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THE SCHOOL LIBRARY—THE ALPHA AND OMEGA OF YOUR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READING PROGRAM

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The principal initiates the new program:

Yes, your school library (media center) can be the Alpha and Omega of your reading program and turn failures into successes if you, "Dear Principal," are daring enough to take the first enthusiastic step and let everyone around you know that the library is the place where reading connections are made and reading appetites are nurtured and nourished.

Yes, it is you, "Dear Principal," who makes the Alpha connection by volunteering to fill the reading or storyteller's chair in your library for at least one hour every week. you might call this hour a time of renewal. Renewal in the sense that you divest yourself of your garments of authority and, as if by magic wand, become the Pied Piper who leads children to the realization that reading and listening can be a very titillating experience. In reading to children, you, like the Pied Piper, take it upon yourself to charm children out of the confines of their texts into the wider world of reading found in the thousands of books available to them in their own school libraries.

Your second daring step then is to convince your teaching staff that you consider the library the heart of your reading program. In that sense, the library, like the heart, should pulsate new life into every classroom where reading is taught. For it is the library where gifted as well as reluctant and retarded readers can select from thousands of books and other materials that one specific item that will suit their particular reading needs.

Reading readiness and the School Library:

No child in your school is ever too young to be introduced to the magic place called the library. Kindergartners in particular need to be surrounded with books, books and more books if we expect them to develop voracious appetites for the printed word. All children need to be saturated daily with stories which will stimulate their imagination and keep their curiosities amply nourished. For instance, an appreciation and sense of language and word power can be cultivated very satisfactorily through the use of Mother Goose rhymes. The musical quality of these rhymes has rarely ever failed to tickle children's ears. Before long then, they will be eager participants who find great delight in letting even the more difficult words roll across their tongues easily and expertly.

Alphabet books, counting books, concept books should not be overlooked as valuable tools to help children make that all important transition from thinking and perceiving only on the concrete level, but also on the more advance abstract level.

Kindergarten children should also have the opportunity to take their first giant step of selecting their very own books to take to the classroom and then to their homes. By letting kindergarten children use their own books they can immediately be introduced to the basic prereading skills of caring for books, turning pages, looking from left to right, looking up and down, using picture clues, and even reading a few basic sight words.

For the kindergarten child there is no better place than the school library to make the Alpha connection that will lead to reading success.

The School Library as the catalyst to assure reading success for your primary grades:

Today's school library can also truly be the catalyst to spark the enthusiasm of your first grade readers. Most exciting among the hundreds of books and other materials which are available to first graders is a new series of books generally referred to as "I Can Read Books," or "Read Alone Books." These books have been written especially for beginning readers who have been told so frequently by well meaning parents and grandparents that they would be able to read books once they entered first grade. Children, of course, more often than not, have interpreted this to mean, "I will be able to read a book at the end of my first school day." These easy to read books can nearly make this promise become reality because they were written using vocabulary which first graders either know already or want to learn very quickly. Many of the titles also reflect the interests which first graders have expressed over many years. Even though children live in the age of robots they still continue to ask for books which deal with ferocious dinosaurs, dogs, cats, slow moving turtles, and even minute tadpoles which sooner or later grow into not so minute bullfrogs. The attractive illustrations which cover part of each page, furthermore, enhance the exciting plots and help the beginning readers in realizing their reading goals through the additional help of picture clues. Even the overall format of these books has been planned carefully so as to closely resemble the type of book a more advanced reader might take home. All of these qualities appeal to the beginning readers who have waited so long to be "grownup" when it comes to reading.

In schools where the basal readers may not be taken home by children the easy to read book can truly be the lifeline which will keep the reading program between school and home intact.

Students who were avid library users as first graders usually become even more avid library users as second graders. Children at this age level also have that urgent desire to become more self-sufficient in how and what type of material they want to select. Because they are so full of that unquenchable thirst for knowing more about the world around them, they are even willing to learn how to use the card catalog in order to find the books

and materials which might answer their questions. Although they come to the library to read on their own, they still like to be read to and experience the world of make-believe and high adventure.

Second graders, like any other grade, also have that special need to find corners within the library where they can read and browse either alone or with trusted friends who might share in the fun and laughter which a book might bring. It is the kind of experience which seldom emerges in a structured classroom where only formal reading practices are allowed which are not always conducive to making the beginning reader understand that reading can also be an exhilarating experience.

Many librarians have also introduced puppets in their libraries. These puppets serve as listeners for those students who find reading difficult and need additional practice outside the classroom. A puppet sitting next to these special readers can instill that extra confidence needed by some of these children so that they may better survive in the very competitive classroom environment. "Frieda" as one of these puppets might be called, has unending confidence in the troubled reader, and if you believe in magic, you might be able to overhear Frieda whispering in the children's ears, "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone, just try it again."

Another item in the library that has always attracted the attention of second graders is the "rare" bookshelf. These books might rightfully be called rare because they have been written and illustrated by fourth and fifth graders with that rare charm and humor with which only children are endowed at this stage of their lives.

For second graders the library is like a kaleidoscope which, when turned again and again, will continue to bring new reading adventures.

Ask third graders what they like best about a library and they will probably tell you that it is the place where the *Guinness Book of World Records* is kept. It is the place with the reference shelf where answers can be found to such pressing questions as: "Who ate the most worms at one time?" "Who has the largest ears?" "Who has the smallest feet?" Another very tempting place in the library is the listening station area where they can try out their mechanical skills and wind, roll and thread tapes, films, filmstrips and view and listen to materials which will enrich their textbook lessons and help them prepare for social studies reports.

The library can also be the mentor for teachers who need to encourage the shy child to become a more active participant in creative group activities. Wordless picture books, when looked at and talked about in a magic circle, usually have the power to entice even the quietest child to participate and come forth with welcome responses.

Third graders also consider a poetry learning center set up for them in the library a very special place they like to come to. Poems dealing with such current themes as wheels, monsters, skateboards, and wishes, have a very special drawing power. In fact, before long you will probably find your students not only eagerly reading poetry but actually writing their own Haiku, Diamante and Cinquain poetry. This, of course, means that

another successful reading connection has been made between classroom and library.

Towards reading independence at the intermediate grades through the school library:

For fourth and fifth graders the library functions as a place of self-discovery. For them the library becomes the Alpha connection between the reading requirements of the classroom and how these requirements may be applied in the world to which they return after school.

In their basal readers, for example, they might be introduced to a unit on newspaper writing and publishing. Follow-up and extension activities in most basal readers usually suggest that students read certain articles in a daily newspaper and then attempt to follow this up with writing their own headlines and/or write an article which might be published in a classroom or school paper. The prime purpose of the assignment, of course, is to promote the habit of daily newspaper reading for both information and pleasure. While the classroom teacher might motivate children by having additional newspapers available in the classroom, it is in the library where students can pursue the topic in greater depth through the use of an interest center set up for them. Such special items as galley proof, type, and make-up page, can usually be obtained from a local newspaper. A "real life" reporter might even be present at the center for a few hours to add that extra touch of reality to the project.

Other reading connections to the outside world can be made by asking community volunteers to come to the library so that they might share with students how reading and their particular professions are very much interrelated. For instance, volunteers with such diverse backgrounds as bicycle repairing, weather-forecasting, farming and truck driving might be a very challenging and worthwhile beginning.

Reading and civic responsibilities can be presented through the cooperation of the local League of Women Voters who might be invited to come to the library when local or national elections are imminent. The presentation of campaign issues in all likelihood will arouse not only fervent debates but also bring about more critical reading habits if the students are asked to carefully examine the campaign issues through the various media made available to them in the library.

For the intermediate grades the library can, without doubt, be the most important Alpha and Omega link towards the development of lifetime independent reading habits.

In schools where the library has been allowed to be an integral component of the reading program, reading suddenly stops being fundamental for teachers and students only, but rather becomes fundamental for everyone within the school and outside the school. The term fundamental in itself takes on new meaning and becomes "FUN" damental. It is a special reading aura which permeates the entire school and can easily be detected by the positive attitudes that teachers and students exhibit both in their work and in the environment in which they work. "Quiet" signs have been

banished from the library. Bookshelves no longer look like soldiers parading for review, but rather like soldiers on active duty to the reader. There are no empty walls or drag spaces in these schools. Every corner has been utilized to display completed work or work still in progress. Every corner has been used to help all children make the all important Alpha and Omega connection to a successful lifetime reading program.