

VI. BEYOND ONE-TO-ONE TUTORING -- CREATING A LITERACY RICH ENVIRONMENT



What we put into the thought stream of our children will appear in the life stream of tomorrow.
Plato




There is no question that one-to-one tutoring is a highly effective tool in literacy development. Seniors for Schools projects saw measurable proof that their efforts get results, with greatly improved reading scores and new enthusiasm on the part of their tutees for reading and books. But while much of the projects' focus is on improving reading and literacy skills of children through one-to-one tutorial sessions, the vision of the Seniors for School Initiative is broader.

In his letter to Congress introducing the America Reads Challenge Act of 1997, US Department of Education Secretary Richard W. Riley declared that "Literacy is about reading, but it is about more. It is also about participating in the community, understanding the world around you, becoming a better citizen, and taking advantage of opportunities."

Secretary Riley's words reflect one of the core elements of the Seniors for Schools Initiative – to enable service learning for senior volunteers while they work to improve the reading skills of at-risk children. As trained tutors, the volunteers broaden their understanding of literacy and then have an opportunity to apply this new knowledge as they reach beyond one-to-one tutoring.

With the new understanding and skills they have gained, volunteers help design, develop and implement educational activities that create a literacy rich environment that promotes interest in reading. This is an opportunity for volunteers to offer their life experiences, talents and resources, and at the same time reach out to connect with parents and community partners.

This chapter offers you:

-  Examples of literacy-rich activities developed and used by SFS projects
-  Stories from the field on developing activities that go beyond one-to-one tutoring
-  Pointers, tips and strategies such as project planning forms and resources to assist volunteers and projects in their work.

A. Examples of Creating a Literacy Rich Environment

Designing and carrying out literacy enrichment activities is an ideal **opportunity for volunteers to work as a team**. While their tutoring tasks are individual efforts -- one-on-one -- here is an opportunity for the volunteers to put their heads together as a group and think of ways to strengthen literacy skills with all their young tutees, in activities they can participate in together.

This is also an opportunity to share their talents with the children and with each other. They can draw from personal experience and bring their real-life knowledge into learning. Brainstorming together, volunteers may discover they have more to offer than they realize. And while the tutoring must follow a predetermined structure, volunteers can be creative and inventive thinking of ways to offer their knowledge and skills through literacy enrichment activities.

“We’ve come to realize that some of the best projects we have were initiated by the volunteers, based on their own interests and skills and what they thought was needed.”

Rob Tietze, Project Director

Developing diverse literacy-enrichment projects also allows for a **variety of roles and responsibilities**, enabling volunteers who may not feel at ease providing one-to-one support to still make a contribution to helping children learn to read.

The following are examples of activities developed by the nine Seniors for Schools demonstration projects:

- Develop a Post Office—students write letters as part of tutoring: “Wee Mail”
- Develop and manage a computer lab
- Provide in-school library assistance
- Read poems and discuss them



- Design a Community Poetry Journal
- Design a Kindergarten Reading Corner
- Create a Bowling League — involve families

- Take stories and rewrite their endings



- Put together a Storytelling Troupe and Choir
- Develop parent seminars
- Design a Birthday Club for children
- Host “Books for Kids” book fair(s)

Books for Kids



- After School Book Club – read books and collect books for kids to take home
- Time Out Room: volunteers “manage” Referral System—activities are lesson related
- Intensive volunteers help develop lesson plans for part-time volunteers

A retired post-office worker helped develop a mini “post-office” project in which the students write each other letters that they drop in a mailbox in the hallway.

The letters are addressed with each classroom being a “town,” each row a “street,” and each desk a “house.” The students then help the volunteers collect the mail from the mailbox, bring it to the mail room to sort, and deliver it in pouches to the various classrooms.

The presence of the big US Postal mailbox and the delivery schedule has students writing more than ever before.

from *The TUTOR*, September 1997

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- Form a Booster Club—SFS volunteers work to develop parent involvement
 - Develop after-school programs that provide homework assistance and educational games
 - Serve as ESL translators between school, volunteers and parents
 - Gents Club: men work with boys after-school to discuss issues, manners, etc.
 - Help with truancy issues by contacting parents to find out why a child is not in school.

B. Promoting Literacy Skills

Storytelling

One effective teaching technique some literacy programs are using is storytelling. According to Linda Fredericks, author of *Using Stories to Prevent Violence and Promote Cooperation*, **everyone is compelled by stories.** “When children listen to stories, they respond by creating images of characters and places described by the words. This is the process of developing internal images and meaning in response to words, and is **the basis of imagination.**”



“So what if children have a great imagination; how will this help me teach them?” you may ask.

Fredericks notes that researchers who study brain and behavioral development have identified **imagination** as the **essence of creativity and the basis for all higher order thinking.** With imagination, with the ability to understand symbols, create solutions, and find meaning in ideas, young people are more capable of mastering language, writing, mathematics, and other learnings that are grounded in the use of symbols.



“**Storytelling** has been shown to increase vocabulary, refine speaking abilities, promote interest in reading, enhance listening and writing skills, and develop critical thinking skills.”

The Seniors for Schools project in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has developed a school **storytelling troupe.** Volunteers meet on a regular basis and help each other learn cultural stories to share with the children. For Black History Month, Seniors for Schools volunteers select stories that honor the traditions of African-Americans. To get started, volunteers put together packets of information, including flyers and surveys, and then distributed them to all teachers in their partner school. Volunteers then met, reviewed teacher suggestions and requests, and scheduled storytelling sessions around the teacher’s schedules.

Pen Pals, Acting Out Stories, and More

There are many creative activities your project can do. Play **story-to-order**, where children think up characters, describe them and decide on the plot; design **a pen-pal program with other schools** involved in the city that are part of the project, or perhaps even across the country. Volunteers with the Port Arthur Seniors for Schools projects did just that. Teachers helped select topics and volunteers facilitated the letter writing.



In New York, Seniors for Schools volunteers are reading plays with second graders and then encouraging the children to **act out the stories.** It’s fun for the children to put action into the words they’ve read and literally makes the stories come alive.

In Cleveland, Ohio, and Port Arthur, Texas, volunteers are organizing **community book fairs**. Check with local malls and community centers to find out whether they are willing to serve as drop-off points for contributors. This is a wonderful project that provides an opportunity for true community involvement and collaboration.

Literacy volunteers can develop **after-school programs** that begin with homework assistance and end with fun activities such as board games, sports or crafts. Many children love to show their creative sides and after school can be the opportunity to let them express themselves. With something fun to look forward to, homework seems easier. After-school programs can focus on certain topics such as science, cooking or arts. One of the best ways to get the most out of your after-school program is to survey your volunteers to learn about their strengths and talents.

For example, if you have volunteers who play piano and are willing to develop a curriculum around teaching piano and **helping children learn music**, this could make a solid after-school program. You may have volunteers who are retired from careers in science or medicine. These activities provide rich learning for children, and an appreciative audience for the volunteers.



“Commonplace activities that most people would not connect with literacy can build the foundation for reading skills...literacy is everywhere.”

Danielle Ewen, AmeriCorps Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center



Other volunteers may have spent their lives as homemakers and have strengths such as **cooking, sewing, gardening**. Remember that all of these offer strong literacy links. Gardening involves math and science and makes a rich teaching environment. Your literacy project can work with volunteers to help them develop a curriculum around these topics.

Planned Events for Parents

Look for ways to **engage parents** in the teaching process. Volunteers from Philadelphia’s Seniors for Schools project organized a **Parents’ Breakfast** at their school. Fourteen out of sixty parents attended an 8:30 AM breakfast to learn about ways that they can support their child’s learning. Volunteers personally made phone calls to parents and sent letters inviting them to the breakfast. During the meeting, volunteers met with the parents of the children they’re tutoring to explain their roles, goals and objectives.



C. Stories and Quotes from the Field

Cleveland, Ohio

Realizing that many of the children they were tutoring did not have any books in their homes, and knowing that access to books and encouragement to read are keys to success in later school years, volunteers set a goal of putting books into the hands of their tutees.

Volunteers held **four successful book fairs**. After a book fair that lasted almost a year and amassed more than 3,000 gently used books, the **Seniors gave books to more than 450 children and about 200 parents** in the four Cleveland schools in which they tutor.

“The book fairs were an excellent opportunity to involve parents in our programs, get them more involved in reading to their children and provide them with access to the tools that will make them successful students.”

Joy Banish, Former Project Director, Portland, Oregon

Seniors for Schools volunteers came together and created a community effort that built connections beyond the children, parents and teachers. When no PTA existed at one local elementary school, the volunteers united to develop **a booster club**. **This club provides a framework that parent groups can duplicate**. The booster club is now working to recruit **at least three parents** to set up a plan for increased parent involvement in the future.

The booster club organized a **“Grandparents Day”** at the school and activities to celebrate **Martin Luther King Day**. The volunteers hope that the organization they create will continue to strengthen the school’s effectiveness after the children move on to higher grades.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Seniors for Schools volunteers work on literacy-based activities such as:

- Word banks
- “Library corners” in the classroom
- Sight word games
- Reading aloud to children each day
- Engaging children in small group language arts experiences
- A message board on which children can write to one another.

Port Arthur, Texas

Seniors for Schools volunteers have proposed and executed innovations for the partner schools, such as a “**Time Out Room**” where volunteers support teachers by providing one-to-one attention to children who disrupt the learning environment.

Outside the schools, they **hold meetings in neighborhood centers** and public housing complexes in order to increase parent involvement in their children’s education and in the schools.

D. Activity Planning Guidelines

Volunteers enjoy doing diverse projects such as those described in this chapter. Some volunteers will immediately sign-up to be involved in designing such projects, while others may need time to feel comfortable with this type of unscripted role.

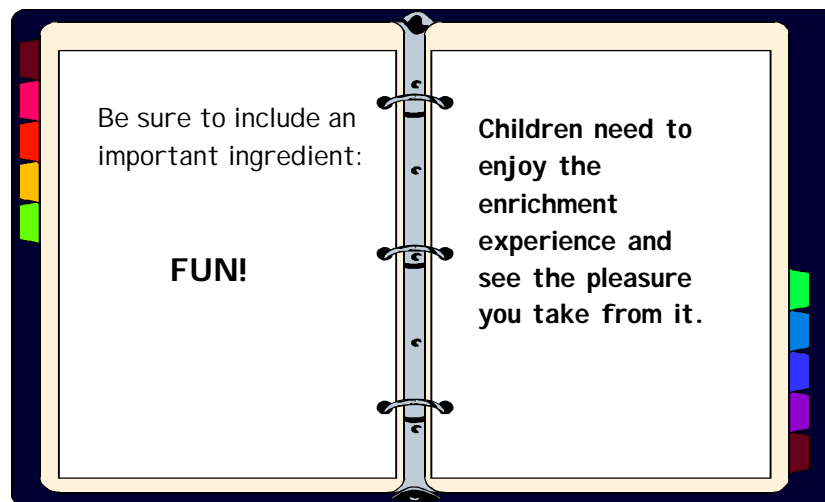
Volunteers are likely to embrace these unique leadership opportunities when they have **information** about them **at the beginning of a project**. They will need **guidance** when they attempt to launch their new projects and need to know how and where to obtain it.

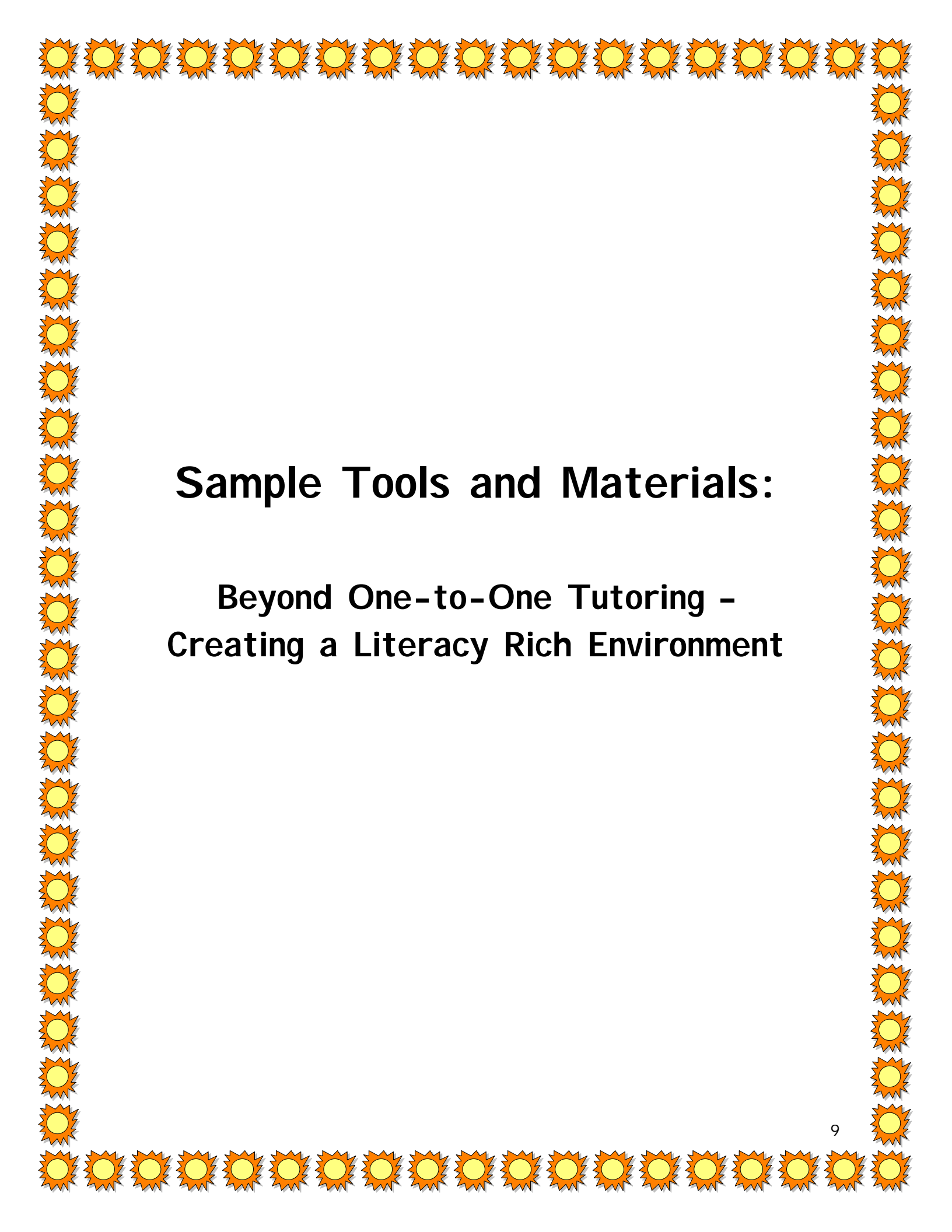
Here are some guidelines you can use to **help focus and develop your volunteers’ ideas**. Volunteers will need to know:

- What the **parameters** are of **any enrichment project** they plan to undertake
- What the process is for obtaining **school approval** for projects, and knowing how to present ideas so the school will understand the benefits
- How much they should **lead**, and how and when they should **take direction** from the project director
- **Leadership skills** to engage other volunteers in implementing their ideas
- Ideas and suggestions for where and how to **get resources and donated materials**
- A project development **timeline and implementation plan**
- Help in knowing who can give **assistance in managing their plan**
- How their “beyond one-to-one” activities **fit into the overall work plan**
- Ways to **motivate other volunteers** to get involved in this aspect of the literacy program.

Training is also a critical link in helping volunteers embrace the opportunity to create and develop literacy rich activities. Volunteers appreciate and value training in areas such as:

- Goal setting and project planning
- Team building strategies to involve other volunteers in planning and executing the activity
- Literacy techniques such as elements of storytelling.



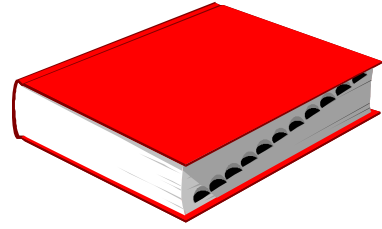


Sample Tools and Materials:

**Beyond One-to-One Tutoring -
Creating a Literacy Rich Environment**

LIST OF TOOLS AND MATERIALS

1. Certificate for Reading Well
2. Certificate of Award for Reading Books
3. Gift Book Labels
4. Create a Literacy Family Tree
5. Post Office Handbook
6. Enrichment Activity – See Me Grow!
7. Enrichment Activity – My Spring Picture
8. Enrichment Activity – Drawing Umbrellas
9. After School Programs
10. Readers’ Club
11. Literacy in the Child’s Environment – Home and Family
12. Literacy in the Child’s Environment – Parent Response
13. “Books for Kids” – How to Put Together a Book Fair

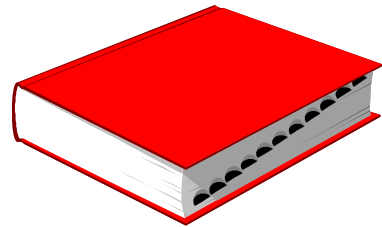


**Seniors for Schools
Tutoring Program
Presents**

**This certificate
for READING WELL today**

Date

Tutor



**Seniors for Schools
Tutoring Program
Presents**

**This certificate
for READING WELL today**

Date

Tutor

Certificate of Participation

awarded to

**For reading books in
the 'Reading Challenge'**

presented by
RSVP Seniors For Schools

Friday, June 5, 1998

Program Director

Principal



This book is given
to you by a
Seniors for Schools
Volunteer!



This book is given
to you by a
Seniors for Schools
Volunteer!



This book is given
to you by a
Seniors for Schools
Volunteer!



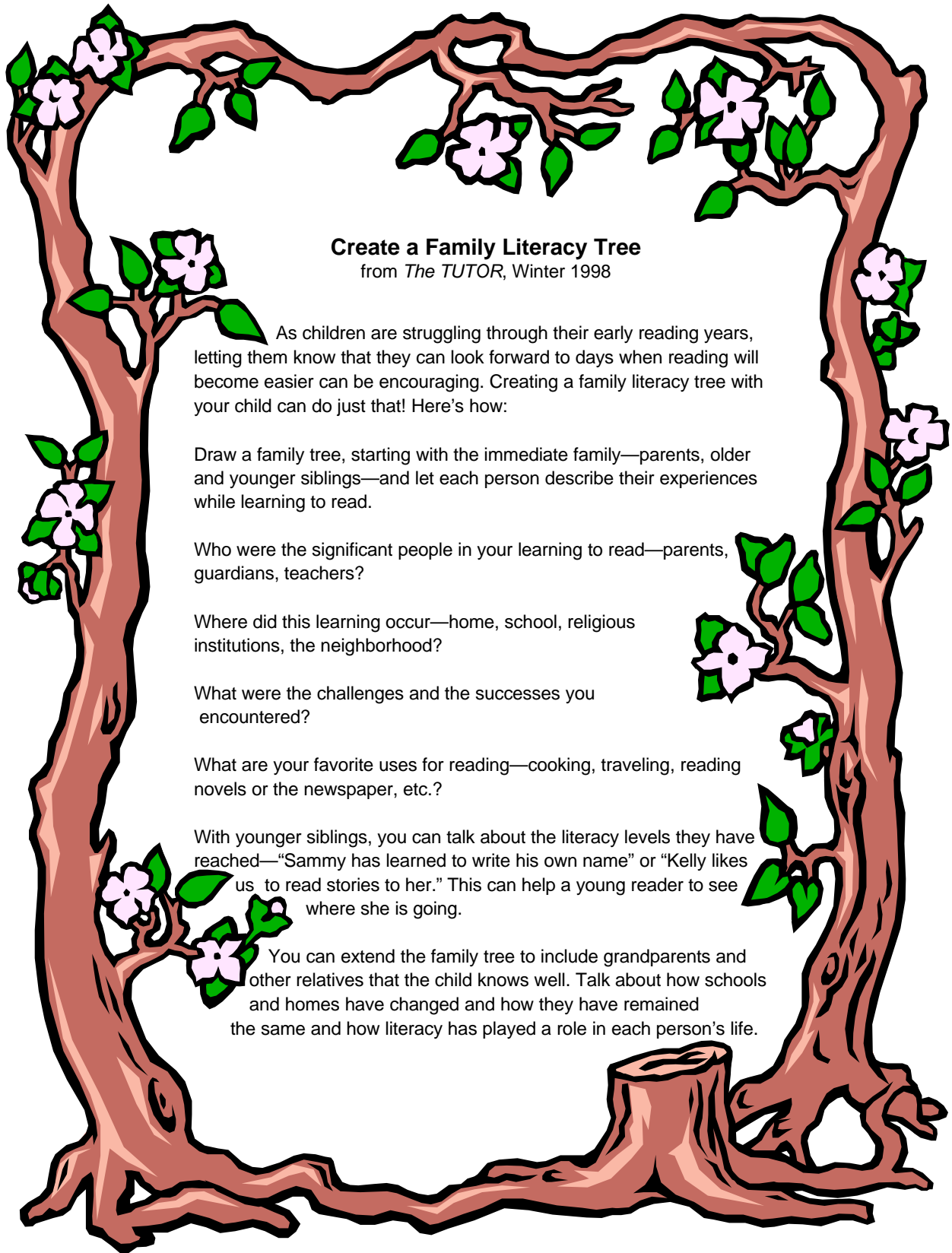
This book is given
to you by a
Seniors for Schools
Volunteer!



This book is given
to you by a
Seniors for Schools
Volunteer!



This book is given
to you by a
Seniors for Schools
Volunteer!



Create a Family Literacy Tree

from *The TUTOR*, Winter 1998

As children are struggling through their early reading years, letting them know that they can look forward to days when reading will become easier can be encouraging. Creating a family literacy tree with your child can do just that! Here's how:

Draw a family tree, starting with the immediate family—parents, older and younger siblings—and let each person describe their experiences while learning to read.

Who were the significant people in your learning to read—parents, guardians, teachers?

Where did this learning occur—home, school, religious institutions, the neighborhood?

What were the challenges and the successes you encountered?

What are your favorite uses for reading—cooking, traveling, reading novels or the newspaper, etc.?

With younger siblings, you can talk about the literacy levels they have reached—"Sammy has learned to write his own name" or "Kelly likes us to read stories to her." This can help a young reader to see where she is going.

You can extend the family tree to include grandparents and other relatives that the child knows well. Talk about how schools and homes have changed and how they have remained the same and how literacy has played a role in each person's life.

Philadelphia Experience Corps

School Post Office Handbook



Developed by Temple University
Center for Intergenerational Learning
1601 N. Broad Street
Philadelphia, PA 19122
215.204.6970

Creating A Post Office In Your School

I. Rationale:

Every opportunity to advance literacy is our goal!

Everyone enjoys getting a letter from a friend.

Mail is a painless way to advance literacy.

II. Kindergarten is the Perfect Time to Start Post Office Activities!

They enjoy the "here and now" - Let them tell about things that interest them, then they can draw a picture of the happenings and you can add the sentences they state to go with their picture! Send to "buddy" in their class that is a part of Experience Corps.

III. Post Office Components:

A. Child will write to his or her caregiver –
Monthly mail is best!

Keep it simple and short.

1. What is happening at school.
2. Holiday Letter - Thanksgiving, Easter, Christmas, Passover, Valentine's Day.
3. Seasonal Letter –
Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer.
4. Thank You Letter to parent or caregiver for a special gift, a fun trip, a special dinner, nice home, good things that happen in the home.

B. Pair Children of Experience Corps with the idea of trading mail.

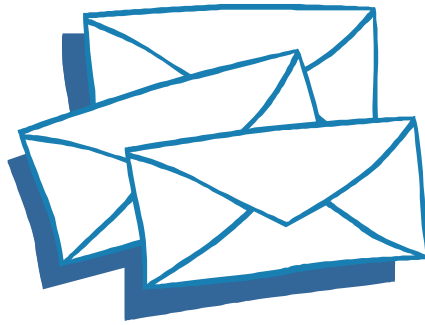
1. Children should be in the same class.
(So they can really bond as "buddies".)
2. "Buddies" should be Experience Corps children - so they will be able to write their mail with their tutor and read their mail with their tutor.
3. Simple and short letters are best.

This will give children a feeling of success and they won't become frustrated with lengthy letters.

C. Post Office "Special Delivery"

1. Special Deliveries will be bi-monthly starting in:
December, February, and April.
2. Buddy classes will be set-up.
3. Children and Tutors will make something to share with the whole class.
4. Child is selected to be "mailman" who will deliver the package.
5. Ask classroom teacher to talk about the "surprise" sent to them.
6. Ask classroom teacher to let us display anything they do with the surprise!
(Letters of Thanks, Experience Stories, Pictures, etc.)






Some ideas for the



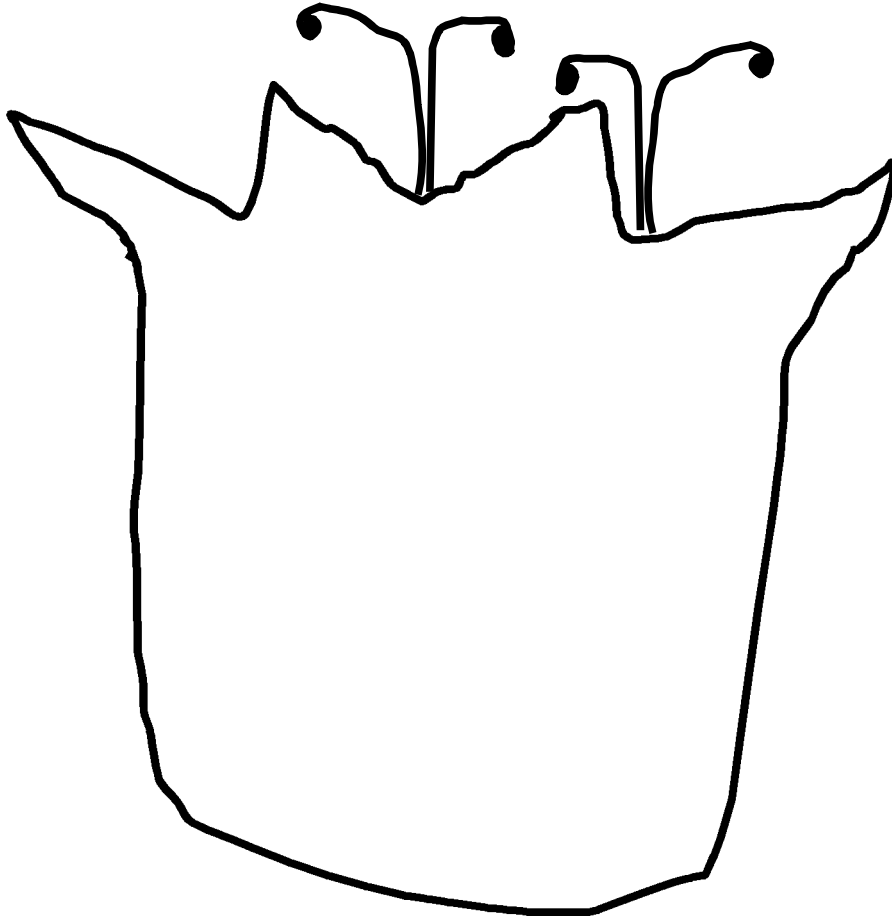
Special Delivery

- ✉ Seasonal Ideas: Snow pictures, rocks (real ones), flowers (in spring), holly (real and pictures)
- ✉ Holiday Ideas: Santa Claus ideas, Reindeer ideas, Elves ideas, Valentines (make some), Groundhog Day ideas
- ✉ Famous People: African-American Heroes, Lincoln and Washington, Benjamin Franklin
- ✉ Famous Cartoons, Comic Books or TV Characters: Superman, Big Bird, Wonder Woman, Miss Piggy
- ✉ Unusual Things: A funny hat; old shoe; a towel roll doll, a pot or pan

D. Skills Developed by Post Office Activities:

-  Fine Motor Skills
-  Creativity
-  Imagination
-  Self-confidence
-  Self-esteem
-  Speaking Skills
-  Listening Skills
-  Writing Skills
-  Socialization Skills
-  Directional Skills
-  Language Development
-  Patterns of Speech
-  Sequencing Skills
-  Transference Skills
-  Thinking Skills
-  Concept of Language
-  Judgment Skills
-  Memory Enhancement

See me grow!



I can draw

I can drive a car

I can write

I can play

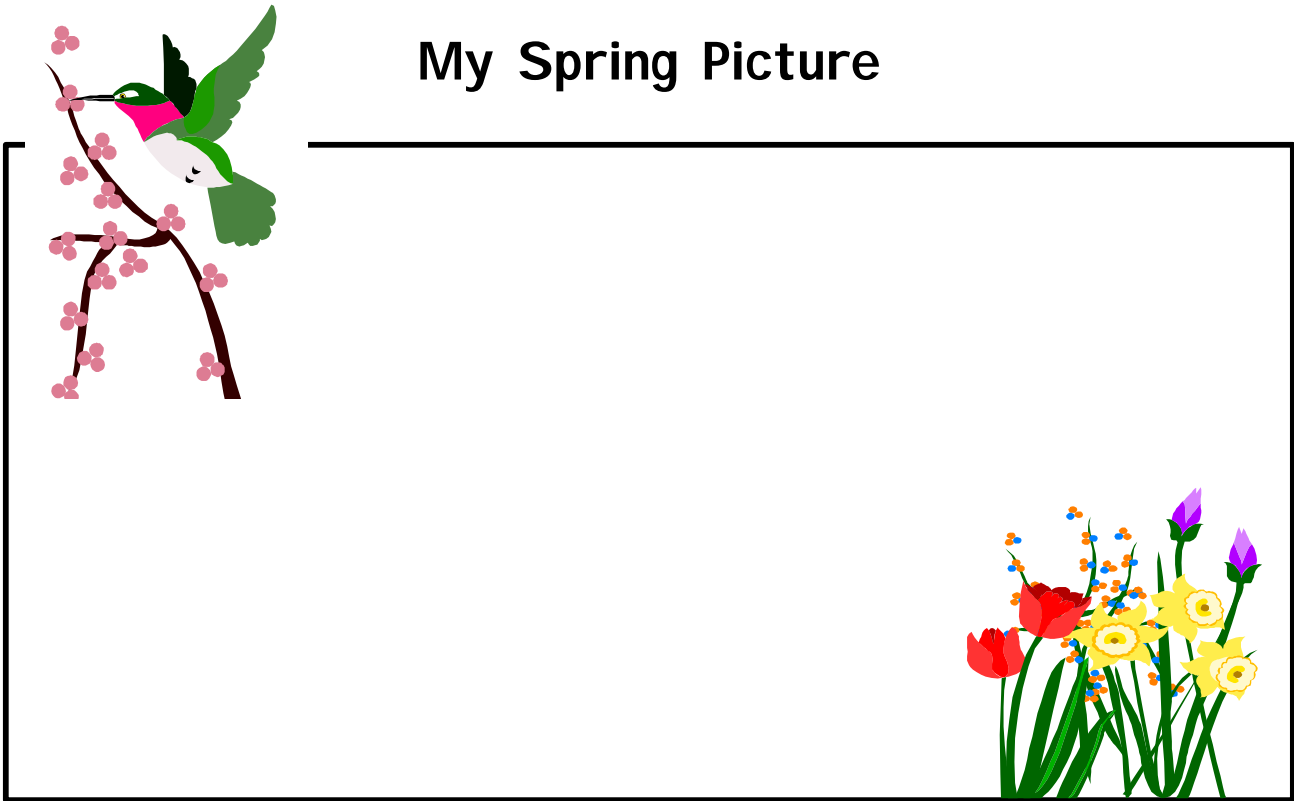
I can eat

I can read

I can fly like a bird!

Philadelphia Experience Corps

Draw your picture in the flower and color the boxes next to what you can do!



Philadelphia Experience Corps

Dear,

Spring *is* *here* !

The spring will bring *flowers* and
birds. We will *see* sunny days!

Do you *like* my picture?

Love,

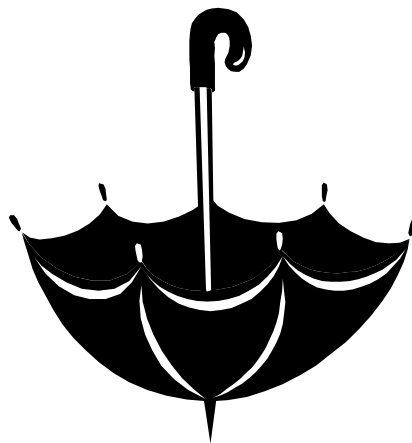
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April Project "Special Delivery"

Let the children draw umbrellas.

All kinds are welcome!

Then give them to your "Special
Delivery" Class!



April Project

1. If I open my umbrella and turn it upside down I can catch:

2. If my umbrella is closed, I can use it for a:

3. If my umbrella is open and over my head I can use it to protect myself from:

4. If my umbrella was magic I would say "Abracadabra" and it would:

Philadelphia Experience Corps

After School Programs

Recommendations from Portland, OR
January 2000

Before You Start

Think about the purpose of your after-school program. It should provide academic support and encouragement for students who need it. Teachers should refer students to the program, rather than having a “drop-in” arrangement.

Unfortunately, when students are referred to an academic after-school program, they may interpret it as punitive. Part of our job is to change that feeling, to **make the experience a fun and supportive one.**

Many of these students may be challenging to work with, students with low motivation or difficulty staying on task. **These are the students who need your help, support and encouragement the most.** Here are some tips:

Have extra helpers in the room to sit with students. Even when students seem to be doing fine alone, the adult presence and attention will make them feel special and help them when they get stuck.

Try to have enough tutors to have one tutor for every 1-2 students. If you are short on volunteers, have tutors circulate around and ask how students are doing, give them encouragement and offer assistance.

Reward good behavior and gently ask for appropriate behavior from those who are restless or misbehaving.

Provide learning games and fun options for students who finish early.

Have a snack available.

Plan a fun group activity for the end of each session. This can be as simple as a sharing time over snacks, reading a story to the group, or choosing a weekly theme to explore (see Experiential Learning, discussed below).

Try including peer tutors. This may take the edge or stigma out of being sent to the after-school program. Ask teachers to recommend students for peer tutoring, or find out if other students are interested.

Invite parents and/or family members to sit in on your after-school program and/or help as volunteers.

Needs:

Space

Presence of a teacher, librarian, AmeriCorps member or other non-volunteer member of the school community is preferred. There should always be at least 2 adults present in the room.

Determine a schedule: days per week, which days, start & end time. Plan for about an hour for each session, with 2-3 sessions per week. With a new after-school club, start small – 1-2 days per week, with a limited number of children.

Basic supplies: juice & snacks, paper, pencils, eraser, pencil sharpener, fun learning games, dictionary and other reference resources.

Parent permission slips (see sample).

Teacher referral forms (see sample).

After-School Program Log to track student attendance and what subject each student received help on.

Planning notebook: Keep parent permission slips, teacher referral forms, lesson plans, notes, etc., all together in a notebook.

Incentives for good behavior, and consequences and process for addressing misbehavior. Incentives may include stickers, a system for earning points towards a special prize, etc. Consequences for misbehavior may include being taken to the office to await their ride, loss of privileges.

Sample Daily Schedule

2:15-2:25: Students get settled.

2:25-3:10: Students work individually or in pairs with help from tutors.

They should finish their assignments, plus 20 minutes of silent or assisted reading time. If they finish everything early, give them free choice time with select options – educational games, continued reading time, puzzles, coloring or drawing, help set up snack.

3:10-3:15: Set up snack and have students wash hands.

3:15-3:30: Group activity and snack.

3:30 Students are picked up, volunteers clean up and close up room.

Group Activities

These can include story time, citizenship building or experiential learning.

Story Time

Read or tell a story to the students and talk about it afterwards. Have the students create a group story or share their own stories. Plan an activity to reinforce reading comprehension.

Citizenship Building

Select individual qualities or characteristics to emphasize and discuss each week. Many schools have school-wide guidelines or programs you might use to identify these qualities. Check with the principal or school counselor.

The Kenton Team elected to use the Virtues Training for their Homework Club, focusing on a different Virtue each week. During the group time, tell what the virtue is, share a picture, story or object to illustrate the virtue or quality. Go around the group and ask each child to tell what that quality means to him or her, or to give an example of a person or situation that illustrates that quality.

Experiential Learning

Select a theme topic each week, such as the ocean, the forests, careers, etc. Bring in pictures or objects relating to the topic. Share and discuss the picture or object, a little like show & tell. Choose topics that may be unfamiliar to the students, which exposes them to new experiences and vocabulary.

Experience Corps Referral Form

The information on this form will aid Experience Corps in providing service and tracking progress. This information will be kept strictly confidential. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Experience Corps Program Coordinator Cindy McGean at 249-0469. **Thank you!**

Student name: _____ Grade: _____

Teacher: _____

1) Reason for referral: (Please check **only one**.)

Reading assistance: Child is reading at __ grade level based on Running Records assessment.

Homework assistance: % of homework completed accurately: _____.

Classroom difficulties: % of time child is off-task in class: _____.

2) Compared to the rest of the students in your class, how much time does this student require of you or an assistant?

Much less Somewhat less Same Somewhat more Much more

3) Any special issues or needs the Experience Corps volunteer should be aware of (ESL, special education, physical ability, etc.)?

By referring this student to Experience Corps you (the teacher) agree to:

1. Meet regularly with the volunteer to discuss questions, concerns and student progress.
2. **Reading and homework assistance only:** Send home parent letter and permission slip.
3. Provide a mid-year and year-end assessment of student progress.
4. Complete an end-of-year evaluation survey of the Experience Corps program.

Please return this form to your school's Experience Corps liaison.
Thank you!!

Revised by CJM 8/99

**Reading Club Permission Form
Atkinson School**

Your child has been selected to participate in the after-school Reading Club, which meets every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 3:00 to 3:45 in Room 126 at Atkinson School.

You should meet your child at Room 126 at 3:45 to provide transportation home, or your child may walk home.

Name of Student: _____

Classroom Teacher: _____

Parent Name: _____

Phone Number (where parent can be reached during the day): _____

Please check the appropriate box:

I will pick up my child at 3:45 or My child will walk home.

Please provide name of person who will pick up child **if it will not be a parent**:

Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Homework Club Guidelines

Students are expected to do homework; this includes written work and 20 minutes of reading.

If both written work and reading are completed by 3:00 PM, a student may quietly play a game (learning appropriate social skills), color or draw.

Students who have followed the rules enjoy simple refreshments at 3:15 PM. These are to be nutritious fruit juices, snack bars such as granola, or graham crackers. Fresh fruits are also desirable. Students gather at one table and practice good social manners.

During the refreshment time, Experience Corps volunteers present one of the Virtues, telling a story and/or facilitating a consultation about the Virtue Of The Week. One virtue is the focus for 2 weeks.

At Kenton School, the Homework Club is sponsored by the Touchstone Program and Experience Corps offers the tutors and helps recruit other volunteers from parents and grandparents.

The Homework Club is not a “drop-in” session where anyone may come in for help with homework. Students must be referred and turn in a parental permission slip with transportation plan before they attend.

All supplies are available. Students do not answer the phone. The teacher’s desk, computer, drawers, and other materials are not to be used.

A student who is not able to settle down to do his/her homework is taken to the office to wait for transportation home. He/she does not just leave for home.

HOMEWORK CLUB REPORT

Date: _____

To: (Teacher) _____

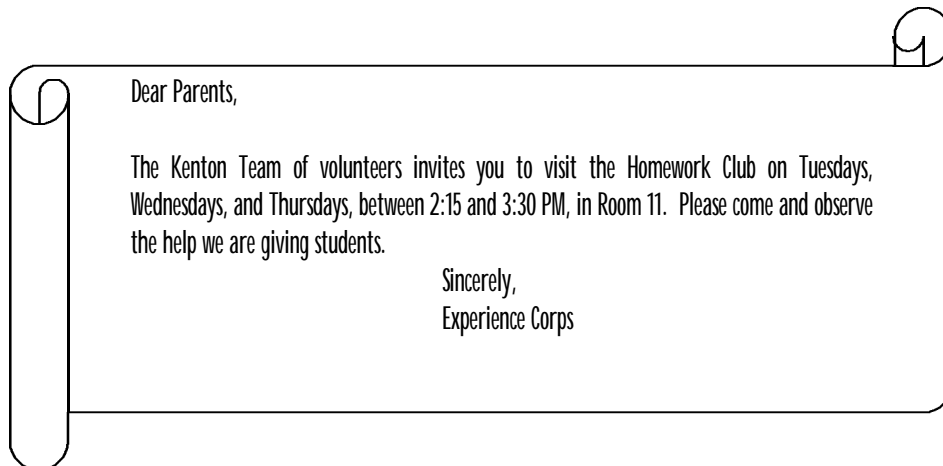
Re: Homework Club Report

1) Assignment and Activities:

2) Progress:

Respectfully submitted:

Experience Corps Volunteer Signature



THE READERS' CLUB

Atkinson School






Congratulations!

You are a member of the Readers' Club.

What we will do:





- We will read books together
- We will tell stories
- We will write books
- We will read books at home
- We will read with our parents, grandparents, or a friend – for 15 minutes a day
- We will be readers!
- We will earn colored stars for the books we finish reading

What being able to read will do:

-  Reading will help to make us strong
-  Reading will help to make us feel good
-  Reading will help to make us feel big
-  Reading will help to make us learn
-  Reading will tell us what we need to know

It will be fun to read anything we want!!

We will earn stars for reading books.

-  Read ONE book..... GREEN star
-  Read TWO books..... RED star
-  Read THREE books..... SILVER star
-  Read MORE books..... GOLD star

WE WILL READ BOOKS TO OUR FRIENDS, TOO!

Literacy in the Child's Environment – Home and Family

Family Literacy Through a Parent's Eyes: Mississippi Delta Parents Talk About Literacy

Compiled by Heidi Pfunder Laws
from *The TUTOR*, Winter 1998

Despite differences in economic, cultural, or linguistic background, everyone has experiences with family literacy. This simple truth became most evident when we asked parents at a recent America Reads training in Mississippi about family literacy. For example, one mother explained that when cooking with her kids each child plays a part in the dinner. While one child is cleaning the lettuce, another is measuring vinegar, and still another is setting the table. The whole time they are cooking Mom is reading the recipe for instructions on what to do next. "That's family literacy, isn't it?" she asked.

Another man's first memory of reading in his family was with his grandmother singing him church songs. "Is that literacy?" he asked.

Yes! Both of these are good examples of literacy. There are so many day to day activities in a home that enhance literacy. By just talking with children or playing games in the car, parents and other family members contribute to children's language development.

In the Mississippi Delta, families play a big part in literacy. Recently, LEARNS partners led a training in Cleveland, Mississippi, where I met members of the Delta Service Corps, Delta Reads, and America Reads programs. The goal of these projects is to create life long

learners. Members' excitement about literacy and their dedication to communities and education was overwhelming.

We asked them to describe the key players who taught them to read, as well as activities in their homes that promote literacy. The response was inspiring. Many of the members, who are parents, realized the magnitude of their role as "teachers" for their own children. They saw that they are modeling positive attitudes towards reading. Members describe below their experiences with family literacy.

Family Literacy Experiences

Viola Taylor—I learned to read with my parents and other family members reading the newspaper, children's books and comic books to me. I would try to read billboards whenever we traveled. Reading was all around me growing up.

Keith Townsend—The first time I ever heard someone read was my sister. As a child she would always read me books and later on she began to teach me to pronounce the words. Living in a family of ten, reading was very important in my home, not just for education but for entertainment too.

Sharone M. Coleman—Literacy plays a very important role in my household, especially since my son was born. He loves books and always wants his Mom and Dad to read to him.

What Is Family Literacy? Examples of Activities in the Home

Caprina Bell—As the oldest of five children, I always read to the younger ones. Now that we have all learned how to read, we don't just help ourselves.

Ethel Jamison Johnson—In my home we read *The Holy Bible*, newspapers, magazines, and other books. We love to read. I started my children reading at an early age.

Nellie Martin—We read to our grandchildren and tell them stories. It keeps them interested in books and finding information.

Ripple Effects of Family Literacy

Cathy Moore -- I tell my children the importance of reading like my mother told me. I tell them how slaves were not allowed to read and had to steal away just to teach each other to read. We no longer have to do that. I tell them to read all their eyes can see, grasp the concept of the words. I read to them and they read to me. When you learn to read and read to learn, there is nothing you can't accomplish. Knowledge is in the words.

Family Literacy Affects Adults

Keith Townsend – I am currently attending night classes at the local college and numerous training workshops. It's been said, "The thing that makes a great teacher is that he/she is always learning new things to teach."

Myra B. Thomas—I am enrolling at Delta State this spring. I attend all workshops that I need to help me improve my reading skills. I use my planning time to visit the library to get books that I can bring back to the classroom to read at story-time.

Latisha Beckworth—Learning is an ongoing process. Every time a child learns, so do I. My comprehension level has increased because I have to comprehend material in order to help the children.

Literacy in the Child's Environment – Parent Response

Children's Writing Begins Early and Parents Can Help

by Elise Goldman

Excerpted from *The TUTOR*, Winter 1998

Dear Mom, Buy me a puppy. Tomorrow.
Love, Eli.”

(Note: These were the intended words in the letter written by Eli. The letter consisted of carefully drawn, cursive lines, a circle on a 'stem', two parallel lines, and some bold strokes of a crayon...but no identifiable words or even letters.)

I don't recall what I was doing when my four-year-old son interrupted me to read aloud...his first "letter." I do remember that he read it with great, dramatic emphasis, pointing to each "word" with authority. And I'm sure that I dropped whatever task I was engaged in to delight in his first exploration as a writer.

You may be puzzling over that description. How could he be a writer if there were no real letters...? Eli put pencil to paper with real intention to communicate an authentic message. He knew from past experience that I take messages in print seriously. This is why anyone writes: **to communicate an authentic message.**

All his life, Eli watched me work with print. I write shopping lists, take phone messages, leave notes for my husband on the bathroom mirror. I give my attention to the mail, the newspaper, and books. I have read to Eli and his brother all their lives and we frequently visit our local library. Eli was doing the work of young children: he was imitating

an important adult in his life. **Children learn about the world around them through make-believe and imitation.**

When they try on policeman's hats, hard hats, or an old purse, they are trying on the identities of people around them.

As parents and tutors, a big part of our role is thinking about ways to increase literacy opportunities for children. I urge you to look no further than your children's active interest in your world. Here are some suggestions to encourage kids to write. They aren't designed to be "school-y," but rather to be a natural part of kids' everyday lives.

- **Be sure kids see you write.** Whenever you're writing a shopping list, or a birthday card, think out loud, so they can get a sense of how this writing thing works: "Let's see. . .we need milk . . ." write it down, ". . Captain Crunch. . ." write it down.
- Let kids see that writing is essential to function in daily life. **Make sure they see you reading** cards, notices on school walls, schedules for buses or TV shows, and newspapers, etc.
- **Create a "desk" for the child.** This could be as simple as a shoebox, or as elaborate as an actual desk with containers for writing supplies. Stock the desk with writing materials (pens,

novelty pencils, thin markers, colored pencils), with stationery, with a pad of lined paper, with blank books made from folded over and stapled pieces of blank paper. Use your imagination.

- **Give older children reasons to write that grow from their experiences.** When Eli was six he developed a severe case of the “gimmies.” We didn’t even have to go to a toy store: he was a walking commercial for all the toys he wanted. In exasperation, I hit on a solution: we began a wish list. Every time Eli thought of another item he “needed,” he added it to his list. By now he was no longer “scribble writing,” but using “invented” or “phonetic” spelling. Items like “chrsfrmr” (transformers) and “lgoz” (Lego’s) were on his list. He stopped demanding and he started writing—frequently.

Cleveland Seniors Provide “Books for Kids”
from The TUTOR, August 1998

Cleveland’s Seniors for Schools volunteers held four successful book fairs during April and May. After a book drive that lasted almost a year and amassed more than 3,000 *gently* used books, the Seniors gave books to more than 450 children and about 200 parents in the four Cleveland schools in which they tutor. Realizing that many of the children they were tutoring did not have any books in their homes and knowing that access to books and encouragement to read are keys to success in later school years, last year they set a goal of putting books into the hands and homes of their tutees. This spring they made great strides toward meeting that goal.

During the four book fairs, the Seniors, children, and their parents met and mingled in the cafeterias, libraries, and gymnasiums of the four schools. As they snacked, browsed through, and chose books, they learned of educational resources available to them in their community.

To gather the 3,000 books, the volunteers placed announcements in newsletters and newspapers, hung flyers across town, and *talked*. Edward Cunneen, Cleveland RSVP Board Member and creator of the “Books for Kids” program, knows the value of word-

of-mouth outreach! “The idea really catches on. You just need to keep talking about it. *No one* will turn you away. Everywhere I went I told people about ‘Books for Kids.’”

The city and county public libraries were also an important resource for books. Seniors for Schools Project Director Joy Banish asked the libraries for books which were no longer in circulation and, when the libraries planned their book sales, they filled boxes with books that they either gave or sold at a great discount to the project. The Seniors also asked the libraries’ acquisition officers for the names of their contacts at book publishing companies. They wrote letters to the publishing representatives, explaining the goals and structure of the program, and requesting any donations they could make.

Reviewing the overall success of the book fairs, Banish says, “They were an excellent opportunity to involve parents in our program and get them more involved in reading to their children while also ensuring that children have access to the tools that will make them successful readers and successful students.”

Tips for Book Fair Success

1. Publicize – Publicize – Publicize!
Contact public libraries, bookstores, community groups, and publishers. Hang flyers throughout the community.
2. Find a retired librarian to sort the books by grade level and to remove outdated, damaged, or inappropriate books.
3. Schedule the event *with* the school—before or after school is usually best.
4. Send flyers home with the children.
5. Hang posters throughout the school, encouraging children to come and to bring their parents.
6. Make sure *all* school staff is aware of the event—teachers, librarians, custodians, gym teachers, and cafeteria workers—especially if the event is in the gym or cafeteria.
7. Ask public libraries to send a staff member to talk to the parents about library events, library cards, summer reading programs, book clubs, etc.
8. Seek the help of high school students, teen center members, and Learn and Serve projects. They can unload books, set up tables, greet parents and children, and help children select books. It offers a great experience to them and to the children.
9. Sort books on tables by grade and place signs accordingly
10. Serve Food!!! Continental breakfasts in the morning or cookies and punch in the afternoon. Ask local grocery stores to donate the food.
11. Have both parents and children sign in. This provides a helpful list when planning future events and getting parents involved in your program.