



The Reading Bug

Books Reviewed:

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Reviewer:

[Jill Bennett](#) [3]

Not a choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

As a one-time special education teacher and education lecturer, author of numerous highly popular books such as **Uncanny, Unreal** and **The Cabbage Patch Fib**, Jennings comes from a place of knowing. In just thirteen chapters he demystifies the reading process and empowers parents with the knowledge to get involved from the earliest possible age, or indeed, at whatever stage their child may be; and, most importantly, he puts literature back at the heart of literacy. The first chapter highlights the importance of immersing children in a reading friendly environment which leaves no room for boredom or struggling, and of acting as a role model: 'If children are to be lifelong readers, we must instil a love of books.' Chapter two focuses on the vital role reading aloud to a child plays - as a special time together, as a motivator, and for the numerous lessons children will learn without knowing it: lessons about story worlds, about how book language works and about print conventions - in short, they are building an internal map of the reading process. The third chapter looks at finding the right book - an interesting, unputdownable book, long or short, not one specially written in a controlled vocabulary for beginner or reluctant readers. And, we are reminded, real reading is about understanding: pronouncing every word correctly in a book does NOT mean a child necessarily understands the ideas therein. But, how I wish that Jennings' assertion, 'matching children and books is covered in every teacher-training course' were true. In my experience, recently trained teachers may appear to be expert deliverers of the literacy hour and know all about phonemes and glossaries, but ask them about literature and stories and, in most instances, that's a whole other story. This is followed by a look at the role of stories as humanising influences, helping children to become sensitive and caring beings. Here I think the vital role of story in the education of the imagination is understated though this is highlighted in the penultimate chapter. The next topic is beginning reading - behaving like a reader, listening sensitively to children and responding to what they're trying to do, and the overriding importance of meaning (rather than 100 percent accuracy). Phonics is put well and truly in its place as a small part of reading - a sometimes useful tool, and one to be handled very carefully ('sounding out letters is not reading'), for as Jennings rightly asserts, its misuse has done more to put children off reading than anything else. There follows a look at ways of using writing as a means of developing children's reading. Here (as in reading) the importance of risk taking is highlighted. The influence of pictorial images is ever growing and in chapter nine Jennings underlines and discusses the role of visual literacy drawing on some of his own experiences with a range of illustrators. Reluctant readers, some of the possible reasons for the 'label', and ways to motivate and promote positive attitudes to books are the next topic, followed by the role of computers - as a tool not a replacement for parents - in fostering a love of reading. The final chapter is essentially an

annotated book list of recommendations ranging from books for babies to those for teens, many with a strong adult appeal. All in all this book is a model of how it is possible to make what many see as a difficult subject accessible. It is totally unintimidating in appearance with a double spaced text, humorous illustrations and cartoons, and the advice imparted in an uncomplicated and direct style with numerous anecdotes and examples drawn from the author's own experience as a teacher, speech therapist, lecturer and not least, parent. A veritable gold mine of good advice and practice and, I would suggest, required reading for every practising or aspiring teacher, nursery nurse and classroom assistant involved with helping children to become readers, as well as parents and carers.

Running Order:

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