

Book lovers have good reason to find April D.E.A.R.

By LORI McNEIL, M.B.A., M.Ed.

Most have known for generations the importance of storytelling and reading to your child when they are young to help build literacy skills. Recent research supports this and has led to campaigns that encourage reading to children from 15 to 30 minutes each day to help increase skill level.

Beverly Cleary wrote dozens of children's books that have made their way into libraries all over the world and provided exciting adventures for young readers since 1950. Ramona Quimby is the main character in many of Cleary's books.

Beverly Cleary wrote about D.E.A.R. in "Ramona Quimby, Age 8." Since then, "Drop Everything and Read" programs have been held nationwide on April 12 in honor of Mrs. Cleary's birthday (she turns 101 this year). HarperCollins Children's Books, the publisher of all of Cleary's books, decided to adopt the entire month of April and launch an annual campaign celebrating the life of Beverly Cleary by encouraging reading all month!

Drop Everything And Read is a great time to focus on increasing the daily amount of time you and your child spend reading, as well as engage in activities that will sup-

port literacy skills and a life-long love of reading.

April is the right time of year to get outside! Exploring and experiencing settings with the five senses helps kids make lasting connections between what they read in a book and the real world. For example, when you take your child for a walk, have intentional conversations about what they notice, what they smell or what rocks, sticks, and leaves feel like. Most kids also like collecting things. Maybe the next book they will want to read will be about geology.

Try and help your child make links between the things experienced on the walk and something in a book they recently read. Did you recently read about flying a kite, camping, swimming, or going to the park? If so, these are all things that can help to make other connections on your walk.

Intentionally using larger vocabulary words when communicating with your child will help increase their own vocabulary. Don't worry if they don't know what the words mean, use the opportunity to engage your child in a conversation. Building vocabulary is an excellent way to assist reading skills.



Lori McNeil's new book offers many suggestions for reading in the great outdoors.

Something as simple as a going for a walk can actually be turned into a huge literacy building activity! You might also take a book along and find a nice place to stop and read together. Increasing the number of minutes your child spends reading or that you spend reading together is a great investment of time.

In our technology-based society, most people have cell phones, iPads, laptops and other electronics that they never leave home without. Don't forget to interact with your child as much as possible by participating in activities where

technology is not necessary. For instance, on a camping trip, instead of reading on a Kindle or playing a hand-held video game, take a hardback to read so your child can help turn the pages, feel the paper, and interact with the actual book. This will inspire family bonding and deepen their connection with reading. Technology has many good educational uses but sometimes allowing children a more traditional experience provides unique learning opportunities. Maintaining balance is key.

As we celebrate D.E.A.R. Month, try brainstorming creative ways that you and your family can increase literacy skills. Spend more time reading, making new associations to books that have been read, increasing vocabulary, and creating opportunities for deeper critical thinking. These opportunities are all around us, every single day. You only need to Drop Everything And Read.

Baker City resident Lori McNeil has been an educator for nearly 20 years, teaching all grade levels.

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