



GIVE KIDS Their Reading Choice

By Mary Seehafer Sears

“There are no reluctant readers,” proclaims Lisa Von Drasek, the children’s librarian at Bank Street College of Education in New York, “just kids who haven’t found their choice yet.” Plug in to her way of thinking, and you’ll see your child’s relationship to reading in a whole new light. She suggests these strategies for your not-yet-passionate reader:

- **Don’t pressure him to read a certain something.**

Let him choose what he’s going to read. Some kids will devour a book about World War II. Others want *The Sporting News* or a teen magazine. “It’s not the amount your child reads. High interest is what matters,” says Von Drasek.

- **Find out what others like.** Read book reviews and book lists. This will give your child a chance to see what appeals to her. (Remember, to her, *not* to you.)

- **Consider a book group.** Ask your child if he’d like to get together with some friends, or even family members, who like to read. Keep expectations low. Meeting even once is fine! See what works.

- **Read everywhere. And read out loud!** Have books, magazines, and newspapers on hand. Bookmark favorite online newspapers, magazines, and other websites. And encourage her to read the starting lineup, menus, maps, train schedules, tide tables, the crawl at the bottom of the TV screen, weather warnings, nutrition labels, billboards—you get the idea.

- **Parents, make time to read.** Don’t expect your child to read if he never sees you reading. Be excited about books. “After you brush your teeth every night,” says Von Drasek, “read for a while. It’s as easy as that.”
- **Remember: Listening is reading.** Consider audiobooks. They are especially helpful to kids and teens who have trouble decoding the written word. The spoken word may spark an interest in looking at the book. You can also encourage your child to use audiobooks as they are used in the *READ 180* classroom: follow along in a print copy of the book while listening to the audio narration. Many audiobooks can be downloaded right from the Web onto your child’s iPod.
- **Be prepared for surprises.** Von Drasek encountered a seventh grader “who’d been tested tested tested. There was nothing wrong with him; he just hadn’t found anything he wanted to read. One day he spotted *After Tupac and D Foster* by Jacqueline Woodson on a shelf in my office. (It’s the story of three New York City girls who bond over their shared love of rapper Tupac Shakur’s music.) ‘Are they allowed to write about this?’ he asked in wonder, taking it down and glancing through it.” After a quick inspection, he decided to check it out. Hooray!
- **Enjoy, then donate.** Decide you’re going to invest a certain amount in some fun reading, and then donate these popular reads to your child’s school or public library for other kids to enjoy. “I only had to buy one of the last Harry Potter titles for the library,” recalls Von Drasek. “The rest were all donations.”