

This Holiday Season, Give Gifts That Give in Return

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All Aboard!

In 1986 *The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg was not only awarded the Caldecott Medal, it also appeared on the New York Times bestseller list. "Since that time, more than six and a half million copies have been sold, and every December it faithfully reappears on national bestseller lists" (amazon.com, 2008).

In 2004, *The Polar Express* became a blockbuster holiday movie where viewers were taken to "a simpler time, a far-off and frozen place, and an animated exhibition that roars like a passing train; we haven't seen a film so perfectly pitched for the very

young, and young at heart, in years (Overstreet, 2008).

Robert Zemeckis, who is responsible for turning this storybook into a full-length feature, successfully delivers the message of turning doubt into belief (Overstreet, 2008). "We're introduced to a young boy just as the first frost of adolescent skepticism settles on his heart" (Overstreet, 2008).

The Polar Express appears on educators, as well as kids', top lists of book favorites. What has made children, and many adults, hop aboard *The Polar Express*? It may be the appeal of the imaginary, the whimsical



nature of make-believe or the message it conveys with sincerity. "In a few poignant moments, the story reminds us that there is a deeper meaning to Christmas – the 'spirit of Christmas' equals human kindness (Overstreet, 2008).

Whether you read the book, watch the video, or do both with your child, *The Polar Express* is sure to become a holiday family favorite.

Inside this issue:

Characters Come to Life	2
Kid Favorites	2
Books Make Great Gifts (continued)	2
Let Me Read!	3
You're the Teacher	3
Family Time	3
December Q&A	4

Books Make Great Gifts

Wondering what to give your child this holiday season? Books make perfect presents. "They'll get used, but not used up, and every member of the family can enjoy them. Everyone should have the chance to warm up with a story" (IRA, 2008). PixelHead, an educator, recalls many favorite memories that involve having books

read to her by her mother. She has now passed this tradition down to her own children. "When I give a book to my kids, it is not only a book, it is a promise that I will be spending time with them reading the new book and discovering the world that lies within its wonderful pages" (PixelHead, 2008). When children

know their parents value reading, often they too will come to enjoy the magic of written words. "When you give a child a book, it shows them that you value books, and this encourages kids to become readers" (PixelHead, 2008).

(continued on page 2)

Special points of interest:

- ♦ *Believable characters.*
- ♦ *The most popular book titles.*
- ♦ *Supporting your child's reading.*
- ♦ *Helping your child learn.*
- ♦ *Spending quality time together.*
- ♦ *Finding books and videos at bargain prices.*

Characters Come to Life

Older children are especially drawn to contemporary realistic fiction, which means that everything in the story is “consistent with the lives of real people in our contemporary world” (Norton, 2008). Although the story is fiction, it *could have* happened. In contemporary fiction, the characters are believable. The setting is realistic and the plots focus on character relationships that may be filled with chal-



*“Paterson develops strong characterization in her novels.”
(Norton, 2008)*

lenges, pleasures or both. “One of the greatest values of realistic fiction for children is that many realistic stories allow children to identify with characters of their own age who have similar interests and problems” (Norton, 2008). When children identify with characters like them, they discover they are not alone because their feelings and situations are not unique; others have expressed similar concerns

as well. More importantly, how a character approaches conflict can also be helpful by demonstrating effective social solutions. For parents, realistic fiction can “stimulate discussion and help children share their feelings and solve their problems; it also provides children with pleasure and escape” (Norton, 2008).

Judy Blume, Sheila Burnford, Beverly Cleary, Jean Craighead George, Fred Gipson, Katherine Paterson, and Gary Paulson are just a few top noted authors of contemporary realistic fiction.

Kid Favorites

Several years ago, the National Education Association conducted an online survey to determine which books were kid’s favorites. When selecting books for gifts this holiday season, keep these top ten favorites in mind.

- 1) Harry Potter (series) by J.K. Rowling
- 2) Goosebumps (series) by R.L. Stine

*“The results leave no doubt that America’s kids LOVE to read.”
(NEA, 2008)*

- 3) Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss
- 4) The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss
- 5) Arthur (series) by Marc Brown

- 6) Charlotte’s Web by E.B. White
- 7) Shiloh (trilogy) by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
- 8) Hatchet by Gary Paulsen
- 9) Holes by Louis Sachar
- 10) The Giver by Lois Lowry

For more favorite book titles, visit the NEA web page and read “Kids’ top 100 books.”

Books Make Great Gifts (continued)

With a wide assortment of subjects, books can become fast-friends. “Today, books are available on every subject; there is fiction, non-fiction, and one can choose from various authors that fill the bookshelves.” (Artipot, 2008). Comic books are also great for children and don’t forget book series that often have intriguing characters to

capture a child’s interest. “If you do not want to give the typical fiction books, you can go for books that can teach something. There are many books in the market that teach math or other subjects in a fun manner” (Artipot, 2008). If you know your child’s interests, you will surely find a book to captivate their mind this holiday season.



*“Picture books that celebrate the season are perfect presents.”
(IRA, 2008)*

Let Me Read!

Reading with your child is a time of bonding and learning. One of the most important aspects of reading with your child is to give her the opportunity to improve her skills. When we tell our child what the word is immediately, he will begin to look to us while reading and never become a self-sufficient reader. When your child attempts a word, be supportive and offer praise.



We want our child to be an independent reader, self-monitoring as they read and correcting themselves when they need to.

- I saw you forming your mouth to say the word. Great job!
- That was a terrific try.
- I like the way you tried to work out how the word sounds.
- How did you figure out that word? You make me proud when you work to solve an unknown word!
- I noticed you looked at the illustrations to help you figure out what the

word might be. Good thinking!

- I like the way you went back to the beginning of the sentence and tried reading the word again. There are often clues in other words to help us. Smart thinking!
- You stopped when you knew the word you used didn't make sense. How smart! You are doing what good readers do - you stopped and tried again. You're going to be a good reader!

You're the Teacher

You don't have to be trained as a teacher to help your child learn. In fact, "you are your child's first and most important teacher" (NWREL, 2008). Here are a few things you can do to help your child at home.

*Read daily. "Don't stop doing this even when children can read on their own" (NWREL, 2008).

*Keep a variety of reading materials around (magazines, newspapers, newsletters, books, etc.)

*When reading a book together, discuss the characters. Ask questions such as, "Would someone really do that?" or "What would you have done in their shoes?"

*Limit television. "Use television as an educational tool whenever possible" (NWREL, 2008). Encourage your child to share their feelings and ask questions. Discuss lessons learned by television characters and how experiences can relate to real

life circumstances.

*Set a good example by reading yourself. "Kids are more likely to follow their parents' examples than their advice" (KidsHealth, 2008).

*"Help your kids understand that building knowledge is something to enjoy throughout life."
(KidsHealth, 2008)*

Family Time

With today's busy schedules, it's often difficult to carve out time for reading and watching television together. Try some of the following suggestions:

*Take books along to doctor's appointments or when traveling. By keeping books in the car, the opportunity to read is made available.

*Popular children's books are often made into movies. Before watching the movie, read the book together. If your child is anxious to watch the movie, book reading will be a much simpler request.

*Compare different book



*"Books influence, entertain, inform and are looked upon as guides."
(Artipot, 2008)*

characters by noting their similarities and differences.

*Allow your child to stay up 30 minutes longer on school nights as long as they're reading.

*Discuss books and videos you enjoy and why.

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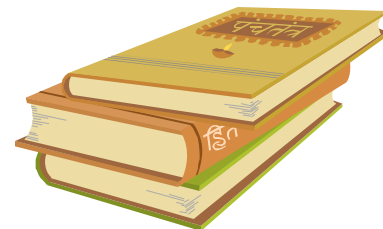
Promoting social &
emotional fitness for kids.

Daphne Morris, M.Ed., met Trevor Romain in 1992 when he visited a school as a guest speaker. Impressed by Trevor's profound and meaningful impact on students, Daphne joined The Trevor Romain Company in 2006. A former elementary school principal, Daphne holds two Master's degrees in education.

December Q&A

Q: Where can I find discounted book titles and educational videos that are popular with my child?

Watch for garage or yard sales that are selling children's toys. Parents often include books with toy items and you can find great books for pennies on the dollar. *Half-Price Books* has a children's section that includes not only new, discounted books but also "gently used" book titles as well. Book orders, such as Scholastic, often come home with your child. Watch for bundle packages that include more than one book title; popular educational videos are offered as well. If you have family or friends with children similar in age, trade book titles and videos to expand selection. Educational videos, such as those containing strong characters your child can identify with, can also be found at places such as *Half-Price Books*. If videos are sold on-line, watch for free shipping or discounted offers when purchasing more than one video.



Resources:

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