



Author to speak in Napa County

Wednesday, October 14, 2009

By Special to the Register

For many parents, encouraging their children to read is as challenging as interesting them in a dinner with Brussels sprouts or switching their attention away from the Nintendo DS. But while children have nutritional alternatives, there really isn't any replacement for good reading skills. With reading proficiency so important for academic success, Diane W. Frankenstein has spent two decades teaching parents how to encourage a lifelong love of reading in their children.

Frankenstein, a San Francisco-based author, educational consultant and part-time Sonoma resident, will appear at several local events in the next month to introduce her new book "Reading Together: Everything You Need to Know to Raise a Child Who Loves to Read" and discuss how children can learn to love reading in a world of video games, iPods and cell phones.

Entry to the following events is free to the public:

- Saturday, Oct. 17: 1-3 p.m. at the Blue Oak School Book Faire, 1436 Polk St., Napa
- Wednesday, Nov. 4: 6-8 p.m. at the Napa Country Office of Education, 2121 Imola Ave., Napa (info: 253-6810)
- Thursday, Nov. 5: 6:30-8 p.m. at St. Helena Elementary School, 1325 Adams St., St. Helena (info: 967-2712)

With today's kids plugged into so many things other than books, how can parents turn their children into interested readers?

According to Frankenstein, the path to becoming a lifelong reader begins with talking.

"Vocabulary is the linchpin to literacy and conversations are where children first learn many of the skills they need to get ready to learn to read," she said. "The right book in the right hands at the right time is only the first step to developing confident readers. The most important metric may not just be how many books children have read, but how many conversations they've had about them."

But if computers are not ideal for brain development at a young age, what can parents do to encourage their children to read?

First, don't waste precious time trying to convince your child of the importance of reading — just start reading them good stories.

“A child’s desire to learn to read comes from being read to and a child’s reading will only improve the more they enjoy reading,” Frankenstein said.

Below are some suggestions that will help kids get on the path to becoming avid readers:

- Reading isn’t just for bedtime: Find other times in a day to read. Your child is probably much more alert earlier in the day, anyway. How about a poem with breakfast? How about a short story with an after-school snack?
- Make books easy to find in your home. Put them everywhere. Are there rooms without books? Why?
- Respect your child’s interests. Taste is personal. You may not like all the books your child chooses to read, but allow him age-appropriate books that fit his curiosity and interests. Help him find his “home run books” with characters and plots that he cares about.
- Read the story as written. Read it without substituting easier words or omitting complicated sentences or information that you think might be confusing.
- Reading time isn’t necessarily vocabulary time. Learning words in isolation gets in the way of comprehension and pleasure. If a child meets five or more unknown words on a page she is probably on the young side for that particular book.
- Slow down; reading isn’t a race. Children need comprehension — not speed — to be good readers. Encourage your child to read fewer books and know them well.
- Read aloud and don’t stop doing it when they can read on their own. Reading to your child taps into his imagination and curiosity.

Continue to read aloud, share ideas and discuss the stories even after he is old enough to curl up on the couch and read by himself.

Finally, not every book will be a winner and captivate or even satisfy your child. If a book fails to capture her interest, don’t insist that she finish it. Give a story a fair chance and move on if it isn’t working its magic.

For additional tips on how to encourage a love of reading in your child, visit Dianefrankenstein.com. For more information on her presentation at the Blue Oak School Book Faire, visit BlueOakSchool.org