

# READ ALOUD

WEST VIRGINIA

NEWSLETTER: WINTER 2019-20

## Are you raising a reader? Pediatrician can tell by looking at a child's brain

By Dawn Miller

**T**he more time we spend reading to the babies and children in our lives, the better their young brains organize themselves, forming networks essential to learning to read around age 6.

Dr. John Hutton can see it in their brain scans.

The more we pacify babies and children with screens, even supposedly educational apps, the more screen time short circuits essential connections that the brain is primed to develop in the first years of life.

He can see that, too.

A pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's Hospital and "spokes doctor" for the national campaign, Read Aloud 15 Minutes, Hutton presented some of his findings to doctors and educators at Marshall University in October at an event sponsored by Marshall's June Harless Center for Rural Educational Research and Development.

"Why does this matter to pediatricians?" he asked. "Reading we know is a major public health concern. It is considered a social determinant of health."

### First, some background

Human brains are born ready to do certain things, such as see and speak.

"But out of the box, there's not an actual network in the brain that automatically knows how to read. We have to make it," Hutton said.

London Law, then in kindergarten, models her new fleece blanket and book that she chose at a Snuggle & Read event at George C. Weimer Elementary School in Kanawha County last winter.

What to do:  
A doctor's advice  
Page 3

Human beings do this by using brain networks that evolved for other things. So, as parents talk and sing with babies, their language networks are stimulated.

"This tends to happen in a predictable sequence," Hutton said. As parents show picture books to babies and toddlers, other brain networks are engaged – vision, attention and executive function, for example.

"All these areas need to be stimulated during early childhood. The more you

stimulate them, the more they form networks to work together. The more you stimulate them, the stronger they get.

"If all that goes well, that's how this emerging literacy process is fueled," he said.

### Long before the ABCs

Emerging literacy is a collection of skills – how to read, background knowledge, and attitude, Hutton said.

The how-to includes how a book works. Turning pages. We read from left to right. Children learn these details years before it is time to learn ABCs or to sound out words.

As children listen to books, look at pictures and converse with others, they build up a store of words and ideas. Later, when it is time to "learn to read," children draw on those words, matching them to words they are learning to decode in school.

Children who hear and learn fewer words during their first four years do not read as easily as children with more words.

And then there is attitude.

"This is the underrated part," Hutton said. "Do I like to read? Did I grow up in a home that valued reading? Is reading fun? Or is reading more of a chore?"

"That's one of the challenges we have, to really reinforce the idea that reading is something that should be seen as a fun and nurturing and positive thing, not just something that is all about how you are going to do on the test later."

### The brain, on books

Earlier surveys counting books and reading time, for example, showed that children who spent more

(HUTTON continues on page 3)



# Hold on to that sense of urgency

I am extremely proud of our newsletter. It is the vehicle for connecting our network of donors, volunteers and educators. This issue is especially “meaty.”

On Page 4 you will find the disappointing but not unexpected decline in our NAEP reading scores. Though it is a single test and should not be the only data considered in evaluating student reading outcomes, it is a valuable benchmark comparing the reading skills of WV students over the years and to those of other states. It was expected because educators and speech therapists have been sharing alarming stories of children from all income levels entering school with lower language skills than students even five years ago. Their consensus has been that parents are not talking, much less reading, to their children as often as they did in previous years. The work of Dr. John S. Hutton provides clear evidence of the critical role human interaction in the form of talking and reading to a child plays in the development of an infant’s and toddler’s brain. (Page 1) Failure to read and talk with babies and toddlers puts children in a deficit position on Day 1 of their formal education. Once in school, we may further exacerbate the problem with an over reliance on technology (Page 3) and a reduction in access to books and opportunities to build skills by reading for pleasure.

Dr. Hutton’s research offers hope. Growing interest of the business community

offers additional hope. I recently heard BB&T Chairman Kelly King state that the biggest threat facing our democracy is growing income inequality driven by poor reading. His point is one Read Aloud has been making on these pages. Future jobs require higher levels of literacy. If we want to re-tool our economy, it is imperative that we raise our education levels. The foundation for doing that is improving the literacy skills of tomorrow’s workers. Doing so will also help us meet other significant challenges. Students who read on grade level by third grade are more likely to graduate from high school and less likely to be vulnerable to substance abuse or to be incarcerated in their lifetimes.

As we have often stated, growing student reading skills requires a solid three-legged stool. The “legs” are family, educators and the community. Read Aloud has an important role in solidifying that third leg, as do the medical and business communities. We face challenges, but cannot lose our sense of urgency to use the tools at our disposal to meet them.

Having stated that, I need to tell you my own role in Read Aloud will have changed by the time you read this. Dawn Miller will assume the Executive Director position on December 5. She has been on staff for over a year in our plan to make this transition as seamless as possible, and she brings valuable skills to the task.

Read Aloud has been a labor of love for me, and I am deeply indebted to all the individuals who have donated time and money to build our organization and its impact. The list of people (friends, family, volunteers, donors) I would like to thank publicly is far too long to include, but I hope you will indulge me and allow me this opportunity to thank my children and especially my husband, Pat. Jokingly dubbed “Saint Pat” by Read Aloud Handbook author Jim Trelease during the year Read Aloud was founded, he has been a stalwart supporter from the beginning. He has been a steady calm voice of practical advice and encouragement, read in classrooms, raised funds, carted books and even subsidized some of the early years of our program. In short, I know that his work behind the scenes has enabled me to pursue this labor of love, and I wanted this chance to thank him publicly.

There is much work to do, but I am optimistic about our ability to meet the challenge. Read Aloud has a tremendously talented staff, board and network of volunteers and donors to see us into the new year. I see great things ahead for Read Aloud and send my deep thanks to all of you for helping us build the organization we have today.

**Mary Kay Bond, one of Read Aloud West Virginia’s founders, recently retired as executive director.**

## 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten

Families challenged to read to children from birth

Parents who want to raise good readers may find a helpful nudge in the national program 1000 Books Before Kindergarten.

Find directions, reading logs and local contacts at [1000booksbeforekindergarten.org](http://1000booksbeforekindergarten.org).

Sound like a lot? One book a night will add up to more than 1,000 books by the time a child is 3. Repeats count.

A list of West Virginia libraries participating is available on the website.

**[1000booksbeforekindergarten.org/  
find-a-program/west-virginia/](http://1000booksbeforekindergarten.org/find-a-program/west-virginia/)**

## Calif. colleges teach reading to freshmen

At the University of California at Santa Cruz, faculty have redesigned freshman writing courses to also teach reading, the Chronicle of Higher Education reports in one of its newsletters.

Specifically, freshmen are taught about different genres, strategies, and purposes for reading as part of a new three-course sequence created by the provosts of 10 residential colleges.

“Our students were lacking some fundamental skills in reading comprehension, reading analysis, and even in something as simple as having a conversation with someone else about a text,” Jody Greene, Santa Cruz’s associate vice provost for teaching and learning, told

the Chronicle.

The course, called College 1, teaches “critical reading, analysis, and self-efficacy skills required for college-level work.”

Elizabeth S. Abrams, provost of one of the colleges, told the Chronicle that assignments in the course help students learn not to jump to conclusions but to “appreciate the process of thinking, and where deep reading can take you.”

After the course, some freshmen reported feeling greater “self-efficacy and belonging,” which is correlated with staying in school.

**[www.chronicle.com/article/  
Why-One-University-Went-All/246399](http://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-One-University-Went-All/246399)**

## Doctor's advice

Parents want to do what's best for their children, but there is confusion about what is best.



### Dr. John S. Hutton recommends:

- Read picture books for at least 15 minutes a day with your child. Longer is fine.
- Start shortly after birth. With infants, reading is not about learning the ABCs or even understanding the story. It is about establishing the routine and starting a dialogue.
- Keep children away from phones, tablets and other screens, including TV, before age 2. The one exception is video chatting with loved ones who are far away, but not until 18 months.
- Phone and tablet apps are easy to carry and to use, and marketers promise learning benefits. But those apps have not been studied and shown to work.  
"Reading, by contrast, has been well studied," Hutton said. "We know it works, but it is just kind of old-fashioned."
- For toddlers, limit screen time to an hour a day.
- Keep reading with children even after they start school and after they can read themselves.
- Don't use screens to pacify children. Children are learning to handle their emotions and control their reactions. "They need practice, and if they're constantly soothed with devices, they are short-circuiting this process and their ability to handle their own stuff. They don't learn to regulate their behavior," Hutton said.
- Keep screens out of the bedroom, where they tend to lead to later bedtimes and disrupt sleep, homework and reading. "That's one of worst places for screens to be. Anything that disrupts sleep causes all kinds of trouble."

(HUTTON continued from page 1)

time with books from an early age had better readings skills and scores. But could you observe a physiological difference?

Hutton and colleagues did MRI scans on healthy preschoolers. They scanned brains while children listened to stories, and again when they heard random noises.

"What we found was there was a difference," he said. In children who had been read to more, there was more activity, including in the part of the brain associated with vision. Doctors think that is the child's imagination.

"It's pretty amazing," he said. "Kids who have more practice, more experience with books and reading, have more ability to activate the part of the brain that's involved in imagining what's going on in the story and then understanding what it means."

"This is pretty exciting. It's really the first study to show reading early on makes a difference in how their brains function," he said.

## Quality counts

So, the number and frequency of books is important. What about quality of the experience?

Hutton's team watched parents read to children and scored the range of their behaviors. Some read in a monotone. Some made sound effects and involved children. One even looked at a phone while reading.

They scanned children's brains and found that children of parents who read more interactively, where children had turns at talking about the story, had more activity in both the back and front of the brain. These areas are associated with imagination, chronology, expressive language, and understanding emotions.

Parents, teachers and doctors have long observed that kids who interact more with stories have stronger language skills. Hutton's research corroborates that observation.

"More interactive reading experience leads to stronger activation in the part of the brain that's involved in knowing how to talk," he said. "And also integrating what they hear in the story with how they feel about it."

"It really is a pretty powerful parallel with what behavioral research has shown in terms of the benefits of interactive reading."

## Lost in a good book

Was there a difference in the brains of children who were visibly engrossed in a book compared to those who weren't?

Yes.



Jason Beeler with his son Jonah, then 8, snuggle and read a Lego novel last winter at Weimer. Families enjoyed hot chocolate and breakfast and chose a blanket and book, then read together for a few minutes before both headed off to school and work. "We just like to be involved in our kids' lives," Mr. Beeler said. "We try to make everything we can."

Kids who showed greater interest in the story had more activation in the cerebellum, a rear section associated with helping the whole brain learn new things.

"We call it a storytime turbocharger for learning," Hutton said.

Children who were most interested were probably more likely to be learning something. He could see their brains doing it.

"We should be coaching families to get kids involved in the story, sharing the process, to talk about it, to ask questions," he said.

## Goldilocks effect

Then they looked at brains receiving stories in different formats – audio only, an animated story app, and a traditional picture book. They evaluated how much the different parts of the brain were working together.

Small children who listened to audio only without pictures had much less network activity. There were no pictures to help with unfamiliar words.

"Too cold," Hutton said.

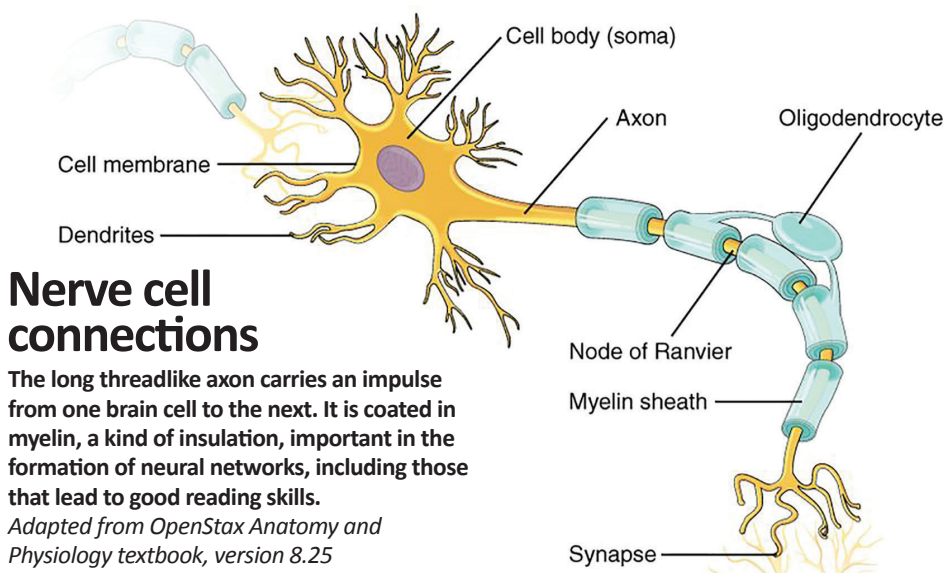
When children looked at the same story animated, there was a lot of activity associated with visual processing, but little else.

"All the sudden the networks stopped talking to each other."

"When animation happens, there is a

(HUTTON continues on page 4)





## Nerve cell connections

The long threadlike axon carries an impulse from one brain cell to the next. It is coated in myelin, a kind of insulation, important in the formation of neural networks, including those that lead to good reading skills.

*Adapted from OpenStax Anatomy and Physiology textbook, version 8.25*

(HUTTON continued from page 3)

37 percent drop-off in cooperation between these networks. The imagination part is less needed, so there is more focus on the visual processing part.

"When you animate a story, it short circuits the child's imagination.

"Too hot," Hutton said.

The old-fashioned picture book?

"When you put pictures with the audio, there is greater cooperation among parts of brain," he said.

"It was just right."

## But wait, there's more

"Books are also a way to learn about feelings," Hutton said.

"It's a way to really exchange emotions with a child, from promoting early experiences of nurturing and feeling cared for to relating to what characters in books are feeling.

"This is how kids learn a lot of these feelings. They are able to put themselves into the minds of other characters."

Social and emotional maturity is also a predictor of school success. Learning to think about the world from another's point of view helps.

"All those things involve practice, and they start early," Hutton said.

"That's another real benefit of reading with a child. You're not only building their vocabulary but also their ability to process their feelings and to put themselves in other people's shoes. I think that's another benefit that may be underrecognized."

## NAEP scores

Shortly after Hutton's visit, the National Assessment of Educational Progress released

its 2019 scores. West Virginia fourth graders dropped four points in reading to 213 on the 500-point scale. The national average is 240. No one was surprised.

Read Aloud West Virginia sees three main reasons. Poverty interferes with children's learning and exacerbates other problems, and West Virginia children are disproportionately poor. Opioid addiction has killed parents and destroyed families, further harming children and their ability to learn. And then there is screen time.

In another study, Hutton said, most parents were reading to their infants frequently, and 34 percent read once or twice a week.

But at two months, 68 percent of babies were watching TV regularly, and TV time turned into hours, not minutes.

Read Aloud 15 Minutes surveyed parents and found that reading to children every day dropped between 2018 and 2016, with the biggest drops among kids ages 6 to 8.

"I would argue that kids at this age still need to be read to," Hutton said. "Even if they can read, the content of the book leads to lots of questions, lots of things the parent can really talk to them about."

West Virginia teachers have been telling Read Aloud that they are seeing more language delays among children entering school in recent years.

The state Department of Education reports 2,122 children had an identified developmental delay in 2018, up 9 percent from 1,946 children in 2013.

## 'Neurons that fire together wire together.'

Then in November, Dr. Hutton's latest research appeared in the journal JAMA-Pediatrics.

He studied preschoolers who were exposed to more digital media than the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends. Those guidelines include no digital media before age 2 except for video chatting and no more than an hour of high-quality children's programming a day for ages 2 to 5.

This time, scans showed brains exposed to more screen time were associated with less of the desirable fat coating of nerve cell connectors – a process called myelination. Myelin is what makes the brain's white matter white. It insulates nerve cells and makes them more efficient at signalling each other, like the insulation on electrical wires.

There is an old adage in neuroscience, Dr. Hutton said: "Neurons that fire together wire together."

"The more these areas are encouraged to talk to one another, whether language areas or executive function, the more that coating of the wires is stimulated," Dr. Hutton told the New York Times. "The amount of myelin around a nerve fiber is directly related to how often it's stimulated, how often it's used."

Possibly, he said, kids with more screen time have less myelination of networks important for language and literacy because the screens crowd out other things that are shown to stimulate healthy brain development.

Back in Huntington, Hutton told doctors and educators that the number of books, the frequency, the quality of reading and the format are all important to children's brain development.

"I would interpret this as saying you need books, you need to read them pretty often, read them interactively, and as boring as possible in terms of the format. Boring being straight up picture books.

"I really would argue there's not a better invention. We haven't invented a better mousetrap at that age if we want to stimulate brain networks to develop in the most strong and functional way."

## Resources

[jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2754101](https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/article-abstract/2754101)

[readaloudwv.org/alarming-wv-naep-scores-are-no-surprise/](https://readaloudwv.org/alarming-wv-naep-scores-are-no-surprise/)

[nytimes.com/2019/11/04/well/family/screen-use-tied-to-childrens-brain-development.html](https://nytimes.com/2019/11/04/well/family/screen-use-tied-to-childrens-brain-development.html)

# How Accelerated Reader turned my daughter off books

By Lynn Kessler

I've been reading to my daughter, who is now 12, since she was born. She always loved it. At 6 months old, she would sit for long stretches on my lap while we read Go, Dog. Go! and Bear Snores On. Her first full sentence, at 18 months, was "Read Dog Go." I knew then she was destined to be a great reader.

Through preschool and kindergarten, her reading skills and scores were always above expectations for her age. We snuggled up and read together every night before bed.

When she started first grade and began using the Accelerated Reader (AR) program, she did well on the tests, scored a lot of points, and looked forward to taking tests and receiving rewards and recognition for her achievements.

I recall a conversation around this time

with a friend in education who was not a fan of AR. The program, she said, was detrimental to the intrinsic motivation that is critical to develop lifelong, avid readers.

"I don't know," I responded. "She seems very motivated."

Cut to the beginning of summer vacation. My 7-year-old is bored.

"Why don't you read a book?" I suggest.

Then, the reply I never expected: "No way! School is out. I don't have to read!"

After I collected my jaw and my heart from the floor, I called my AR-averse friend to say, "You were right."

Accelerated Reader, commonly known as AR, is a computer-based program that seeks to encourage kids to read more independently, improve student comprehension and reading skills, and provide a tool for teachers to evaluate student progress and adjust instruction and

interventions accordingly.

Renaissance, the for-profit company that owns and sells AR to schools, says on its website:

"Every student can become their most amazing self and discover a lifelong love of reading with the guidance of an expert teacher. Designed based on years of careful research to help teachers introduce students to the magic of books and reading, Accelerated Reader products are the most widely used K-12 reading practice programs."

I was not able to find pricing information on the Renaissance website, but my general research found that it can cost anywhere from \$2,000 to \$10,000 a year to implement and maintain the AR program, depending on the size of the school and the package selected.

Renaissance offers plenty of research to (ACCELERATED READER continued on page 6)

## How to help raise WV readers

■ **Give to our Annual Fund.** Read Aloud supporters make everything else possible – winning grants and awards for books, leveraging gifts into higher-impact projects, and collaborating with schools and other groups.

■ **Direct a Required Minimum Distribution from a tax-deferred account.** Have your financial institution send a disbursement directly to Read Aloud, and the IRS doesn't count it as taxable income.

■ **Get NIP tax credits.** Donate \$500 or more (including from a retirement account) and receive WV Neighborhood Investment Program tax credits to lower state personal income tax or corporate net income tax bills.

■ **Set a Kroger Plus card to benefit Read Aloud.** Recruit a friend.

■ **Go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)**, designate Read Aloud West Virginia as your choice and shop as usual.

## Roofing company expands Summer Book Binge to Wood

Wood County's Jefferson Elementary School is getting its own Summer Book Binge and a Snuggle & Read event, thanks to a \$20,600 grant from Tri-State Roofing & Sheet Metal Company.

Read Aloud's Summer Book Binge is based on research at Vanderbilt University that found about half a dozen freely chosen books given to students at the end of the school year was more effective at preventing summer learning loss than \$3,000 worth of summer school.

Each of Jefferson's 400 students

will browse and "order" six books this spring, which will then be personalized, packed and delivered in a book bag at a festive event at the end of the school year.

Read Aloud's Summer Book Binge was started at Crichton Elementary School in Greenbrier County, where reading scores jumped from the bottom in the county to the top in four years.

Children who have high-interest books and adults to make a big deal of reading for fun, will read for pleasure and maintain or even gain skills over the summer.

A gift for

**READALOUD**  
WEST VIRGINIA

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed please find my gift of \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 \_\_\_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_\_\_ \$1,000 \_\_\_\_\_ Other

☐ **NIP CREDITS** (as available)  
For donations of \$500 or more

Please make check payable to  
Read Aloud West Virginia, P.O. Box 1784, Charleston, WV 25326-1784  
or visit us at [readaloudwv.org](https://readaloudwv.org) to make a secure payment. Thank you.

## CHAPTER NOTES FROM READ ALOUD COUNTIES

### Harrison

Read Aloud West Virginia has been granted funds from Dominion Energy Foundation to cultivate a new Read Aloud chapter in Harrison County. During our Books-A-Million fundraiser a few months ago, Marion County volunteers who crossed county borders to help out received frequent questions about the fledgling chapter. To get involved, email [stateoffice@readaloudwv.org](mailto:stateoffice@readaloudwv.org).

### Preston



Preston County chapter members gave out children's magazines and encouraged parents to read with children at a Lights On! event in Kingwood.

### Logan

Communications & Development Director Amanda Schwartz attended a Logan County Community Baby Shower hosted by Mountain State Healthy Families. This event not only allowed us to reach new and expecting parents in Logan County

about reading together from birth, but also connected us with new potential partners in Logan County, like their local Headstart and WIC offices.

### Greenbrier

Read Aloud of Greenbrier County is getting ready to put on several Snuggle & Read events with local PreK students.

### Marion

Marion County chapter board member Nicole Walls attended a Marion County Family Resource Meeting and met Pam Nolan of Marion County Headstart. This led to interest from the North Central West Virginia Headstart centers in enrolling with Read Aloud's programs. Rivesville and West Fairmont Headstart centers have already enrolled.

### Berkeley



**Jennifer Foster prepares blankets for the Berkeley County Chapter.**

The Berkeley County chapter is gearing up for their series of Snuggle & Read events funded by Procter & Gamble. They recently had a blanket making party to prep the two-sided fleece tie blankets for the parents and children to complete at the events. Special thanks to participating

volunteers, the local MOMS Club, and Jessica Ramey for helping make this possible.

### Raleigh



Raleigh County just had their first Reader Appreciation event of the year, and it looks like it was a success! We're happy for any opportunity to say thank you to our wonderful readers who change the lives of kids across the state.

### Kanawha

Preschoolers at Bream Preschool in Charleston show off their bookmarks and magazines with volunteer reader and Kanawha chapter board member Raney Exline, an education major (rear).



(ACCELERATED READER continued from page 5) support their product, and it seems that the company has attempted to improve upon areas that have received critical feedback. However, there are many literacy experts who feel the program undermines intrinsic motivation and the development of a genuine love of reading.

A report from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) found only two studies that met the agency's research design standards and evaluated those results. The Institute concluded: "Accelerated Reader was found to have mixed effects on comprehension and no discernible effects on reading fluency for beginning readers."

The research above focused on measurable academic outcomes -- changes for which students can be tested. But what about motivation?

Studies examining intrinsic and extrinsic

motivation have shown that rewarding children for a certain behavior can produce immediate results, but then backfire. After an initial period of improvement, students begin to perceive the activity they are completing for a reward as a chore. It is something to be done so they can move on to something they enjoy.

That research is parallel with my personal experience with Accelerated Reader. I believe that this program -- now a part of students' grade calculations in our elementary and middle school -- inflicted significant damage upon the years of success I had in encouraging a love of reading in my daughter.

That does not mean, of course, that this will be the case for every child. My younger daughter, a voracious reader, excelled in the AR program until third grade when she struggled to get enough points. That challenge has continued in fourth grade. It concerns me that the goals set for students

by the program, and the requirements for grading, become more difficult just as children reach the critical age in third to fourth grade that is widely acknowledged in education as a make-or-break point for reading skills.

I was a Read Aloud volunteer in my 9-year-old daughter's class. We finished reading **The One and Only Ivan** by Katherine Applegate. The kids thoroughly enjoyed it. They were engaged in the story and always excited to recap each week, discuss the book, and read more. They were gratified by the ending. After considerable sorrow and hard times for Ivan and his friends, the kids were delighted that the characters found peace and happiness.

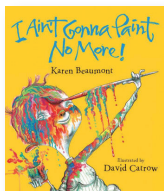
Then they reached for their tablets and asked if they could take the AR test.

**Lynn Kessler, former Read Aloud staffer, is a reader, writer, mother of two and a Read Aloud volunteer in Kanawha County.**



# Ten to try: Readers recommend

Each year, we ask our volunteer readers for books that worked well in their classrooms. Here are some of their favorite titles:



You know you have found a good book when you finish it, and they yell, "Again!" That is what they always do with **I Ain't Gonna Paint No More** by Karen Beaumont. PreK-K.

— Jackie Thompson, Kanawha County

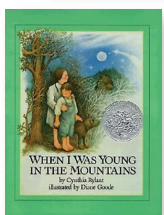


**There's a Mouse about the House** by Richard Fowler

I found that asking each child on the first day of Read Aloud what their favorite stories are about helps tremendously with my book selections for the year (as well as their attention span).

PreK-K.

— Margaret Tennant, Marion County



**When I was Young in the Mountains** by West Virginia's own Cynthia Rylant

Each week I asked who had read or who had been read to outside of school. It seemed the show of hands and enthusiasm continued to improve during the school term.

Grades PreK-2.

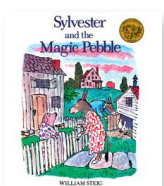
— Jane Cooper, Fayette County



**The Day the Crayons Quit** by Olivia Jeffers

Another colorful choice. This time, each crayon in the box writes a letter to Duncan letting him know what is going on. Grades 1-3

— Catherine Slonaker, Berkeley County



**Sylvester and the Magic Pebble** by William Steig is about a rock gathering donkey. Our wonderful teacher tells me what they are studying, and I bring in books and things on the topic.

Grades K-1.

— Lee File, Raleigh County

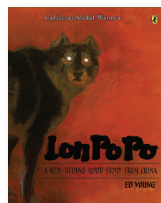


**There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly** by Lucille Colandro

Holds listeners with folksy illustrations, rhyming and repetition.

Grades K-1.

— Bob Sylvester, Kanawha County



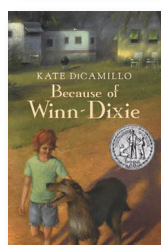
**Lon Po Po**

by Ed Young

A Chinese version of Little Red Riding Hood.

Grades 3-5.

— Sandra Summers, Jackson County



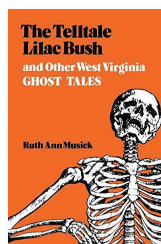
**Because of Winn-Dixie**

by Kate DiCamillo

This book follows Opal at a particularly difficult time in her life as she finds a dog that she needs as much as the dog needs her.

Grades 3-5.

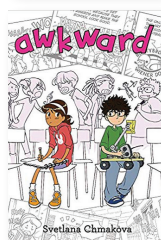
—Synthia Kolsun, Tucker County



**The Telltale Lilac Bush and Other West Virginia Ghost Tales** by Ruth Ann Musick is all in the title. A spooky, local classic.

Grades 6-9.

— Linda D. Mitchem, Raleigh County



**Awkward**

by Svetlana Chmakova

It was my first experience with reading a graphic novel with the use of the overhead camera and "smart board." It went well enough that I would do it again with the right book, but it takes some getting used to.

Grades 6 to adult.

— Gary Grosso, Preston County

— Compiled by Raney Exline

## CONTACT US

Executive Director Dawn Miller  
dmiller@readaloudwv.org

Send any inquiry to  
stateoffice@readaloudwv.org

Letters and newsletter submissions:  
newsletter@readaloudwv.org

P.O. Box 1784, Charleston, WV  
25326  
304-345-5212

readaloudwv.org

Follow us on social media!



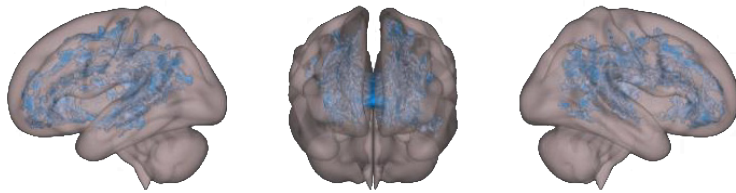
This newsletter is made possible by  
the generous, ongoing support of:



**WINTER  
2019-20  
IN THIS  
ISSUE**

**Pediatrician can tell which  
kids are read to, by looking  
at their brain scans.**

**Page 1**



**My daughter liked  
to read, before  
Accelerated Reader**

**Page 5**

**Read Aloud  
chapter notes from  
around the state**

**Page 6**



**Our  
volunteers  
recommend**

**Page 7**



NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
PERMIT NO. 2879  
CHAS., WV 25301

## James Patterson: 'It's not the school's job to get our kids reading'

To prepare for James Patterson's appearance at the West Virginia Book Festival in October, Kanawha Circuit Judge Carrie Webster printed a letter the bestselling author had written to his son Jack back in 2007. It was a loving letter at Christmas, urging his son to read for the joy of it, not just to get into Harvard. Patterson promised to give his son at least one book every Christmas and several for the summer.

Webster served as host and moderator of the author Q&A, and confided to him that she wished her own daughter read more.

"It's your moms' job," he said to the judge's daughter and to the crowd. "She says you are smart, but you could read more.

"It really is," he said. "It's not the school's job to get our kids reading. It's our job. It's on the parents, the grandparents, aunts and uncles, all that stuff."

Patterson didn't read much as a kid. He thinks it is because his parents and the nuns at his school did not put enticing books in his hands. He discovered reading as a young adult working night shifts at a mental hospital.

Then years later his own son was uninspired by books.

"I said, 'Jack, you have to read over the summer.'"

He said, 'Do I have to?'



**James Patterson, right, and his son Jack Patterson.**

I said, 'Yeah, unless you want to live in the garage.'"

But the key thing is, he said, kids must have books they really enjoy.

"We went to the local library and got about a dozen books, and by the end of the summer he had read 12 books. It's going to vary with your kids. He went from being not very interested to going to the library in his school."

A reader told Patterson that her 7-year-old came running in after a visit to his school library saying: "Nana! Nana! Look what I found. It's James Patterson!"

"He didn't know you were a children's book author," she said.

Many people don't know it, he said. One reason he writes for kids: to give them the

kind of page-turners that keep them coming back.

"As I say, I think the important thing is if you are a mom or dad or whatever, it really is your job. We're the ones who are responsible. It's great to teach your kid how to ride a bike and how to throw a ball, but if they're not at least competent readers, we're putting them behind the eight-ball.

Patterson's son Jack, now 21, is a reader and has since collaborated with his dad on a picture book, **Penguins of America**.

"Look. We have rules in the house. You can't come in and track mud on the rug. You've got to show up to meals. It just needs to be a rule," Patterson said.

Afterward, Webster thought back. "I loved reading as a child — Nancy Drew and Trixie Belden," she said. As an adult, she enjoyed Patterson's Alex Cross series, though thanks to her phone, she doesn't read like she used to.

Her daughter loved reading in the early grades (and was a big Accelerated Reader fan). "Now she reads only when she has to," Webster said.

Around the time of Patterson's appearance, her daughter asked if they could read together like they used to.

"We need to do that," Webster said. "I'm going to take her to the bookstore."