

# COOK'S CORNER

## PREPARE FOR SUMMER!

May

### 10 Facts Parents Should Know About Reading!

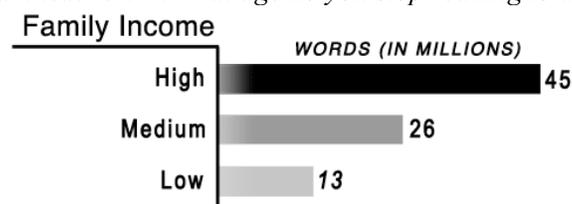
**1. READING** is the most important subject in school. Why? Because a child needs reading in order to master most of the *other* subjects. It's *extremely* difficult to do word problems in math if you can't read the words. How can you answer the questions in social studies or science if you can't read and understand the textbook? *If it's so important, how does a child "get good at it?"*

**2. ACROSS** the world, children who read the most, read the best. That includes all social levels—rich or poor, urban or suburban. Among all incomes, the more they read at home, the higher they score, but the biggest gain for low income students is when they are truly engaged in reading. *So how do we get all students to read more at home?*

**3. WE** humans are pleasure-seekers, doing things over and over if we *like it*. We go to favorite restaurants and order the food and beverages we *like*, not the stuff we dislike. So if you want to ensure children visit "reading" more often, make sure they *like it* more than they *don't*. *How do we get them to like it that much?*

**4. READ** aloud to them, even as infants. Initially, the sound of your voice is a beacon of calmness, conditioning the child to associate you and the book with security. As the child grows, so too does the time you should spend reading in one sitting, from a few minutes to at least 20 minutes, from picture books to chapter books. *I can see the benefits for younger children but I thought my 1st-grader was supposed to come home and read to me. How can he get better at reading if I'm doing the reading?*

**5. LISTENING** comprehension comes before reading comprehension. You must hear a word before you can say it or read and write it. If you've never heard the word "enormous" in a meaningful way, you won't understand it when it's time to read or write it. There's a kind of "word reservoir" in a child's brain and one of the jobs of a parent is to pour so many words into it that it overflows into speech and then reading and writing. By age four, high-income children have heard 45 million words from their families and low-income children have heard just 13 million. That's a 32 million-word difference equaling one year's head start for the advantaged child. **HUGE FACTOR:** a child spends 900 hours a year in school and 7,800 hours at home. Who's the most important teacher? *At what age do you stop reading to a child?*



**6. CHILDREN** usually read on one level and listen on a higher level. It's usually not until eighth grade that the reading level catches up to the listening level. This means that first-graders can hear and understand third- and fourth-grade books they can't read yet. These chapter books gradually introduce them to new words, new ideas, and the world beyond their neighborhood—

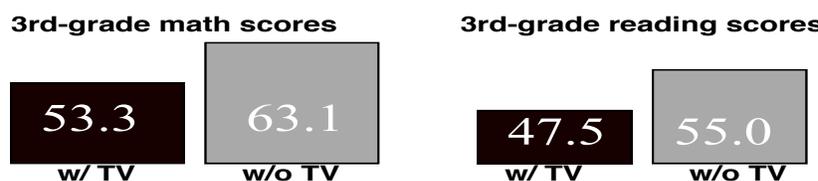
and that, in turn, helps them better understand what they need to read in their school books. Simple sentences in Dr. Seuss books like “Hop on Pop” were written to be read *by* beginning readers *to* themselves; that’s why the cover label reads “I Can Read It All by Myself.” Six-year olds are capable of understanding sentences that are longer and richer than “All Fall. Fall off the wall” but an adult must help by reading richer sentences like, “Mr.

McGregor was on his hands and knees planting out cabbages, but he jumped up and ran after Peter, waving a rake and calling out, “Stop thief!” (The Tale of Peter Rabbit) *What about families that can’t afford books?*

**7. THE** top winter Olympians come from states where they have the most ice and snow. Reading research shows that children who come from homes with the most print—books, magazines, and newspapers—have the highest reading scores. They also use the library more than those with lower scores. Libraries have the most and best books in the world—all for *free*. Remember: a used book for 50 cents—like you find in garage sales or thrift shops—has the same words as a brand new copy for \$12.95. Reading families use the **3 B’s** (to help the **3 R’s**): *Books, Bathroom, and Bed Lamp*. Make sure there’s a box for books and magazines in the bathroom for idle or captive moments, and add one near the kitchen table. Install a reading lamp near the child’s bed and allow the privilege of staying up 15 minutes later to read (or just look at book’s pictures) in bed. It might be the most important night school he’ll ever attend.

**8. THERE** is a strong connection between over-viewing of TV by children and underachieving in school. Simply put: those who watch the most know the least. Research shows that up to 10 TV-hours a week has no impact on children’s grades but beyond that the grades decline. Sixty percent of children now have a TV in their bedroom. Oh-no! A side-by-side comparison of third-graders’ math and reading scores tells it all in the chart below—scores of children with or without a TV in their bedroom. The average child spends 1,460 hours a year watching TV/DVD’s and playing computer games—equal to watching “Gone With the Wind” 392 times in a year (there are only 365 days a year and that movie is **4 HOURS LONG!** That means for 27 days within the year you would have to watch the movie again. That is equivalent to 8 hours a day for 27 days!. No wonder a good deal of kids in the USA struggle with reading. *What about buying the computer programs or tapes you see advertised on TV that teaches reading?*

***The Impact on Test Scores for Students who have a TV in their bedroom***



**9. THE** most economical device to teach reading is already in your home. Finland’s children have the highest reading scores in the world and they use this device more than any other country—and it’s *free!* It’s *closed-captioning* on the TV. Turn it on by using the “menu” button on the remote to reach the “cc” area. Children unconsciously absorb the sight of the words and their sounds, making connections to how print is used. It’s like having a free magazine subscription in the home. All print counts. *What about recorded books—do they count?*

**10. WHILE** a recorded voice is not as good as a live adult who can stop and explain something in the story, it’s better than nothing. It’s also a great assist for the parent who has a reading disability or for whom English is a second language. (Incidentally, reading to a child in a foreign language accomplishes many of the same things—feeds vocabulary and builds a bridge to the love of reading and books.) Public libraries have huge collections of audio books—all available for *free*.