

Some things we love!

Why I Read to my Children

by Christopher de Vinck



Most nights I read aloud to my children before they sleep: Mr. Popper's Penguins, My Father's Dragon, Treasure Island and James and the Giant Peach have been some of their favorites over the years. I have been doing this since my eldest son was small, and my reasons are many.

Oh, I believe the psychologist Jean Piaget when he speaks about assimilation, children picking up information that fits in with what they already know. My children have heard thousands of different sentence patterns over and over again as they sat beside me during those many nights.

To be sure, my children have picked up new words along the way. When my oldest son, David, was four years old, he walked around the house stating he felt soporific after he heard about the soporific effects lettuce had on Beatrix Potter's slothful rabbits. Karen learned what a bungalow was as she listened to how Uncle Wiggily crawled out from his home at the beginning of each new adventure.

Of course, it is true that a rich reading background adds to a child's intellectual baggage. I have been an English teacher for the past 16 years and I have had, for the most part, two types of students: those who have a rich personal background and those who have this personal experience and a wide reading experience.

All children come to schools with a wide diversity of personal experiences. I would say only 10% also come with a wide reading background. The child with the widest personal and reading background seems to carry the most intellectual baggage into my classroom year after year. This is the child who, eventually, scores the highest on the verbal section of the SATs, who is able to make sudden and clear connections between books and life, who has the strongest sense of what it means to live a life of reflection, who is the strongest writer. The SAT is a very biased test. It is biased against those who do not read.

Thinking is looking at experiences and making conclusions. Writing is the physical evidence of our thinking. The more we experience, the more information we have inside our minds and our hearts. The more information we have, the better conclusions we can make about our own lives.

But I read aloud to my children each night for reasons that go beyond Piaget, vocabulary, writing and information retrieval.

I want eight-year-old Michael to taste the chocolate as Willie Wonka guides the children on a grand tour of his factory. I want Karen to smell the flowers Francie Nolan's father bought for her in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. I want my children to feel the hunger Richard Wright endured in *Black Boy*. I want my son David to smack his hand, someday, against Boo Radley's house in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I want my daughter to feel the moonlight against her bare breasts as did Annie in Jamaica Kinkaid's glorious little book *Annie John*.

I read aloud to my children because I want them to feel the hand of Ivan Illyic against their cheek just before he dies. I want my children to receive the blessing of Father Zosima in *Brothers Karamazov*. I want my children to believe that it can, indeed, rain flowers as it did in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. I want my children to watch Sydney Carlton walk up the steps to the guillotine. I want them to carry Addie's coffin along with Faulkner in *As I Lay Dying*. I want my children to listen to Reb Saunders in *The Chosen*. I want the water from the pump in *The Miracle Worker* to run against the small hands of David, Karen and Michael.

Mrs. Keller! Annie Sullivan screams out with joy to Helen's mother. Mrs. Keller! Mrs. Keller! She knows!

Helen Keller finally learned that these funny little symbols - "A," "B," "C," "D" - mean words, sentences, language, life, freedom. "She knows!"

Reading makes possible the connection between our minds and the near magical notions drawn up from our impossible hearts. I also read to my children because I like the feel of their warmth against my arms and the sound of their quiet breaths as they listen to my voice circling around them night after night.

Reading aloud to my children every day gives them the widest entry to that place we call freedom.

Reading aloud to children begins the slow process of education that ends in parents and teachers celebrating: "They know! They know! Their hearts and minds have made the connections. Our children are free. They know!"

About Mathew Price

[Books](#)

[For Parents](#)

[For Teachers](#)

[Order](#)

[News](#)

[Join our mailing list](#)

[Contact](#)

Copyright © 2013 Mathew Price Ltd. All rights reserved. [Privacy Policy](#) [Credits](#)