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To our Bookelicious partners for making it possible for all children to discover themselves as readers—and then, for providing the books that feed their read.

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And finally, to our Bring Me a Book founder Judy Koch, a former middle school English teacher, who, in the early 90s, took over the family’s manufacturing plant and established a workplace library, so her largely immigrant employees could take home and read the same beautiful books to their children that she was reading aloud to her children. Thus, when her employees would leave for work, their children would remind them, “bring me a book!” From these roots, twenty-five years ago, was born the nonprofit foundation Bring Me a Book. Judy, your passion for service, generosity of spirit, deep expertise of children's literature, and the importance of “read it again!” stories—plus, your indefatigable drive—make all things possible. And no one has better ideas than you.

Thank you to one and all – with admiration and gratitude always,

[Signature]

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INTRODUCTION

The Power of Joyful Reading Impact Report

This Impact Report details our collaborations across the country with our designated Literacy Champions. Through case studies, vignettes, and testimonials, the report highlights the various ways in which the Literacy Champions implemented Bring Me a Book’s mission and vision:

Bring Me a Book serves as a catalyst for community literacy. We help children grow a reading habit, by providing books, choice, and family engagement—with sustained support from the public library.

When we help all children thrive through the joy and power of reading, we leverage literacy to create a more humane and hopeful world for us all.
Background

In the fall of 2021, the Bring Me a Book National School Consortium launched an action research study to determine the necessary personal, social, and environmental factors that help children develop a sustainable reading routine in a school setting.

Twenty-two educators working in eight states utilized the six components that frame our foundation’s model and are essential for children’s reading lives:

1. **Access to Books**
   Our goal is book abundance—children need access to books (and lots of them) wherever they are—in their homes, classrooms, schools, and in their communities.

2. **Reader Agency, Identity, and Choice**
   Children are twice as likely to read a book they have chosen themselves.

3. **Time to Read and Talk about Books**
   Reading is social. Children thrive as readers when they have time to read their books—as well as talk about them with others, particularly, with their peers.

4. **Family Engagement**
   Families are children’s first teachers—and their influence on children’s reading lives is immeasurable, especially when parents model their own reading lives and create a reading culture in the home.

5. **Teacher Professional Growth and Leadership**
   Teachers who share their own joy of reading have the greatest impact on their students; as scholar Shirley Brice Heath once wrote, “The single most important condition for literacy learning is the presence of mentors who are joyfully literate people.” But teachers and administrators also need access to current multi-dimensional research as well as time to absorb professional information, to meet and discuss the implications with their colleagues; and time and support to implement innovative and impactful practices in their own classrooms (Routman, 2018; Renwick, 2022).

6. **Community Engagement: Partnerships with School and Public Libraries**
   Libraries are our “literacy equalizer” and “social safety net” (Farmer, 2021) because they are free, open to all, and offer the resources we need to live, learn, and thrive. High-achieving schools tend to have rich and extensive library collections—staffed by professional librarians—and more students who read frequently (Lance & Kachel, 2021).
What follows are the reports, stories, guidelines, and testimonials from our year of promoting and supporting book abundance, time to read, and a commitment to partnering with school and local libraries. While some of our time was compromised by Covid19 and other factors affecting schools and communities during the pandemic, we distributed:

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| 7,000 books | 1,000 children | 8 different states.

This quote from a third grade teacher summarizes our work:

When students learned that their books had arrived, they all got smiles on their faces. They really felt connected to their books because Bring Me a Book made it a priority to not just place any book in their hands, but to really make sure that it connected to what each individual student loved. When I asked one of my students, they said that they were so excited to get books that were finally theirs. I appreciate all that Bring Me a Book has done for my class.

—Vanessa Villavicencio-Gomez | 3rd Grade Teacher, Aspire, East Palo Alto, CA.
Foreword

Reading Is a Birthright

Regie Routman

In the abundance that is America, it’s heartbreaking and unforgivable that millions of children in under-resourced schools and neighborhoods lack free and easy access to books in their homes, classrooms, schools, public libraries, and communities. These children must be provided the nourishment, information, and learning about diverse lives, histories, and cultures that books deliver. All our youth must be afforded the key to unlocking the beautiful and limitless language of literature, of well told stories, of poetry, adventure, humor, of fiction and nonfiction narratives in all genres, forms, and formats—in short, the endowment of becoming and being a reader, which is their birth right. Anything less is a violation of human rights.

I’ve been teaching reading in under-resourced schools for five decades. I am also a ravenous reader. What I know for sure about being a reader is that you need to be surrounded by books and authors that you love and have dedicated time to read and talk every day about your chosen books. Voracious reading makes you a stronger, confident, more discerning reader. I also know for sure that public, school, classroom, and home libraries are necessary for living a full and rich life as openminded and responsible citizens who have developed empathy for others and openness to other points of view, largely through books and thoughtful conversations around them.

In the Impact Report, you will hear, see, and learn about how unique school projects in varying locales and states have contributed to book abundance, choice, and ownership in a way that engages children, families, caregivers, teachers, and gives all who come to love books a voice at the table. While teaching students how to read is, of course, essential, teaching students to become readers who love to read and live to read is momentous in ways not fully measurable. You will also see and learn in the Impact Report how the transformational power of books has forever changed students’ lives, as well as the lives of their teachers, librarians, and families.
Preface

Research and the Case for Pleasure Reading

For decades, researchers and practitioners have acknowledged that reading builds healthy brains. More than 20 years ago, eminent reading researcher Keith Stanovich noted that reading builds a “cognitive processing infrastructure” that then “massively influences” every aspect of our thinking, particularly our crystallized intelligence—a person’s depth and breadth of general knowledge, vocabulary, and the ability to reason using words and numbers (Stanovich, 2003).

Specifically, children who read for pleasure shine academically—not only in their wide-ranging knowledge of the world, but also, in their vocabulary development, spelling, writing, math, and technology prowess (Sullivan & Brown, 2013; Krashen, 2011; 2021; Cho, et al., 2015).

Reading also educates the imagination, “… kindling the spirit of creativity in every human heart” (Jago, 2011). And reading fiction, in particular, expands the heart, making us more empathetic (Oatley, 2014; Bal & Veltkamp, 2013).

We also now know that reading even lowers stress levels. Neuropsychologist David Lewis (2009) found that only six minutes of reading a day can reduce stress by 68 percent. The concentration that reading requires helps to slow our heart rate, ease tension in our muscles, and center the mind.

And, the benefits extend from cradle to grave: adults who read 30 minutes a day live two years longer than their nonreading peers. (Bavishi, et al., 2016). Additionally, the latest neuroscience research found that the more frequently you are read to as a child, the healthier your brain in older life (Rajan, et.al, 2022). This means that reading has an impact that expands across your lifespan.

Reading makes us smarter, kinder, and more civically engaged.
Why is Reading Missing From School?

The benefits of pleasure reading are immeasurable (Miller & Lesesne, 2022; Bridges, 2014), and the more our children read, the more they succeed. Children who read an hour a day typically score in the 98th percentile on standardized tests (Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding, 1988), which often are consequential to students’ advancement and academic success.

Given the benefits of pleasure reading—both academically and personally—why is it that most schools still provide so little time to read in school? In one survey, only a third of the educators interviewed said that they offered daily time to read at school; by some estimates, students are still only reading extended text for about 7 minutes a day—and yet, all educators surveyed agreed that time to read is essential (Hoddinott, 2022).

As will be highlighted through case studies, vignettes, and testimonials throughout this Impact Report, we will demonstrate how Bring Me a Book is committed to addressing this disparity and encouraging the importance of giving children time to read both in school and at home.

With all best wishes,

Lois Bridges, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Bring Me a Book
bringmeabook.org

Research Note

Fostering a love of reading is essential because the role of reading volume (time spent reading and pages of text processed) is the key to both personal and academic success. Indeed, time spent engaged in independent reading is the strongest predictor of reading achievement and the best predictor of gains in reading achievement for second through fifth-graders (Allington & McGill Franzen, 2021; Mol & Bus, 2011).
SECTION 1: HOME

Families are the first, the best, and the most reliable teachers of their children.
–Alma Flor Ada, Children’s Book Author, Professor Emerita, San Francisco University

Children who grow up in homes replete with books, and rich opportunities to talk about books, have the best chance of growing into avid readers (Evans, et al., 2010). Book access in the home comes in multiple forms—families purchase the books, children receive books from school-sponsored book events or classroom donations, or parents fill their homes with books they borrow from the public library. All families are best served by expert information about the nature of literacy and how it develops most effectively in growing readers. At Bring Me a Book, we believe that families benefit from knowing how to:

- establish a library habit; make trips to the public library part of their family routine
- select books across grades, ages, and ability levels for their children
- harness the power of series books
- help their children identify their favorite authors
- create a home reading culture
- find time in their busy lives to talk about books as a family
- draw on the power of graphic novels and audiobooks as part of a robust reading diet
- invite children to read a variety of texts for a variety of purposes

In this section, we outline how the home environment is essential for helping children develop a healthy reading habit and build their own identities as readers. Here we share vignettes from our literacy champions’ work with their own children (who identify as “super readers” – as defined by our board member, Alan Boyko, and further illuminated by Allyn and Morrell, 2022) and vignettes of the positive impact of family literacy nights.
Shaping the Brain

Reading aloud is more than just picking up a book.

This enriching, integrated experience builds a bond between a new parent and their baby, helps young children gain reading fluency, supports the acquisition of new languages, and promotes reader choice and reader agency.

Research has long demonstrated reading aloud supports children’s development and is connected to later academic success (Meier, 2003; Elley, 1989; Pemberton & Watkins, 1987; Cornell, 1993).

In fact, research has shown that reading aloud will expand children’s knowledge of words. Consider the following numbers. This data demonstrates how many words a child would have heard by the age of five if they were read to every day, or not at all (Grabemeier, 2019):

- Never read to: 4,662 words
- Read to 1–2 times per week: 63,570 words
- Read to 3–5 times per week: 169,520 words
- Read to daily: 296,660 words
- Read to daily with an average of five books a day: 1,483,300 words.

Building on the value and importance of reading aloud, book access, and book choice from a young age, the American Association of Pediatrics released updated guidelines in 2014 encouraging families to making reading aloud a routine at home.

Think about this for a moment: the same organization that develops guidelines for what foods your child should eat and what physical activities will help your child stay healthy is now including reading aloud as part of a necessary component of your child's healthy development (Rajan, 2022).
Reading, books, and supporting early literacy are as important as feeding your child healthy foods and promoting exercise.

In my latest research, my colleagues and I found that being read aloud to at a young age significantly increased brain volume and cortical structure in later life. To clarify, imagine your brain is a sphere: brain volume corresponds to the inside of the sphere and cortical structure is the outside thickness of the sphere (Rajan, 2022).

So, what does that mean?

Reading aloud actually shapes the brain.

If these numbers and decades of research continue to show us the value and importance of reading, reading aloud, and providing children with access to books and book choice, why then does research also show that while 30 percent of parents read aloud to their child from birth, that time significantly decreases from one hour to 15 minutes in just a few years (Read Aloud Survey, 2022)?

The numbers can't be ignored. We have always known the importance of reading, reading aloud, and giving children access to books. Decades of research support what we have always believed.

And Bring Me A Book is a model for this work. We have found that when children have access to high quality work and get to choose the books they want to read, they are 50% more likely to read and develop a healthy reading habit.

The responsibility now lies on us – as parents, caregivers, educators, researchers – to encourage children to pick up a book instead of a device, to carve time into our busy schedules to read together, to show children in our communities that reading isn't just a hobby or pastime – it's a necessity for developing a healthy lifestyle and healthy brain.
Read it Again, Mama!

This afternoon, once backpacks were piled in the hallway baskets and lunchboxes were dismantled, after steaming quesadillas and apple slices with assorted nut butters, I reread two of Oge Mora’s books with my two youngest girls, Eloisa and Ezzat. I love when my kids pair off and I get two-to-one Mama time, when they’re less climbing and clamoring for my attention like little bears but, more calm and willing to slow down. The sun slanted sideways through the windows, and though it’s still brisk outside, it felt warm indoors where we sat on the hardwood, legs outstretched. I would guess these books have been read by my kids at least 100 times, no exaggeration, as they’re the every-night requests, no matter how tired we all are, no matter how many other library books are stacked in their bins. Oge Mora is never out of rotation.

Ezzat and Eloisa bury their noses in their favorite Oge Mora books.

Eloisa flips through Thank You Omu! by Oge Mora.

Ezzat reading Saturday by Oge Mora aloud.
All four of my kids love to read, even the two youngest who glean information from pictures alone, but Ehsan strikes me as an especially Super Reader. He reminds me of myself at eight, when I would tote books everywhere and become irate if I didn’t have my stories with me.

He is the very same. Last May when we traveled to Florida—our first trip after not leaving our house in two years—he lugged a stack of hefty Rick Riordan fantasy novels downstairs.

“Buddy, what about clothes?” I asked.

“You’re just bringing books?”

“I don’t really need anything else,” he replied.

“We’re only going for four days, Azizam, you really think you’ll read a book a day?”

In the end, I convinced him to take only two, but when he finished them beachside he started to cry actual tears.

"Becoming a reader has as much to do with developing a reading identity as acquiring any predetermined set of skills."

—Frank Serafini

Eshan reads at the kitchen table.
It wasn’t until I was in college that I was introduced to authors who shared my culture, such as Rudolfo Anaya. I grew up in the isolated Mojave Desert town of Barstow, California in a time before there was easy access to the internet. However, I never felt lonely because I was always surrounded by my family and books. For entertainment, we would sit out in the yard around a campfire in the evenings where my father and grandfather would tell stories about our family’s rich history. They would also read classic books to us after dinner, such as Homer’s “The Iliad.” I remember that my mother used to take my sister and me to the public library as a reward on Fridays. We always looked forward to the presentations and activities that went along with each story. These experiences are what motivated me to create similar family engagement activities for my students and their parents. Through the Urbita Family Literacy Project, I want to teach parents how to connect with their children through literature and to share the gift that my family gave me.
Family Literacy Night

"Mrs. Burkins! Mrs. Burkins! Last night was magical. My mom loved our family reading night."
—Brayden, age 8

Holding a family literacy night can provide a meaningful experience for students as well as their families. It is a unique way to bring families into the reading lives of their children. One key to success is to get students involved in the planning for the event, as well as the execution. That participation and buy-in means the students have ownership of the event and it creates a rich and satisfying experience. What follows is a description of a virtual family literacy night, planned and executed with my third-grade class.

Read full essay
Knowing Our Kids as Both People and Readers

As the mother of two boys who are opposite in every way possible, I know that I need to navigate my selections and suggestions for them in everything, including books. This is a tale of two brothers: A tale of two brothers, both born in November, one year apart, one with blonde hair, one with brown.

A tale of two brothers, both ready to take on the world, one cautious and calculated, carefully evaluating his next move; one running at the chance to jump over a rainbow (if he can find his shoes and remember to put them on!).

A tale of two brothers, both following their passion, one running to join every team, throwing each ball and hitting each puck with precision and strength; one floating on a cloud, diving into each opportunity with creativity and optimism.

A tale of two brothers both giving their all to everything they do and excelling in their individual passions; one on the football field and in the hockey rink, one in the studio and on the stage.

Read full essay
SUMMARY

Impact in the Home

In this section, our impact report demonstrated the importance of books at home. Book access, book choice, and family engagement in reading are all contributing factors in supporting children’s reading habit and helping children grow into avid readers (Neuman & Celano, 2010; Litwin & Pepin, 2020).

Reading is now a necessary and vital part of children's development – research and data that have been highlighted through the American Association of Pediatrics.

Books in the home environment were also pathways for supporting children’s reading lives through connections with school and the local public library. Through portraits and case studies in Illinois, California, Ohio, and Washington, D.C. we can see the power of children identifying as “super readers,” and the shared joy of reading engagement through family literacy nights.

Ultimately, children may have access to books in a variety of settings and environments, but the most important place to start building a child's reader identity and reading habit is at home.

Eshan reads aloud to younger sister, Eloisa.
SECTION 2: CLASSROOM

“Placing students in a daily book flood zone produces much more reading than occasionally taking them to the library. There is something powerful about surrounding kids with interesting books. I have 2,000 books in my room, and because of this, my students do a lot more reading. Establishing a book flood is probably the single most important thing I have done in my teaching career.” —Kelly Gallagher, High School Teacher, (2009 52-53)

As we provide access to books, we:

- Help our students discover themselves as readers (Muhammad, 2020)
- Help them establish a reading habit—both at school and at home
- Introduce our students to a variety of books—different topics, genres, and formats
- Help them learn to choose books that feed their unique interests and preferences (Wilhelm & Smith, 2013)

As we build a community of readers in our classrooms, schools, districts, and students’ homes, we:

- Make reading a pleasurable habit—the first step toward becoming a lifelong reader
- Establish reading plans—real readers are always anticipating what they might read next
- Understand that to engage in a meaningful way with a good book is one of the most potent ways in which we learn, grow, and change as human beings (Wynter-Hoyte, et al., 2022)

In this section, we share vignettes, case studies, and stories of the value of building classroom libraries (Miller & Sharp, 2022), and the ways in which our Literacy Champions uplifted and inspired children across the country through books.
Red moons are rare, occurring only once or twice a year when the moon is totally eclipsed by the earth. Hidden in darkness, the full moon glows in crimson luminescence for a few hours, a delicious astonishment set into the glittered night sky. We toast them with our cameras and marvel at their brilliance.

A just-right book is a red moon.

For Bria, a second grader at Stonebrook Elementary in Cleveland, OH her just right book was the very first book she could read independently, *Rhyming Dust Bunnies*. When she found she could read the book on her own, she cradled it close and wanted to read it to anyone who would listen. For Teri that book was *Hello Crabby*. Because of Bring Me a Book, both of these readers were able to get their very own copies of their chosen books to take home.
The students and teachers in Paradise have experienced a series of tragedies and challenges the past few years including the horrific Camp Fire which destroyed their school and entire town. On November 8, 2018, the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in the history of California raged through the beautiful town of Paradise, California ruining everything in its path. About 93% of the students in the school district lost their homes in the inferno. From that fateful morning when the Camp Fire’s flames ravaged the town, the teachers in Paradise heroically stepped into action and their lives were changed forever. The district set up makeshift classrooms in stores, churches, and schools in neighboring towns. Teachers scrambled to gather books and materials. Returning to school provided the recovering town with a sense of normalcy.
Our Literacy Champion Islah Tauheed worked with two teachers, third grade teacher Melissa Bowman and kindergarten teacher Elena Vela; over the course of the school year, each child chose six books to take home, read, and keep.

We interviewed Elana at the end of the school year to learn more about her experience helping her kinders learn to regard themselves as readers with their own unique interests and book preferences.

“They now see reading as a fun, exciting thing, which has made it easier to teach them how to read because they love looking at books. And they go home and they say, “Oh, I’m so excited to read this to my sister,” or “I’m excited to show my friend this book.”
Kinders, First, and Third Graders Discover Their Reading Identities and Book Joy

Part 2: Phoenix, AZ

Dr. Felicia Durden is the Associate Superintendent of High Academic Standards for Students, AZ. Dept of Education. Dr. Durden championed two classrooms at Valley View Leadership Academy in Phoenix, AZ—the same school she attended as a child! While Covid and other matters delayed Valley View’s start in our pilot study, Dr. Durden brought book joy herself to the participating children just before the winter break, purchasing books for them all. Dr. Durden knows that the best, most efficient way to promote high academic standards is to give our students access to books they love and lots and lots of time to read, explore, and savor their books through discussion with their peers and teachers.

Research Note

Reading engagement is of paramount importance since engaged reading increases comprehension and long-term intrinsic motivation for reading (Guthrie, et al, 2006). Reading engagement and motivation are self-perpetuating forces (Ainley et al, 2002). The more students are motivated to read, the more engaged they are with their books and vice versa.
Kinders, First, and Third Graders Discover Their Reading Identities and Book Joy

Part 2: East Palo Alto, CA

"All of my scholars were so ecstatic when they received their books and couldn't wait to start reading... Throughout the day, when it was time to read, they were so happy and filled with so much joy to be able to read their new books. It was so wonderful to see their excitement and the way they shared their love for books with their peers."

—Third Grade Teacher, Kimberly Dinh

Equity and social justice are inseparable from developing the agency to evaluate and choose your own reading material. The benefits of book joy are immeasurable. A rich reading life that is deeply and personally satisfying is often the key to a healthier, stronger, and more fulfilling life.

Read full essay
In this section, our Impact Report highlighted the importance of books in the classroom and through school libraries. Children reveled in receiving books as gifts, engaging through author visits, and creating their own book clubs (Kittle, 2013).

We demonstrated the value of books through portraits and stories in Ohio, California, New York, and Arizona. These case studies show the value of providing children with books in their own classrooms, high-quality literature that focused on teaching and promoting a deep understanding of the world around them – as opposed to focusing merely on decoding practices (Zinke, 2017; Stephens, 2022).

Consider this— how can music teachers actually teach music without access to instruments? Similarly, we can only expect and support teachers’ reading, writing, and literacy instruction by helping to build and sustain classroom libraries. After all, books are indispensable instructional materials that belong in every classroom.
In this section, we share how powerful school libraries are in supporting strong readers—especially important since our home state, California—when compared with other states across the country—is last in its support of school libraries and librarians (Lance & Kachel, 2021).

We also address the role of professional development in helping teachers access the theory and practice—honed over decades—that supports a robust in-school independent reading program. Kids who read in volume consistently score in the top range on standardized reading tests (Harvey, Ward, Hoddinott, Carroll, 2021; and Miller & Lesesne, 2022). Clearly, time to read—and practice, practice, practice—is key! (Boyko, 2022).

We understand the importance of practice in everything we are learning to do—play soccer, learn to cook, study a musical instrument. And yet, we never talk about the need for reading practice, a fact reading researchers Elfrieda Heibert and EL Martin (2009) note:

*In any domain that one can identify—whether it be medical diagnosis, flying an aircraft, or programming computers—it would be absurd to think that someone becomes proficient without participating extensively in the activity... When it comes to teaching students to read in schools, however, little attention is paid to the amount that students read texts.* (pp. 3-4)
Reading Is Multi-Dimensional

Dr. Cecilia Espinosa

Samara Dual Language Community School, a vibrant bilingual learning community located in The Bronx, NY, is easily one of the most professionally sophisticated elementary schools in the United States. Samara offers a Spanish/English Dual Language PreK - 5th grade program. Each grade level has a team of teachers; one teacher teaches in Spanish, the other in English. Additionally, at each grade level, a bilingual special education teacher works alongside the classroom teachers. Samara embraces the belief that bilingualism is possible for all children interested in becoming bilingual. The children alternate their learning in Spanish or English by switching from their English class to their Spanish class (Espinosa & Ascenzi-Moreno, 2021).

At Samara, families and the larger surrounding community are a very important part of the successful school learning environment. The publicly displayed values that guide the school were developed by the staff and children and include a commitment to kindness, compassion, collaboration, curiosity, and persistence. In other words, everyone works together; everyone may ask questions, and this community of learners never gives up in the quest for knowledge and understanding.

Students bury their noses in their brand new self-chosen books.

Read full essay
The School Library Book Budget Project: Empowering Readers through Responsibility, Support, and Trust

“We should purchase a couple of books on ADHD, so that I can share them with my friends and they can understand what it’s like to be me.”

This comment, overheard during a conversation among fourth graders, is a microcosm of the outcomes hoped for when students are empowered to update the school library.

The project: analyze the library catalog at Mineral Point Elementary School and make recommendations for new titles. While our librarian, Micki Uppena, had updated the books available for check out over the last four years, a number of texts needed to be replaced or were missing. With this in mind, our goal was simple: Empower students to lead the curation of texts in order to improve the school library.
Bring on the Manga!

We have a group of 5th and 6th graders at Conway Elementary School working on what they want to order. They are reviewing titles and thinking about where the Manga Collection will go... how they will teach other kids how to read Manga, and most importantly, why they believe Manga is an essential new addition to the school library. "Manga" is an umbrella term for comics and graphic novels originally published in Japan.

We met with 13 students about their wish list for the Manga library. New kids have joined the group since our first meeting—a positive sign! Meg and I talked about the diversity of kids in the room... wonderful to see.

Students were in groups of three to four working on how many of each title they want to order. Meg created a Google form with the cost and availability of the titles first on their lists. Students had to solve problems with math to figure out the total cost they want to spend—and it was wonderful to watch them helping each other and imagining how popular this small collection will be. They read reviews of books they haven’t read (classics like Anne of Green Gables are now offered in Manga form and the students are interested in them).

Fifty-five 5th and 6th grade students answered a survey regarding Manga in the library.

Do you think we should build a print Manga collection in the library media center?

Impact in Conway, NH

Penny Kittle and Meg Murphy

Read full essay
Among other literary pursuits, during “Book Week,” The Primary School teachers dressed up as their favorite books (see Vida as Captain Underpants!) and the kids got to choose books from Bookelicious, sponsored by Bring Me a Book.
In this section, our Impact Report highlighted the importance of books in the school, the importance of building and sustaining school libraries, and uplifting a profession that is a necessary part of children’s schooling. Here, we demonstrated the value of books through stories in New York, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, and California. These case studies show how children were empowered through books, how books were celebrated, and how children helped to select and build their school libraries.

The late Elliot Eisner—a great arts education scholar and professor at Stanford University—once wrote of arts education that “children place value on the experiences they have in school, which is why the arts belong in every classroom.” Similarly, if we don't provide books in every school, if every school doesn’t have a school library, how will children and families place value on the importance of books and building a daily reading habit?

That responsibility cannot lie on one individual alone. All of us, as educational leaders and advocates for literacy, must promote at every chance we get, the value of helping our students become “passionate, skilled, habitual, critical readers” (Atwell, 2016).
Ideally, children have access to a children’s librarian—and access to public librarians who know and love children and have a sense of the books they want to read is key. The Reading Wish Lists that children generate through Bookelicious help keep public librarians apprised of what children currently most enjoy reading.

In this section, we highlight the value and necessity of the public library, the way it supports and uplifts readers (young and old), and how libraries are the cornerstones of our community.

Do you remember your first time at the local library? Was it after a bike ride in the summer, a school field trip, a weekend visit with your family? The public library is a magical place that has shaped the lives of many leaders, readers, and writers. Importantly, the public library provides children with access to books, support from a certified librarian in helping them choose books, and a community space that is safe for exploring new stories and diving into familiar ones.

Children read more when they see other people reading.

—Stephen Krashen, 2004
By November 2021, the new furniture had arrived but not the new shelves, so almost all of the books were still in boxes. The book count in the library was 5,797 (40% fiction and 29% nonfiction). Very few books were available to students.

As a Bring Me a Book Literacy Champion, I realized I could help. I called the Merced County Librarian Amy Taylor and connected her to Lori Gonzalez, who serves as both the El Nido principal and superintendent of this rural one-school district. Lori explained that El Nido wouldn’t be receiving the new shelves until after the first of the year. So Librarian Amy offered to loan temporary shelves to the school. And, indeed, that very week, Amy made the 15-mile country road trek to El Nido in the Merced library bookmobile with not only shelving, but also, with public library cards for every student.
Impact in Columbus, OH

Community Literacy: Access, Representation, and Choice

Access, representation, and choice are all critical for children to have positive experiences with books. Future Ready Columbus (FRC) is a collective impact organization that leads implementation of the county-wide kindergarten readiness plan, Future Ready by 5, to support children prenatal through age five, so they track for lifelong success. With grant funding, FRC is working to make book access scalable while still honoring and providing book choice for every child, family, and educator. We have found several strategies for providing choice without demanding extra time from an already understaffed early childhood workforce.

Twice a year, teachers choose books for their classroom libraries from FRC “Browsing Boxes.”

Book fair where parents and students take home books of their choice.

Community free libraries sit in lobbies of local centers.

We learned how to affordably purchase and provide new, culturally responsive books.

In her report, Franki provides helpful tips and guides to help others replicate her work.

Read full essay
While our Impact Report has thus highlighted how access to books at home, in the classroom, and throughout the school are vital for supporting children’s reading lives, the public library can be considered the cornerstone of literacy within our community.

In this section, we highlighted two case studies of how partnerships with the public library provided book abundance to children in California and how curated book collections and family books fairs in Ohio helped readers feel seen and represented.

If providing children with book access and book choice are central to building a reading habit, children need to feel engaged with the literature—representation matters and finding books and literacy experiences that reflect the community, are indispensable in supporting children and families (López-Robertson, 2021; Vu, 2021, Wynter-Hoyte, et al, 2022).
Many of the texts I read as a child have been like roadmap markers, showing me a range of life options ... helping me define myself not only as a reader, but also, as a human being.

—Dr. Alfred Tatum, Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs and Professor of Education, Metropolitan State University of Denver

For virtually all children, time spent reading in the classroom consistently accelerates their growth as readers. As Beers & Probst (2017) explain, “Giving kids time to read is necessary, not optional. And giving them the chance to discover what they want to read is also necessary. When schools choose not to do those things, they are simply failing to provide a good literacy education. And that is a bad choice.”

Any time spent promoting independent reading is time well spent (NCTE, 2017). Nevertheless, teachers, always under siege by the calendar and clock, may be tempted to eliminate this essential time for other kinds of instruction, seldom as valuable. Think of the time—and money!—that we waste on worksheets, workbooks, and test prep. Plus, as Allington and Gabriel (2016) maintain, “There are no studies demonstrating that engaging students in test prep ever improved their reading proficiency—or even their test performance. When we eliminate workbooks and test preparation materials we gain in both time and money to spend on what really matters—books and real reading.”

Paradise Ridge Elementary School Principal Ed Gregorio says it best:

*Very few practices can compete with independent reading in fostering engaged, life-long-learners. With independent reading, student autonomy, and choice positively contributes to each student's motivation and desire to read. Independent reading builds students' reading comprehension and provides ample opportunities to build students' content knowledge.*
Book Abundance, Book Joy, and Membership in the Literacy Club

Maria Nichols

Learning—all learning—is inherently relational and social. Famed reading researcher Frank Smith drew from this foundational understanding to craft the metaphor of a “literacy club,” creating both a vision and a goal for children’s literacy learning (1987). Children’s nurturing into the literacy club begins long before formal schooling as family and caregivers immerse them in conversations, storytelling, drawing and writing, libraries and bedtime stories. Ideally, the ways we design teaching and learning continues this journey by deepening and broadening children’s engagement in joyfully literate communities, with the goal of ensuring all students see themselves as readers and writers.

Towards this end, our teaching and learning must balance the cognitive and social processes of being a reader. My collaboration with Excellence and Justice in Education (EJE) Academies, a charter school located in El Cajon, California, includes a focus on creating time and space for independent reading, with an emphasis on building a student’s cognitive abilities and surrounding these efforts with attention to process, collaboration, talk, passion, and reflection. Tenesha Jones, a passionate and energetic sixth grade teacher, eagerly embraced this journey, and recognized Bring Me a Book as a partner for creating book abundance, book joy, and constructing reading lives.
"The central and most important goal of reading instruction is to foster a love of reading."
—Linda Gambrell, Distinguished Professor of Education, Clemson University

The most powerful way to promote independent reading is to provide all children access to books they can and want to read. When we invest in books, we are investing in kids. It’s really that simple. Real reading creates real readers.

"Countless researchers have proven the impact of classes and communities that have an abundance of books. Frequent, voluminous, self-selected reading and personal preference are the foundation, walls, and ceiling in building a reader for a lifetime" (Atwell, 2009).

And yes, there is something magical about seeing children find their hearts in a book, and that should be attainable for every child, every day (McCarthy, 2020). This is why independent reading cannot be viewed as a curricular add-on; it must be deeply embedded in our daily routines so students see reading beyond school work—as part of lifework.
Partner with Bring Me a Book!  

Regie Routman

What if you had the power to give the gift of astonishment, imagination, courage, and joy to young people who had never experienced it? Wouldn't you rest easier knowing your generosity and commitment would be life-altering for tens of thousands of children? Opportunity is knocking! You are invited to help ensure all students secure their inalienable right to read and experience the mind-expanding, happiness-making experience of being a reader.

By supporting Bring Me a Book, you make it possible for children who have been book-deprived to become book-enriched. There are few things in life we can guarantee, but books for every child is a promise we can and must keep. Reading is the golden key with the capacity to unlock the potential, intelligence, and curiosity of every child.

This is where you come in. We would welcome your support for our Bring Me a Book comprehensive reading model. We are advocating reading for pleasure and meaning-making and creating the time and space to read and talk about books every day with peers and others. In sum, reading and talking about books offer companionship, intimacy, and infinite possibilities for enriching and expanding hearts and minds—a necessity for a democracy to sustain itself and thrive.

Please join us to make marvelous book lives possible for all students. The quality of many children’s lives depends on your partnership with Bring Me a Book.

Kids from across the country experience book joy and find their identities as readers through book choice and book abundance.


