



Students at the Doha College library

I MET A DRAGON FACE TO FACE

Jack Prelutsky

*I met a dragon face to face
the year when I was ten,
I took a trip to outer space,
I braved a pirate's den,
I wrestled with a wicked troll,
and fought a great white shark.
I trailed a rabbit down a hole,
I hunted for a shark.
I stowed aboard a submarine,
I opened magic doors,
I travelled in a time machine,
and searched for dinosaurs,
I climbed atop a giant's head,
I found a pot of gold;
I did all this in books I read
when I was ten years old.*

SHALINEE BHARADWAI

Books & Kids

**The
tale
unfolds**

Who can forget the excitement of reaching the end of a mystery or marvelling at the facts of nature in its multiple forms or crying at the agony of wars or dreaming tranquilly in the freshly breathed poetry? With books we transcend into worlds beyond borders and thoughts beyond translation. This is one treasure we can pass on as legacy to our children.

Reading skills enable readers to turn writing into meaning and achieve the goals of independence, comprehension, and fluency. It involves enabling the reader to figure out new words, predict the next word, phrase or sentence quickly enough to speed recognition, and to see larger segments, phrases and groups of words as whole and identify the relationship of ideas and use these in reading with meaning and fluency. All children learn to read at different pace, however, by the time they reach Grade 3; most of them are capable of reading chapters and long texts independently with fluency and comprehension.

Learning to read is an exciting time for children and their families. While thrilled by their children's emerging literacy and reading skills, many parents are surprised to learn that reading is not automatic and children require support in learning to read and developing strong reading skills. Most adults forget that acquiring reading skills is

not the end of our goal. As learned parents we must focus equally on developing an interest in reading that will help accomplish a sustained reading tradition incorporated into their lifestyle.

Developing a continued interest in reading

Autumn Watts, Writing Centre Coordinator, Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar; herself a versatile writer and a passionate reader says:

"I've always been an avid reader, and I think this interest comes from my parents, who encouraged my reading and who are both passionate readers themselves. My father and I would go to the library and carry home enormous stacks of books, which we'd read alone or together; and my mother let me freely browse her enormous library. Even now, when I return home to visit, a large portion of our time is spent in close but quiet proximity as we read our own books, curled in our favourite chairs. My mother, her friends, and I often swap favourite books and then discuss the characters as if they were people we knew, friends we could gossip about. Reading is not just an occasional activity; it is a central, integral, and beloved part of our lives."

Autumn stresses that to develop a sustained interest in reading, it is important to develop a culture of reading within the family. "It's not enough to read to children occasionally, or to compartmentalise it as a scheduled activity in between video

games and television. This merely sends the message that reading is like going to the gym: necessary and good for you, but limited in scope and perhaps unpleasant. Enthusiasm is contagious, and if parents and teachers are excited about books and reading, then their kids will catch some of that fire. If children see their parents absorbed in books, then they will grow up with positive and naturalized associations about reading."

"Too often, I think, parents or educators try to impose beneficial habits on children without passionately embracing those habits themselves. Reading exercises the imagination in ways that TV and other passive entertainment does not; and it therefore lends itself to partnership with other imaginative and interactive activities, such as writing, painting, play-acting, dressing up, or song writing, to name a few. Reading can be shared and it can be fun!"

She suggests, "Don't just read to children. Talk about the stories and the characters with them."

She has a tonne of ideas to make reading fun and interactive.

- Invite your child to speculate about what might happen next, and to write a sequel or a prequel, or the story retold from another character's perspective.
- Write your own stories, then trade and share. Or write one together and illustrate it.
- Incorporate reading into

other pleasurable activities, such as a day at the park, or by the pool.

- Always tuck a book (or several) into your bag when you leave on a family excursion.
 - Start a reading group with neighbours or classmates: choose a story or book to discuss each month.
 - Write a poem in response to a story, or a story in response to a poem.
 - Organise an 'open mic' where everyone shares a favourite piece.
 - Convert a favourite children's book into a play and perform it with every member of your family or your class.
 - Sponsor a 'Dress As Your Favourite Character' day. Or a Best First Line contest.
 - Write a collaborative story where everyone writes a sentence then passes it along; or contributes a short story to a collection that you 'publish' yourselves.
 - Write a song using lines from a book for lyrics.
- "These are only a few sug-



Autumn Watts supports interactivity with children

Reading Development Checklist:

Birth to 3 years:

- Recognises specific books by cover
- Pretends to read books
- Understands that books are handled in particular ways
- Enters into a book sharing routine with primary care givers
- Vocalisation play in crib gives way to enjoyment of rhyming language
- Labels objects in books
- Comments on characters in books
- Looks at picture in book and realises it is a symbol for a real object
- Listens to stories
- Requests/commands adult to read or write
- Uses increasingly purposive scribbling
- Occasionally seems to distinguish between drawing and writing

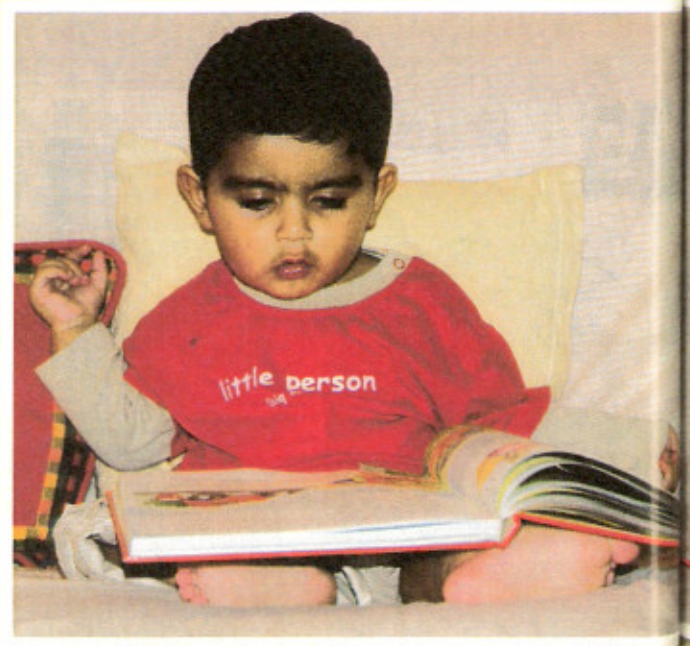
3 to 4 years:

- Knows that alphabet letters are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named
- Knows that it is the print that is read in stories
- Uses new vocabulary and grammatical constructions in own speech
- Understands and follows oral directions
- Is sensitive to some sequences of events in stories
- Shows an interest in books and reading
- When being read a story, connects information and events to life experiences
- Questions and comments demonstrating an understanding of literal meaning of story being told.
- Displays reading and writing attempts, call attention to self: 'Look at my story'
- Can identify 10 alphabet letters, especially those from own name
- 'Writes' (scribbles) message as part of playful activity

Kindergarten:

- Knows the parts of a book and their functions
- Begins to track print when listening to a familiar text being read or when reading own writing
- 'Reads' familiar texts but does not necessarily use the verbatim print

- Recognises and can name all uppercase and lowercase letters
- Understands that the sequence of letters in a written word represents the sequence of sounds in a spoken word (this is called the alphabetic principle)
- Learns many, though not all, one-to-one letter-sound correspondences
- Recognises some words by sight, including a few very common ones [a, the, I, you, is, are].
- Uses new vocabulary and grammatical constructions in own speech
- Notices when simple sentences fail to make sense
- Connects information and events in texts to life and life to text experiences
- Retells, re-enacts or dramatises stories or parts of stories
- Listens attentively to books teacher reads to class
- Can name some book titles and authors
- Can answer questions about stories read aloud
- Makes predications based on illustrations or portions of stories
- Given spoken sets like "dan, dan, den" can identify the first two as sharing a same sound
- Given a spoken set like "dak, pat, zen" can identify



the first two as sharing a same sound

- Given a spoken segment can merge them into a meaningful target word: e.g., "c" "a" "t" can be recognized as "cat"
- Independently writes many uppercase and lowercase letters
- Writes own name (first and last) and the first names of some friends or classmates

First Grade

- Reads aloud with accuracy and comprehension any text that is appropriately designed for the first half of grade 1
- Recognises common irregularly spelled words by sight (have, said, where, two)
- Has a reading vocabulary of 300-500 words, sight words, and easily sounded out words
- Monitors own reading and self-corrects when an incorrectly identified word does not fit with cues provided by the letters in the word or the context surrounding the word
- Creates own written text for others to read
- Notices when difficulties are encountered in understanding text
- Reads and understands simple written directions
- Predicts and justifies what will happen next in stories
- Discusses how, why and what-if questions in sharing non-fiction texts
- Can answer simple written comprehension questions based on material read
- Spells correctly three-and four-letter short vowel words
- Engages in a variety of literacy activities voluntarily (e.g., choosing books and stories to read, writing a note to a friend)

Second Grade

- Reads and comprehends both fiction and non-fiction that is appropriate for grade level
- Reads voluntarily for interest and own purposes
- Re-reads sentence when meaning is not clear
- Interprets information from diagrams, charts, and graphs
- Recalls facts and details of texts
- Takes part in creative responses to texts such as dramatizations, oral presentations, fantasy play, etc
- Discusses similarities in characters and events across stories
- Connects and compares information across non-fiction selections
- Correctly spells previously studied words and spelling patterns in own writing

Third Grade

- Reads aloud with fluency and comprehension any text that is appropriate for grade level
- Reads longer fictional selections and chapter books independently
- Can point to or clearly identify specific words or wording that is causing comprehension difficulties
- In interpreting fiction, discusses underlying theme or message
- Asks how, why, and what-if question in interpreting non-fiction texts
- Independently reviews work for spelling, mechanics and presentation
- Produces a variety of written works in a variety of formats, including multimedia formats

gestions; the possibilities are endless. The most important thing, ultimately, is to discover and cultivate your own joy in reading, and to impart that joy freely and enthusiastically. Don't hoard your joy (like your books) to yourself: share it, swap it around, talk it up, and get excited. And believe me, it will spread," she says.

Choice of reading material and the role of school

Angela Bootland, English Language Coordinator (Primary), Doha College highlighted the kind of reading material that may be presented to the kids for their initial and subsequent readings. A short trip to the primary school exhibited corridors lined with open shelves stuffed with books suitable for quick reading- interesting short stories that are lend to the parents everyday to be read out to their kids. Also whenever they find time, children are free to just pick up a book and give it a reading. Several small cosy 'reading corners' have been specially



Angela Bootland sees the important role of schools

designed for the purpose.

Bootland suggests Phonic books as one of the first reading material that the preschool to three year olds may be exposed to. These include a short, interesting story woven around each alphabet. A- 'Ant' will contain many words starting and ending with the letter A and includes lot of movements, actions, vocalising on the part of the child. This helps maintain an interest in the story. In this way, the child learns to associate the phonic sound with each letter that actually forms the first step in learning to read.

She further suggests some authors and titles that make an interesting reading among children of different age groups and are quite popular- Doctor Seusse, pop-up story books, Nick Sharratt, Enid Blyton, Cookery and Crafts, Horrible History and Horrible Science.

In order to make reading

an integral part of the school curriculum, Bootland says that at least one extra period per week is exclusively dedicated to reading. The school also organises events such as 'Book and Poetry Week' that involves story telling sessions, reading workshops for students as well as teachers, poetry reading etc.

Home library and Reading Clubs

As enthusiastic parents we buy loads of books for our children, hoping to provide them with the maximum learning experience. But, we usually end up closing the books in cupboards neatly piled up. We expect the child to come to us and ask for a book that we eagerly give. Having dealt with pedagogical concerns in education, I believe that the biggest blunder is to unknowingly tuck away the learning material from the reach of a curious, exploring child. Try

putting the books in open shelves, or hang them on a string in your child's room. Voila! You would be amazed to see your little readers (even when they don't know how to read!) deeply engrossed in a book that has caught their interest and imagination! Bright picture books with few sentences and stories related to their immediate environment, interest the young kids. While the older ones look for meaningful stories and characters that they can relate to fiction, science, and mystery. The most popular genre with all groups of children is humour. With post-primary pupils this is followed by horror, adventure and modern, true-life fiction. With primary children other popular genres are adventure, mystery, animal and scary stories.

With primary children, the major influence in helping them to choose a book is that the name of the book sounds interesting. With

post-primary children, the most important factor is the recommendation of a friend. Children get inspired by their peers. If their friends are into reading, chance of their getting interested is very high. Establishing reading clubs in your building or compound, neighbourhood not only provides a reading atmosphere but also helps your child being exposed to a greater number and variety of books than possible at an individual level. From my personal experience, I suggest that the children be encouraged to start a reading club with books that are old and/or not in use, donated by families in your neighbourhood. A nominal membership fee may be specified for using the money to buy new books. The garage or a space in the corridor or a corner of the room of a willing friend may be used as 'the library'. Organise and catalogue all the books, lay the rules and get lending! Meet three evenings a week (or whatever suitable), borrow books, discuss stories and characters and much more!

The only true equalisers in the world are books; the only treasure-house open to all comers is a library; the only wealth which will not decay is knowledge; the only jewel which you can carry beyond the grave is wisdom.

- J. A. Langford

So what are you waiting for? Set sometime aside to shop for good books with your children and, get reading!!

