

Raising Readers

How Katy parents can foster a love of reading in children

Written by Susanna Donald

Students at the Katy Early Childhood Enrichment Center are encouraged to read every day



Ryan, Catherine, Drew, and Nykol celebrate reading at Creech Elementary library



Many Katy libraries offer Story Time activities for parents and children to participate in together

Katy is well-known for its high-quality education. Sometimes, the academic rigor can be intimidating for parents and students, but there is a tried-and-true method that has proven over and over again to help prepare kids for academic success - and it has nothing to do with expensive tutoring or competitive preschool or rigorous scholastic drills. The magic technique? Read to your children and start early.

Early Reading Markers

Research shows that a child's brain undergoes the most rapid growth and development between birth and age 5, and reading aloud to children during this time helps them develop crucial language skills. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a child's reading ability in the third grade is a tell-tale predictor for later school success, because children who read at or above grade-level by third grade are much more likely to graduate from high school, while about half of youth with criminal records or with a history of substance abuse also display early problems with reading.

"Schools often spend a lot of time preparing for standardized tests," says Barbara Landis, a retired Katy ISD reading specialist. "That can take the enjoyment out of reading." The

irony about the increased focused on test scores (as opposed to an emphasis on early childhood reading) is that reading for pleasure with pre-school and school-aged children actually correlates to higher standardized test scores. "Those early years are crucial in a child's development, and you can't ever get them back," cautions Landis. "You won't ever regret reading to your child."

On The Laps of Parents

Author and educator Dr. Emilie Buchwald famously said, "Children are made readers on the laps of their parents." All evidence points to parents as the ones who teach their children to become enthusiastic readers, and Katy parents have a wealth of resources to do just that. Katy area libraries are often packed to capacity for infant, toddler, and preschool story times - with some even issuing admission tickets to keep crowds manageable.

Local bookstores also encourage early reading and literacy. Katy Budget Books hosts a weekly story time for preschoolers, and The Bookworm Shop offers reading assessments and reading skills tutoring by appointment.



Sisters Preslee Nicholson and Kaylee Massey love sharing story time together

Photo by Sassy Massey Photography



Children pick out their favorite stories to read at A Child's Reflection preschool



**TIPS
FROM KATY
EXPERTS**

Reading Tips

Birth to 1 year

Just read! Whenever possible, let your child sit with you as you read aloud. They already love to hear your voice; this time begins the association between reading and pleasure.

1 to 2 years

Help your child interact with the book. Use sturdy board books if necessary, and let them turn pages. Ask them to point to things on the page (e.g., Where is the truck? What does the cow say?)

2 to 5 years

Read the entire book. Read it multiple times, if your child wants. Repetition helps children connect what they see with what they hear.

“Spending time in bookstores and libraries definitely helps instill a love of reading in children,” says Karen Gillaspia, a Katy ISD kindergarten teacher. “Children also need to see their parents enjoying reading.” If a child never sees his parents pick up a book, he will most likely not develop the desire to pick up a book himself.

Carrie Lentz, an elementary language arts curriculum coordinator for Katy ISD, notes that the district is a great partner for parents who want to help their kids love to read. “Katy is blessed to have exceptional librarians in our schools who love reading, love books, and love children.” Some librarians even arrange author visits. In addition to great librarians, many Katy schools also offer opportunities for parents, grandparents, and other volunteers to come and read aloud to classes. Check with your child’s school to see how to get involved, or to find out about other special programs designed to help your children learn to love books and reading.

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- Carrie Lentz, Katy ISD elementary language arts curriculum coordinator

Never Too Early

“Reading is absolutely foundational for all other learning,” observes Lentz. Every other subject requires students to read and comprehend the subject matter. Reading to your kids begins the process of helping them develop language and literacy skills long before they can speak or read themselves, which in turn sets them up for overall academic success later in life.

There is no substitute for a parent reading with their child, and it’s never too early to begin. Many experts recommend 15-30 minutes of reading each day. Brooke Brown, early literacy specialist with Rice University and Katy ISD’s 2010 teacher of the year, says that she and her husband read to their newborn twins. “It starts that positive connection,” she notes. “They are bonded to you, and therefore connect something safe and pleasant - the parent - with reading. This helps them view books as enjoyable and important.”

Even parents of middle and high schoolers can help build this positive connection. Get two copies of a novel your child needs to read for school and read along with them. Ask questions and give your own feedback to open a discussion of the book. Have family reading nights where you turn off the TV and other electronics. Go to the library and find new titles together. Basically, whenever and wherever you can - it’s worthwhile to read. **KM**



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