



Supporting Families as Literacy Mentors

By FRANKI SIBBERSON

Access to books is the most critical piece to a child developing a lifelong love of reading. As readers grow, their tastes and needs as readers change. In order to develop lifelong habits of readers, access to books is critical. Choice, independence, and agency are key to lifelong reading.



LITERACY CHAMPION: FRANKI SIBBERSON

Franki Sibbersson taught elementary students in Dublin, Ohio, for 33 years. She is a thought leader in literacy, with a specific focus on literacy workshop, student agency, readers in grades 3-6, and digital literacy. Franki is past president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). She has co-authored numerous publications and books including *Beyond Leveled Books*, *Still Learning to Read*, *Day-to-Day Assessment in the Reading Workshop*, and *Digital Reading: What's Essential?* Franki holds a Masters and a Bachelor's degree in reading from Bowling State University.



One to Know: Promoting Literacy for All

Those of us who have dedicated our lives to promoting literacy, especially for America's schoolchildren, can also have a wider impact beyond school and help families at home. We want home reading experiences for children to always be authentic and joyful.

What Our Children Need to Grow as Avid Readers

In order to become lifelong readers, our children need support throughout their reading lives. Book choice at any age supports growth in reading identity, agency, and development as a reader. Young readers are introduced the joys of reading when they are surrounded by teachers, family members, and peers who share and talk about books and reading in natural and authentic ways—helping children see the possibilities for their own lives as readers. Finding books with diverse representation, books by #ownvoices authors, and books that support

growth as readers and as human beings are key as readers learn and change. In order to grow as readers, we want every child to be part of a vibrant reading community.

What does being part of a reading community look like? At its core, it means lots and lots of talk about books with people in their lives—listening to and discussing books, attending author events, following information on new book releases, paying careful attention to series books, and seeking book recommendations from other readers.

We know that lifelong readers:

- know books
- know other readers
- have relationships around books
- pay attention to new books coming out
- have favorite authors or series
- have evolving tastes and needs as readers
- attend events for readers (e.g., story hours, author events, etc.)
- participate in book clubs
- recommend books to others
- foster relationships with other readers in their lives
- read for a variety of reasons

What to Know and Do

Beginning with families, we can share what we as educators know about literacy—how readers develop as well as ways to strengthen that development over the course of a child's life.

Build a Home Reading Culture

Families can be their children's best mentors. All family members can help to create a strong culture of reading at home. Without a deep understanding of the complexities of reading development, families and caregivers often rely solely on reading levels to find appropriate books for their children, which is only one small part of book choice. Families and caregivers may also fall back on books they knew and loved and children. Whether they purchase books on their own or they rely on book donations and libraries, parents benefit from more information about the best ways to support their growing readers. Access to family engagement workshops is essential. Families can access information about supporting their developing readers via web content, e-newsletters, podcasts, and, most importantly, the intentional use of all social media channels. Content might include:

- demonstrating how to select books at different stages of reading
- explaining the power of series books
- getting to know authors
- creating a culture of reading in your home
- finding time to talk about books in your busy life
- promoting the power of graphic novels and audiobooks as part of a reading diet
- inviting children to read a variety of texts and for a variety of purposes

Literacy Advocacy Beyond the Home

There are many national, state, regional, and community organizations—government, NGOs, and nonprofits—dedicated to promoting lifelong reading. When we work closely with these organizations, we can better support readers. Because our families are connected through various community organizations, important literacy support may happen in schools, day cares, clinics, nonprofits, corporations, libraries, pediatricians' offices, and more. Each organization will have different goals and needs in its quest for supporting habits of lifelong readers.

The support we might offer includes:

- developing resources and tools for family engagement workshops
- planning professional development for teachers, facilitators, and volunteers
- sharing new books that match community needs
- providing information about books and authors that staff and families know and can share with children
- maximizing the benefit of every donated dollar (getting the biggest bang for the buck)
- sharing easy book-talking skills
- supporting adult readers in the community
- creating book displays that are accessible to children and families
- curating materials for professional development, volunteer training, and parent education
- connecting with reading researchers, experts, and trade and professional authors

Customizing our literacy advocacy in strategic, sustainable ways will allow us to help families support young readers over time. Community literacy advocacy works best when we are responsive to the needs of the families we are attempting to serve.

Building relationships across families will create partnerships that will support children throughout their reading lives.

More to Know and Do

What can you do to support children, families, and organizations strengthen their commitment to lifelong literacy? Specific ideas to begin this work include:

- creating newsletters for families and organizations to help them support readers
- sharing pertinent research in easy-to-access-and-absorb ways
- announcing and sharing book titles regularly
- creating and curating social media content that educates families and communities
- connecting with local groups or initiatives that support families and literacy

When we support families in understanding the changing needs of readers and the ways they can build literacy into their daily lives, we also support readers on their journey to become lifelong readers.

You can connect with Franki Sibberson here:

<https://www.frankisibberson.com/what-we-do>