

request. It's important to have a variety of material available—magazines, newspapers, novels, picture books. A weekly trip to the library can do much to fill this need. Three decades of NAEP research along with a 32-nation study of 250,000 teens showed that the more kinds of reading material in a home, the higher the child's reading scores in school.

Won't 'requiring' children to read eventually turn them off?

Do you require your child to brush his teeth every day? How about changing his underwear or making his bed? Do you worry that such requirements will eventually lead to your grown son giving up teeth-brushing and underwear changes because you "required" it in his childhood? Sounds pretty silly when we put it in those terms, doesn't it?

In my book *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, I write about Sonya Carson, a single parent who required her two sons to obtain library cards and read two books a week. Today one is an engineer and the other is a preeminent pediatric brain surgeon (Dr. Ben Carson). Their story can be found in Ben's book *Gifted Hands*. The man who invented the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (M.A.S.H.) and became the world's greatest heart surgeon, Dr. Michael DeBakey, was required to read a book a week as a child. These are huge testimonials to parents who believe in *raising* their children instead of just *watching* them grow up.



Dr. Ben Carson

Children will never have a chance for higher achievements without higher-level reading skills. Where nothing is asked, usually nothing is received. In offices where

punctuality is not required, people seldom arrive on time. So how to require reading and still keep it pleasure-oriented? First, remember that pleasure is more often caught than taught (that means—read aloud to them). Next:

- Make sure you (the adult role model) are seen reading daily. It works even better if you read at the same time as the child.
- For young children, looking at the pictures in books and turning pages qualifies as "reading." We become picture-literate before becoming print-literate.
- Allow children to choose the books they wish to read to themselves, even if they don't meet your high standards.
- Don't take that vacation car trip without recorded books on board. They count too!
- Set some time parameters, short at first and longer as children get older and read more.
- Newspapers and magazines, even comic books, should count toward reading time. All of it amounts to exposure to print.

The self-selection, self-interest factor is important here. Let children read what interests them. (Those school summer reading lists usually require them to read what interests the faculty.) The goal here is to raise a *lifetime reader*, not an English teacher. The great national shortage is not in the latter but in lifetime readers. Every lifetime reader I've ever known grew up reading everything (including



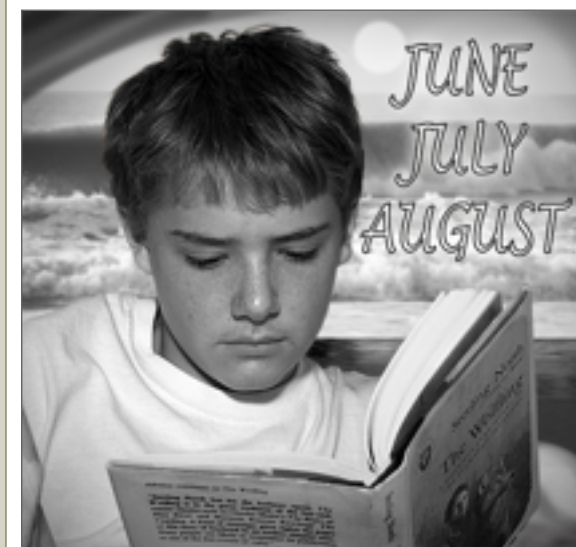
All of the statistics and facts included here are footnoted in Trelease's *Read-Aloud Handbook* (Penguin 2006). © Jim Trelease 2009. For details on downloading free copies of this and other brochures, see: www.trelease-on-reading.com/brochures.html

SUMMER READING:

Research shows the most damage to reading skills occurs outside school—during the summer months. But not for *all* kids.

BY JIM TRELEASE

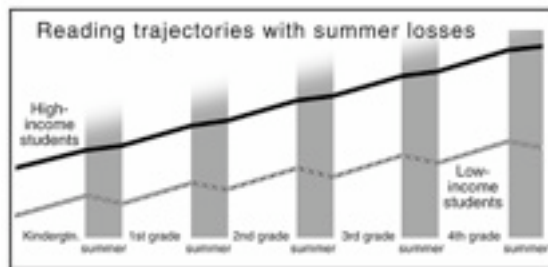
Author of The New York Times Bestseller
The Read-Aloud Handbook



Do summer reading programs help?

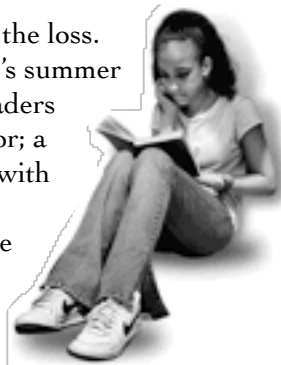
Many parents, especially those whose children are struggling in school, see summertime as a school vacation and take it literally. “Everyone needs a vacation!” they exclaim. “My kid needs to get away from school and relax. Next year will be a new start.” That attitude can be very detrimental, especially to a poor reader. While he’s “relaxing,” he’s also falling further behind the kid who’s reading six books that summer. In a few years, when he’s way behind, the parent will be blaming the school for not helping her child enough. Wrong target.

There is an axiom in education that says “you get dumber in the summer.” A two-year study of 3,000 students in Atlanta, Georgia, attempted to see if that was true and found that *everyone*—top student and bottom student—learns more *slowly* in the summer but some do worse than slow down; they actually go into *reverse*, as you can see in the chart below.



This research from Johns Hopkins University shows that high- and low-income children learn at pretty much the same pace during the school year. But take a look at the gray-bar areas (summer vacation time). There is a decided loss for the disadvantaged child, a vacation period in which he loses several months of skills. With each summer’s loss, that child falls further and further behind.

Many factors cause the loss. The affluent child’s summer includes: a family of readers who model that behavior; a home that is print-rich with books, magazines, and newspapers; visits to the mall with stops at the book store or library; a family vacation or summer camp out of



town in which new people, places, and experiences extend background knowledge and offer new vocabulary; and a high probability that educational or informational TV and radio will be seen and heard, not just the commercial-entertainment formats.

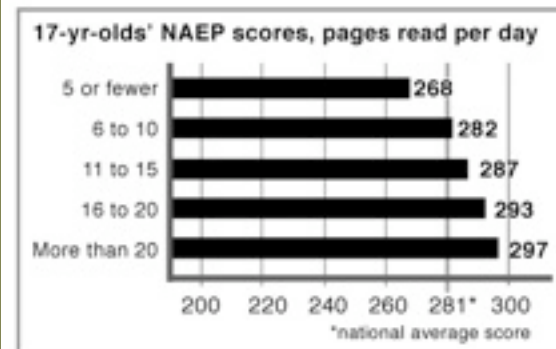
Conversely, the at-risk child’s summer too often includes: a home *without* books, magazines or newspapers, and without adults who read avidly; no car by which to leave a dangerous neighborhood; no bookstores or a convenient library; a daily routine in which the child seldom meets new people, new experiences, or new vocabulary, thus no growth in background knowledge; and little likelihood that educational or informational TV or radio will be seen or heard.

The adage “If you don’t use it, you lose it,” proves true for children who live these kinds of summers. Without reading role models and someone to read to them, without printed material, and without new experiences, the reading skills grow rusty and waste away.

How to prevent the traditional summer reading loss? The research gives great support to summer *reading*—reading *to* the child and reading *by* the child. Jimmy Kim’s study of 1,600 sixth-graders in 18 schools showed that the reading of four to six books (chapter books) during the summer was

enough to alleviate summer loss. He further noted that when schools required either a report/essay be written about a book read during the summer or that parents verify a student had read one summer book, this increased greatly the chances of it being read.

By every measure we have, those children who read the most outside school, also read the best. In simple terms: the more pages, the higher the scores; and the chart below from the National Assessment of Educational Progress demonstrates it perfectly.



Most libraries have summer reading programs, so make sure *your* child is enrolled and participates. And take your child on field trips—even if you just visit local places like a fire station, the museum, or the zoo, and talk and listen. As for availability of books, the public library has all the books you could want—for free. And keep in mind, a 50-cent used copy of *Charlotte’s Web* has the same words in it as a brand new \$15 copy. Used books count and they’re a lot cheaper.

For children who are not used to reading for more than brief periods of time it’s important at first to limit their SSR (sustained silent reading) to ten or fifteen minutes. Later, when they are used to reading in this manner and are more involved in books, the period can be extended—often at the child’s