showing no detrimental effects on learning (and some positive effects) from TV viewing up to 10 hours a week, after which the scores begin to decline.

In short, the Greeks had it right 2000 years ago: Moderation in all things. Ten hours of weekly TV equals 520 hours of TV a year. That stands in contrast to the annual amount of screen time (TV-DVD-video) for today’s child: 1,460 hours—the equivalent of watching “Gone With the Wind” 392 times a year.

Any parent looking for the courage and example to use in limiting family viewing need look no further than Sonya Carson, a poverty-line, single-parent with a third-grade education who limited her children’s TV-hours to three hours a week, required them to read two books a week, and produced an engineer and one of the world’s pre-eminent brain surgeons (Dr. Ben Carson). Her story can be found in her son Ben’s memoir, Gifted Hands, now a popular movie starring Cuba Gooding (DVD available); see also:
• www.trelease-on-reading.com/rah-ch9.html
• www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/car1bio-1

The hidden reading tutor in each TV set

Whether you’re a high- or low-end user of TV, one thing should be done to make the most of it whenever it’s in use: turn on closed-captioning. Finland’s children don’t start formal schooling until age-seven, yet achieve the highest reading scores in the world. Finnish families also are among the highest users of closed-captioning because more than half of everything shown on Finnish TV is captioned (most of the shows’ dialogs are in languages other than Finnish). To understand such shows, a child must be able to read Finnish— and read it fast!

Therefore it’s logical to assume that reasonable doses of captioned television will do no harm and most likely will help with reading just by print exposure. Originally intended for the hearing impaired, decoders cost $250 back in the 1980s but now the chip is built into every TV sold in the U.S. and available for free via the menu button on the TV remote. Captioning is available on most DVDs as well. One could say it’s the free reading tutor in every home.

A first-grade teacher told me about a little girl entering her class one September. “On the first day of school, she was already reading on a third-grade level. That’s always unusual but what made it more so was that her parents were both deaf. Normally the hearing child of deaf parents is language deficient and therefore behind—but this child was three years ahead. I could hardly wait to conference with the parents. They beamed and explained that she’d had closed-captioning all her life.”

Do the same things apply to computers and iPods and cell phones? To some degree, but that’s a subject for a separate brochure in this series, as well as in The Read-Aloud Handbook.

All of the statistics and facts included here are footnoted in T release’s Read-Aloud Handbook (Penguin 2006). © Jim Trelease 2011. For details on downloading free copies of this and other brochures, see: www.trelease-on-reading.com/brochures.html
With electronic media now the dominant force in a child’s life (outside of family), it should be included in any discussion of schooling. Does it help literacy at all or is it all harm? Anything that played such a pivotal role in public awareness about Vietnam, the Civil Rights struggle, the fall of the Berlin Wall, hurricane Katrina’s tragic aftermath, and more recent events across the globe—such a source can’t be all bad, can it?

**What exactly Is so wrong with TV?**

Let’s start with toddlers and work upward. When the daily viewing habits of 2,500 children were tracked and examined by researchers at Seattle’s Children’s Hospital, the doctors concluded that for each hour of daily TV viewed by the child, the risk of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder by age 7 increased by 10 percent. (ADHD is now the most common childhood behavioral disorder.)

In light of that, the Kaiser Family Foundation’s media research offers statistics that don’t bode well for future classrooms:

- Among children age two or younger, 59 percent watch TV daily and 42 percent watch DVD’s or videos;
- Among children age two or younger, average daily screen time is 2:48 hours (TV plus DVD-video);
- Televisions are a permanent part of the bedroom for 30 percent of children by age three and 43 percent of children by age six;
- In homes with children age six or younger, the TV is left on at least 50 percent of the time,

School scores with TV in- and out-of-bedroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3rd-grs. math scores</th>
<th>3rd-grs. reading scores</th>
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</thead>
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<td>w/ TV</td>
<td>No TV</td>
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**Is there a safe amount of TV for children?**

The greatest academic damage done may not be from the shows viewed but by what is *not being done* during those many hours each week of sitting passively in front of the TV: games not played, chores not done, drawings not drawn, hobbies not worked, friends not made or played with, homework not done, bikes or skateboards not ridden, balls not caught, books not read, and conversations not held. I hear parents call it “my babysitter”—but if there were a babysitter who deprived your child of all those activities, you’d ban her from your home, wouldn’t you?

The TV-dosage recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics calls for ten hours a week, and *no TV* for children under two. This is based on a research analysis of 23 studies with 87,025 children,