm interested in how things come along for them.

All in all, I think things turned out well, & that my effort & time was definitely worth it. I'm thankful for your program, since it gave me a good reference to follow, & I was able to adapt it to the needs I found. With my years of teaching & working with parents, I didn't need more than that. Also, by printing it out & referring my niece to the website, she was able to get the OK easily to have me work with the girls. Next year, with long lead time, I may be able to arrange an author visit through the public library early childhood administrator (who was delighted to be able to help) for one session. The area librarian was kind & very enthusiastic about doing a presentation in the neighborhood library for the moms & their children. However, the library visit proved too difficult in the short time that was left to us to arrange this year--public transportation within the school day took too long, & there were no funds for school-sponsored vans--but the coordinator & I are quite sure we can work it out for next year.

Again, thank you for the work you are doing! I'm telling my friends and acquaintances about it, so you may be getting more inquiry emails from the Northwest!

Blessings to you,

**Carolyn Neighbor
Portland, Oregon**

DRAMA MAMAS

Sometimes parents are apprehensive about reading baby books to other adults in the RTM workshops. They may feel nervous or silly. Incorporating theatrical games into your workshops can be very helpful in getting parents to loosen up and become more open and imaginative. I have noticed that some moms and dads get particularly nervous when they have to read wordless books. Without a "script". some parents feel pressured. I found that doing some theater games to warm-up for the wordless picture books really helps people get into a playful mood. Here are few exercises to try with your drama mamas and papas!

ANIMAL INTRODUCTIONS

So many baby books require moms and dads to make animal sounds. By the time one's child is a year-old a parent will have moo-d, baa-d, and chirped more than the actual animals themselves. With that in mind this exercise allows a parent to perfect the animal sound that they feel like the best. This is an excellent ice-breaker.

This exercise should be done with the parents standing in a circle. Each parent introduces herself by first name. Now, think of an animal that makes a sound. A cow, for example. Now say your name as if you were that animal. The group leader can demonstrate. My name is Moomoomonica. Or a snake. My name is Sssssssarah. Laughter allowed!

After this exercise, you might want to choose a book that requires the making of animal sounds and read it in a group or in pairs.

IMITATE YOUR BABY

Pretty self-explanatory. Take a few minutes for everyone to just close their eyes and picture their babies. Babies have no language but have such expressive faces. Think of a face your baby makes and experiment with making it, imitating your baby. Everyone will have their eyes closed, so don't be shy. Play with your own expressions until you can feel your baby's expression on your own face: baby's hello smile, the laugh smile, the sleepy face or yawn, or twisted up crying face, a worried expression or just a little personality quirk that shows up on your baby's face in an expression. Add the sound of it, if there is one that accompanies it, or do hand or arm motions that go along: a rub of the eyes, tight little fists, little punches in the air, a tug on the ear, whatever. For example, when my daughter Alice was a new baby she would always make this one funny face when she was just relaxed and alert, observing her environment. She would hold her mouth in a little O shape with the tip of her tongue sticking out and she would just stay like this looking all around from side to side, her fists at her chest. Go around the room giving everyone 15 or 30 seconds to act like his/her own sweet baby.

HOW YOU SAY THE SENTENCE

Choose a simple sentence and send it around the room. Each person who repeats it has to say the same words but convey a different meaning or feeling than the last person. For example, use the sentence "I knew this was going to happen." You could say it like you are crying, you can say it like you just won the lottery, you can say it like a question, you can say it like you are angry, you can say it accusingly or dismissively, just quietly or yelling, you can say it like you are sick or tired or hopeful, jokingly or seriously, rushed or very calm. It's interesting to see how putting emotion into what you say can convey more meaning than the actual words. This is a nice exercise both as an ice-breaker and to use to show how reading a book with feeling behind the words can make a powerful difference in how the story is conveyed. It's a fun way to play with super simple books like concept books, a way for you to make the book fun and different spontaneously when you read it with your child. To begin the exercise the group leader should take one sentence as an example and say it in 4 or 5 different ways him/herself, just to show how it is done. Next, choose a different sentence for the group to pass around. Some other possible sentences that work nicely are: I want a piece of cake. That car is yours. It came in the mail. This was in the refrigerator. Look what I just found. Go to sleep. Almost any simple sentence works well.

Kristen Lynch and Jane LeCroy, New York, NY



Kristen and Lucina (21 months)

Acknowledgements:

Continued thanks to Nancy Shapiro and Teachers & Writers Collaborative

For AGES&STAGES production:

Kathy Kinsner

Ames Hill Production (Kate Purdie & Andy Reichsman)

Emma Straub

Funding:

Pierce H. Bitker Legacy

The Ravenel Curry Family Foundation

Kids II

J/D McManus Foundation

Susan Barahal

Sally Brody

Johanna Garfield

Christopher Gates

Marcia Grace

Sally & Morris Holbrook

Leila Javitch

Eleanor & Marvin Korman

Peter Straub
Vera Weintraub
Abby Westlake

Special Thanks to the Staff and Families from:

Bloomington Family Program
Grand Street Settlement Early Head Start
The Educational Alliance Early Head Start
The Cathedral School

and

Ruth Cox and Austin; Marcela Pelioid and Paulina/Alexander; Valeria Susanina and Lily;
Anastasia Avrutsky and Aleksandra (Sasha); Amy Wilson Flannery & Connor; Franco Leon &
Kyle; Tracie, Al Spellman and Grandad Spellman with Asa; Rosalind Vargas, Eugene Samuel
& Cadell; Tracy Martin & Nina.

NY Department of Education LYFE Programs at
-Brandeis High School, Manhattan-key help from Diane W. Brown and Fran Fabian
-P911 School for Continuing Education, Manhattan-key help from Josephine Carson, Sonia
Deane, and Margie Nunn
Shim Si Grocery Store, Manhattan
Every Person Influences Children, NYC (EPIC)
Brattleboro, Vermont Families and Staff from Wyndham County

READ TO ME Program Donors:

Lorin Schneider
Kelly Mangano

General Support :

Lisa Bernstein
Jane Clarke
Pat Cummings
Andrea DeBruin
KJ Dell'Antonia
Leo & Diane Dillon
Janice Hirota
Nina Mogilnik
My Book Group
Elyse Rudolf