

SEVEN OAKS
SCHOOL DIVISION
community begins here

Community

B E G I N S H E R E

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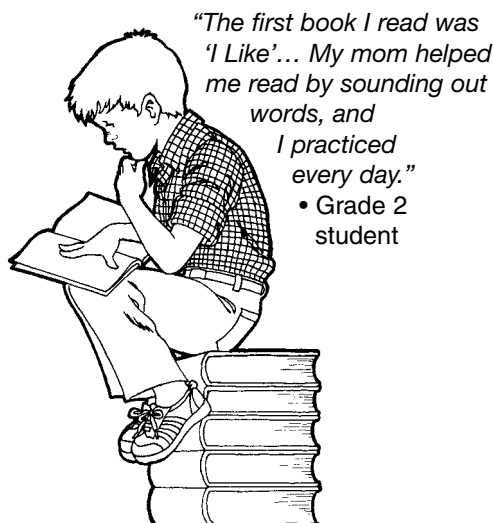
For the Love of Literacy

The earlier children develop their literacy skills, the easier learning becomes.

Do you remember the first book you ever read by yourself? These École Riverbend Community School students certainly do:

"'Brown Bear, Brown Bear' was the first book I read by myself. When I was learning to read, my parents helped me sound out the words."

• Grade 1 student,



"The first book I read was 'I Like'... My mom helped me read by sounding out words, and I practiced every day."

• Grade 2 student

"A Dr. Seuss book was my first book – 'Hop on Pop'. I felt good when I read by myself. My mom would read part of a sentence and I would finish it. My dad would listen to my reading and tell me if I had it right."

• Grade 3 student

"My first book was 'The Very Hungry Caterpillar'. My big brother helped me read by using the sounds of the letters. You need to learn reading, writing and math in the real world. You need these things to do harder work."

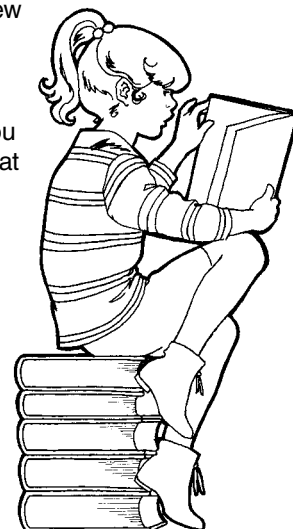
• Grade 2 student

Do you remember the excitement and pride you felt the first time you read a book all by yourself? Or the sense of accomplishment you had when you wrote your very first story? Even the confidence that came the first time you realized you knew how to successfully add two numbers together?

Those feelings are part of literacy learning. But your literacy learning

actually began much earlier than that – perhaps earlier than even your parents might have realized.

Many parents think of literacy as helping their child to learn to read at an early age. Yet literacy is about more than the ability to read. Literacy is about the way we view and interpret the world, then taking what we understand and using it to help us learn new things. It's adding one layer of knowledge to another. In fact, you could almost say that literacy is learning **how** to learn... which is why early literacy learning is such an important component of a child's educational development.



Learning by Example



Sometimes parents become literacy teachers without even realizing it. Children learn a lot of behaviours from observing their parents, and it's no different when it comes to literacy learning.

As a teacher at École Riverbend Community School, Rena Kuhl is actively involved in promoting early literacy learning and knows how influential parents can be in promoting literacy prior to school.

"Children model what their parents do and this can include reading and writing," says Kuhl. "Whether they are scribbling, drawing, painting or writing random letters and numbers, they

need to be encouraged to express themselves. This reinforces that their ideas, thoughts and feelings can be communicated."

"Their expressions also become somewhat 'permanent' on paper, thus validating their place in this world. It can be frequently noted that the first words a child learns to write are words that validate who they are – like their names – or things that are important to them, like 'Mom' and 'Dad'."

"It's very much the beginning of the literacy process and they need to be able to explore that process in a safe environment... feeling like that's okay

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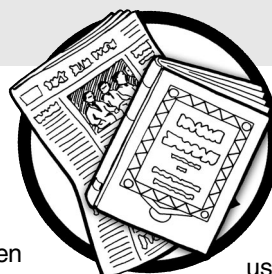
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in order for them to move on to that next step."

Reading can work the same way. Many children pick up a book and flip through the pages, sometimes even making up a story as they go. They understand the actions associated with reading, which allows their parents to begin adding to those actions, teaching children to recognize letters, sounds and words.

Karen Ziegler recalls teaching her oldest daughter (now a student at École Riverbend Community School) to read. "We started with the basics – learn the ABC's," says Ziegler. "That's great and all, except it doesn't teach you to read because that's not the sounds the letters make. So it's nice when you can start with this little song, but it doesn't do anything."

"We started just playing around with the sounds the letters make. Instead of trying to find the 'H', we made the 'H' sound and tried to find the letter based on that. From there it was on to simple books. The famous, 'Hop on Pop' – that was her first one. She read it from front to back cover before kindergarten, just going through the process."



The Many Faces of Literacy

Reading to children – even for a few minutes each day – is one of the most important things parents can do to promote literacy learning, but it's not the only thing. Regular bedtimes and favourite TV shows can be used to introduce the concept of time. Having children help prepare recipes demonstrates math and measurement. Making up stories together and even drawing pictures to go with those stories can start children thinking about how to communicate their ideas and thoughts more effectively.

"I think it is so important for us to understand that literacy encompasses many aspects of how we look at our world and how we express ourselves – reading, writing, math and movement," explains Rena Kuhl. "Children need to be encouraged to explore the 'many faces of literacy' because it makes our lives richer. As children explore and wonder, they are constructing meaning about the world they live in."

"To embrace literacy, in all its forms, enables children to gain a deeper understanding of the world around them, and creates opportunities for them to express themselves in a meaningful way."

Attending Community Classrooms

Parents of pre-school age children can also find some excellent literacy learning resources outside their homes. Libraries often have programs where volunteers read stories to younger children. Local community centres may have arts and crafts classes during the day or on weekends. Many schools also offer special family-friendly programs that are specifically geared around activities that help promote literacy development.

One such program at École Riverbend Community School is a "Storytime" program held once a week. Karen Ziegler often attends with her youngest daughter, who is not quite old enough to attend kindergarten.

"It's one afternoon a week," says Ziegler. "We do songs. We do stories. It's usually theme-oriented so then there will be some kind of craft afterwards. We have a snack and then there's kind of a free play."

"So she's in a group approximately her age, and the parents stay so it's interactive with child and parent – not just 'drop the child off'. It's a great intro to both reading and to the schools. There's usually some kind of

writing or hands-on craft. It also helps them in scheduling and getting used to all that before they start school... so they can sit still and listen to stories and it's not such a big deal when they have to do it in school."

Early Involvement, Early Learning

The key to early literacy learning is **involvement**.

Schools and parents are partners in early literacy learning. Parents can begin to introduce strategies at home and schools can help expand those strategies. Working together to engage children's minds through fun learning activities, parents and schools can help children maintain the same love of learning that we all had when we read our first book – and when learning is fun, children want to do more.

"(Sarah's) favourite thing to do right now is read a bedtime story to her younger sister," says Karen Ziegler. "So she's reading, which is what she needs to do. The little one is listening to a story, which is what she needs to do... and they **want** to do it."

"It doesn't get any better than that."

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