5 Simple Steps to Support Independent Reading

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[You can read the complete article online with links at http://bit.ly/14j8eqq or visit Dr. Kimberly’s Literacy Blog.]

It’s the beginning of a new school year. Teachers are talking up reading (and they should), assigning a specific number of minutes each evening (maybe they shouldn’t), and asking parents to sign off on said # of minutes of reading per day (a generally bad idea).

Reading is important. No doubt. In this article, I’ll lay out a few simple steps to get students to read more. (A lot more.)

**Step 1. Build a Diverse Classroom Library**

To begin, **if you want your students to read more, they need access to books.** You see, a literacy-rich environment that includes well-stocked classroom libraries supports balanced literacy instruction and contributes to students reading more. *Lots more.* Why? Because "access" is the key to reading more!

While a resource-rich school library provides resources for students *and* teachers, a classroom library serves one (captive) audience — your students. In fact, students with diverse classroom libraries exhibit growth in three areas. Put simply, they (1) read more widely for a variety of purposes, (2) exhibit more positive attitudes toward reading, and (3) demonstrate higher levels of reading achievement (NAEP, 2002).

More books = increased reading = more capable readers.

**Step 2. Read Aloud**

Among the primary findings of the *Becoming a Nation of Readers* report (1985) is that “the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.” Not only did the experts suggest reading aloud in the home, but they also suggested reading aloud in schools. **Read alouds not only allow us to model that reading is a great way to spend time, but also expose students to more complex vocabulary than they typically hear or read.**

And, that doesn’t exclude reading to older students, too. While students need to build their independent fluency and reading stamina, teachers often provide the best model of fluency. Occasionally reading more difficult text aloud provides opportunity for rich discussion and vocabulary development. And, reading young adult selections such as *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green provides the background and context for meaningful discussions about current topics, too.

**Step 3. Make Time for Independent Reading**


We know students need to read inside *and* outside of school. While we can’t control time outside of school, we can control time inside school. **To begin, we need to prioritize independent reading by making time for it.** Allowing students to choose books they want to read. Not for points. Not for prizes. Not to answer 10-item quizzes. **Simply time to read.**

The next time you think about skipping independent reading, consider 100+ Reasons to Read.
Step 4. Provide Ways to Share Books

Building a community of readers means more than a classroom library and allocating time for students to read. It also means providing ways for students to extend their reading by sharing their experience with others. **It is important to create spaces and places for students to share books.**

Some ideas include: BookTalks, bulletin boards where students can vote on books (thumbs up/thumbs down), participating in an online blog such as the [Nerdy Book Club](http://nerdybookclub.com), creating a class or school [Twitter](http://twitter.com) hashtag for book recommendations (DL the [Twitter Cheat Sheet](http://twittercheatsheet.com) for Educators if you’re a Twitter newbie), contributing to a class website, or by having students create blogs where they share and write about their favorite (and not-so-great) book picks.

Step 4. Read Books Your Students are Reading

Creating a culture of reading includes teachers, too. **Students need to read, and so do you.** As classroom teachers and librarians, it’s important to help students find books that grab their attention and interest them. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to keep your book knowledge current. I know what you’re thinking. It may go something like this..."How can I possibly keep current on top of everything else on my plate?"

It’s not easy keeping current with new books in children’s and young adult literature; however, there are many excellent book lists, reviews, websites, and blogs to steer you in the right direction. In a previous post, I [compiled several of my favorite go-to sources](http://bit.ly/Uvb3Np). There are plenty more book reviews and sites – these just happen to be some of my favorites. As you begin exploring the book lists, websites, blogs, and twitter feeds, I’m certain you’ll find several that will become your favorites! And, students will benefit from your first-hand knowledge of books.

### Connections and Conversation

- How do you as a school, team, or as a teacher support independent reading?
- Do you have more than one way for students to share books with each other? (online, bulletin board, BookTalks, etc.)
- How frequently do you read aloud to students? Do you read within a variety of genres?
- Do you have a means to track independent reading other than Reading Counts or a similar online reading incentive program?
- Is your classroom library diverse and accessible? Is there a way to support building a classroom library through the PTO, grants, or school/district funds?
- **What are your next steps?**

### Links to Online Resources


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