

HOW TO INSPIRE A LOVE OF READING IN YOUR CHILDREN – INTERVIEW with EJ CARROLL

Reading is an important part of a child's learning and development, but what happens when you have a child who doesn't like reading.

Ebony-Jane Carroll is a children's author and has both undergrad and postgrad qualifications in education. She is passionate about inspiring young children to fall in love with literature.

We ask her a few questions on this topic.

Q. How do you get a child to engage with reading?

A. Children need to be immersed in language in their everyday lives to then be able appreciate words on a page.

Having discussions at the dinner table every night, playing eye spy in the car and being descriptive in general all help children acquire a vocabulary that then gives them power!

As a kindergarten teacher it amazes me to see how many children struggle for words. For example, they may point to a basket full of balls and say, “Can I have that one?” I will reply, “I don’t know which one you mean, describe it to me.” Often a blank look appears on their face as they simply do not know what to say. So I am very intentional about my word choice, I’ll say, “Do you want the small, pink, spiky, oval shaped ball or the enormous, yellow, striped, round ball?”

Meaning is everything, a child must be able to comprehend what they are reading in order for engagement to happen and a foundation of wide vocabulary is key. For example, if a child hears or reads the word ‘mixing’ in a story but has never seen Mum or Dad mixing food in the kitchen whilst explaining what it is, then there is no meaning behind the word. I’ve known children who can read extremely well, but then ask them what the story was about and they have no idea.

Q. How do you make a book interesting to a child who has no interest at all?

A. Find books with content that a child enjoys. Sometimes silly books that are funny can help, I know when I pull out my copy of 'Dirty Bertie', which is about a little boy who picks his nose and eats it, not even the wriggly kids move a muscle during story time.

Being engaging as the reader is so important, putting an emphasis on the right words, doing voices and letting suspension build all contribute towards giving the child an experience.

Rhyming books are gold because children who can't decipher words yet can memorise the story and feel like they are reading, they get enjoyment from the accomplishment and are then intrinsically motivated to keep reading. Sparking interest starts when children are very young (from birth) with no less than 3 bedtime stories a night (a Mex Fox recommendation!)

Q. Is there something parents can do help a child who doesn't like to read?

A. Modelling reading as a parent shows children it is a life

skill to be desired, if a child never sees you pick up a book for fun, they may not either. To quote Mem Fox again, 'Enthusiasm has to bubble around a book or children will think reading is dull.'

Q. What are a few tips for a child who is a passionate reader and wants to create stories of their own based on their own experiences?

A. Well this child will already be well ahead because as the saying goes, to be a good writer you need to be a good reader. Great stories often come from a writer's own personal experience because it is unique to them and has never been told exactly that way before.

Tip #1. Don't tell too many people your idea before you write it because their feedback may discourage you prior to you having had a chance to edit and polish your work. Rough drafts are exactly that, rough!

Tip #2. After you write your story, put it away for a few days or even weeks. Then come back to it and read it like you would as if you hadn't written it. Write down notes as

you go. Was it interesting or boring? Was it easy to understand or did you get confused? What did it make you feel? Could there have been a better way to say something, e.g. another word you could have used (use a thesaurus to find interesting adjectives).

Tip #3. Sometimes you can get a good idea based on your own experience but then using your imagination it can take a whole new direction . . . so let it run wild! Often your original plan is best to give way to an unforeseen turn, so don't hold your ideas so tightly that you aren't willing to let them go for something better.

Q. Why is reading so important?

A. There are a plethora of reasons reading is important but I will just touch on two. Reading develops the mind, sparks the imagination and allows for creativity. Being literate also gives us the ability to function well in society, further educate ourselves and ultimately make choices that will benefit our lives.

In 1990 when I started school, the average 5 year old's vocabulary was 8 times higher than it is today, now that is

an alarming statistic. I constantly had a book in my hand as a child as I gravitated towards the made up worlds authors would introduce me to. Looking back I believe that because I was such a talker (and still am) I enjoyed reading more. If we make it easy for our children to acquire language then the idea of reading a book will not be so daunting.