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Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers was produced by WETA, the public TV station in Washington, D.C., and Rubin Tarrant Productions.

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READING rockets

Launching Young Readers

Viewers' Guide

For parents, educators, day care providers, tutors, and anyone else who cares about kids!



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About Reading Rockets

This Viewers' Guide is a companion to the PBS series **Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers**. The series is part of Reading Rockets, a multimedia project that looks at how young kids learn to read, why so many struggle, and how we can help. Reading Rockets also includes a comprehensive Web site, a one-hour documentary, extensive outreach, and a series of teleconferences for educators.

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About the Series

Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers is a public TV series designed for teachers, parents, caregivers, and anyone else interested in helping children learn to read. Based on the latest research findings, the series features the country's top reading experts and consists of five 30-minute programs that explore the stages of reading that every child goes through.

The programs are organized sequentially, beginning with a baby's remarkable power to recognize the distinctive sounds of her native language and continuing through decoding, writing and spelling, fluency, and reading comprehension.

Each program presents six or seven closely linked stories, illustrating the stages of how children learn to read and how adults can help them. Each program also features a short segment with a prominent children's book author.



Program 1 The Roots of Reading



Hosted by public television's Fred Rogers, this program looks at the earliest stages of literacy, offers practical advice for parents of young children, and gives concrete suggestions for child care providers and kindergarten teachers.

Segment 1: Becoming Aware of Print

In San Jose, California, 32-month-old Mira gets a head start on reading from her parents. **(Length – 3:30)**

Segment 2: Tuning In to Speech Sounds

At a baby speech lab at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, psychologist Janet Werker studies how babies develop skills that distinguish speech sounds of their native language. **(Length – 2:50)**

Segment 3: Encouraging Young Storytellers

Two- and three-year-olds benefit from a project based in Washington, D.C., called STORIES, which is built on the premise that when adults respond to a toddler's efforts to communicate, they increase conversational skills, boost vocabulary, and propel toddlers toward literacy.

(Length – 2:22)

Segment 4: A Writer's Secrets

Children's book author and illustrator Rosemary Wells (*Timothy Goes to School*) talks about how successful children's literature appeals to the heart of the child — and to the sense of humor in adults. **(Length – 2:12)**

Segment 5: Reading as Dialogue

In a Long Island Head Start classroom, children who are at risk for reading failure boost their reading skills using a technique called "dialogic reading." **(Length – 3:05)**

Segment 6: The Building Blocks of Reading

In Baltimore, a pre-kindergarten program called Children's Literacy Initiative helps at-risk children meet the school's high expectations. **(Length – 3:43)**

Segment 7: Reading Together

A program called Georgetown Even Start is helping families at risk in Washington, D.C., to break the cycle of low literacy and educational failure. **(Length – 3:25)**

Here are some things you can do to foster language and literacy skills in preschoolers:

- >> Set aside time for reading to children every day. **Read expressively and with humor**, using different voices.
- >> Indulge children's desire to hear favorite stories over and over again. These **repeated readings** actually promote language and literacy development.
- >> **Draw attention to letters** and print, especially letters that are familiar or that have special meaning, such as the letters in your child's own name.
- >> Read rhyming books, **say silly tongue twisters**, and play other enjoyable games that help children become sensitive to sounds in spoken words.



Program 2 Sounds and Symbols



Hosted by actress Annette Bening, this program spotlights teachers using innovative strategies to help kids crack the code of reading.

Segment 1: Fun with Phonemes

One family in Raleigh, North Carolina, shows how playing word and rhyming games puts their child on the road to reading success. **(Length – 1:38)**

Segment 2: Letters and Sounds

A Hmong-American kindergarten teacher in Sacramento mixes serious instruction with lively play for his second-language learners. **(Length – 4:37)**

Segment 3: Helping Struggling Readers

The Lab School in Washington, D.C., shows how one-on-one tutoring helps struggling readers achieve phonemic awareness. **(Length – 4:12)**



Segment 4: Assessments by Specialists

At a Lindamood-Bell Center in Denver, a seven-year-old receives one-on-one assessment and guidance.

(Length – 2:46)

Segment 5: Deaf Children Master Reading

Learning letters and the sounds of “cued speech” help deaf children improve their reading skills. **(Length – 3:15)**

Segment 6: A Writer’s Secrets

Norman Bridwell talks about *Clifford the Big Red Dog* and the one consistent message that shows up in his books: When things go wrong, don’t give up. ... Try again.

(Length – 2:42)

Segment 7: The Alphabetic Principle

In Houston, the teacher of an advanced kindergarten class connects letters and sounds in a systematic and explicit way. **(Length – 3:04)**

Here are some things you can do to help children decode the printed word:

- **Play word games** that blend and segment individual sounds in words: “Can you guess what this word is? /m/ /a/ /s/ /k/.” **(Say each sound separately.)**
- **Help with your child’s reading homework**, such as learning letter sounds and memorizing sight words.
- **Have your child read aloud** to you. Alternating reading (where you take turns reading a word, paragraph, or page) is also helpful and fun.
- **If your child experiences difficulty reading a word**, encourage him or her to look carefully at the letters in the word (rather than, for example, guessing based on a picture).
- **Encourage struggling decoders to practice.** Ask children to re-read sentences that they are having trouble decoding, and encourage their efforts: “I know it’s tough right now, but this is how you learn new words; and you’re getting better and better. If you keep practicing, eventually reading will seem much easier.”
- **Select appropriate books** for reading that are at the child’s level. Visit www.ReadingRockets.org for a list of 100 books organized by age group.



Program 3 Fluent Reading



This program highlights successful strategies for helping children become fluent readers and shows how early testing and intervention can

help struggling readers. **Fluent Reading** is hosted by television anchor Deborah Norville and Theo Lion from PBS's **Between the Lions**.

Segment 1: Developing Fluency

An after-school program called RAVE-O helps to teach reading fluency in Malden, Massachusetts. **(Length – 3:33)**

Segment 2: Word Families

At Sudduth Elementary School in Starkville, Mississippi, Tina Scholtes teaches first graders a handy spelling pattern that helps them recognize word clusters. **(Length – 2:43)**

Segment 3: Eye Movements in Skilled Readers

A research lab at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, investigates what good readers do with their eyes.

(Length – 2:26)

Segment 4: Community Volunteers

The Charlottesville, Virginia, school district has started an innovative community volunteer program called Book Buddies. Six-year-old Trey now has a book buddy who will work with him twice a week during his first-grade year.

(Length – 3:33)

Segment 5: A Writer's Secrets

Writer William Joyce (*George Shrinks*) talks about the people and places that have inspired his work.

(Length – 2:42)

Segment 6: Assessing Reading Skills

At the Stern Center in Williston, Vermont, struggling students get a leg up on reading and other skills.

(Length – 3:04)

Segment 7: The Sounds of Speech

At Fort Pitt Elementary School in Pittsburgh, a second grader named Azeeza gets reading help from a dedicated mentor — a software program called The Reading Tutor.

(Length – 3:20)

Segment 4: A Blind Writer's Story

Kyra is the only blind child attending a public school in Santa Monica, California. With a little extra work, teachers help her meet her full potential. **(Length – 3:41)**

Segment 5: Parents Promote Writing

Reading experts explain why parents should create opportunities for their children to write. **(Length – 2:46)**

Segment 6: Writing Poetry

In Houston, Lynn Reichle and her second-grade students go on a writing adventure called the Writers' Workshop. **(Length – 4:46)**

Here are some things you can do to help children become good spellers and writers:

- Supply preschool youngsters with **drawing and writing materials**. Encourage their attempts to write, and express interest in their writing.
- Find everyday **opportunities for children to write**, such as helping with shopping lists, writing thank-you notes, and sending out invitations.
- When your child is practicing spelling, emphasize **looking at the sequence of letters in a word** rather than just spelling it orally. Have the child write the word as he or she spells it aloud.
- Encourage an **interest in word spellings and word meanings**. Talk about words, point out written words in the environment, and respond with interest to children's questions about words.
- Want more ideas to help your budding writer? National reading experts suggest activities for reading and writing fun in ReadWriteNow! Find it at www.ReadingRockets.org.



Program 5 Reading for Meaning



Hosted by author and former teacher Frank McCourt (*Angela's Ashes*),

Reading for Meaning highlights effective strategies used across the country to help kids understand — and care about — what they read.

Segment 1: Finding the Right Book

The library is a vital resource for one mom whose son's appetite for information — especially about dinosaurs — is growing as quickly as his shoe size. **(Length – 3:14)**

Segment 2: Engaging Nonfiction Readers

In Salt Lake City, teacher Margaret Barnes uses a framework called CORI (Concept Oriented Reading Instruction) to teach reading comprehension skills to second and third graders. **(Length – 4:48)**

Segment 3: Students Take Charge

A Seattle school uses a technique called Reciprocal Teaching that's designed to improve reading comprehension. **(Length – 2:14)**

Segment 4: Understanding Themes

At Community School 200 in Harlem, Robert Vettese uses the Theme Scheme method to help his third graders discuss complicated narratives. **(Length – 4:00)**

Segment 5: A Writer's Secrets

Children's book author Walter Dean Myers (*Harlem*) talks about a discovery he made in childhood: that books are a path to a world beyond our own neighborhoods. **(Length – 3:23)**

Segment 6: Families Find Meaning

In Washington, D.C., inmates volunteer to get training in how to run a book club for their kids. **(Length – 4:14)**

Good reading comprehension depends on abilities in two broad areas: (1) accuracy and ease of reading individual words and (2) oral language comprehension. Here are some things you can do to help develop children's reading comprehension:

- » **Encourage variety** in your children's reading choices to expose them to a wide range of books (fiction, poetry, fables, biographies, science, etc.).
- » Activities that foster comprehension do not always have to involve reading. Discussing movies and television programs, taking children to new places, even **talking about everyday experiences** — all contribute to growth in comprehension.
- » **Tell stories.** Oral storytelling indulges a child's passion to hear stories about his family's experiences. Talk about what life was like when Grandma was growing up, the time you got in trouble at school, etc.
- » **Continue to read to children** even after they can read independently. Besides the gains in reading development, parents and children both benefit from this continued bonding experience.



A Note About Motivation

If reading isn't **enjoyable**, children won't choose to read, and they won't get the practice they need to become fluent readers. Reading is an active process of constructing meaning — and the key word here is *active*.

To develop and maintain the motivation to read, children need to:

- » Appreciate the **pleasures of reading**.
- » View reading as a **social activity**, to be shared with others.
- » See reading as an **opportunity to explore** their interests.
- » Read widely for a **variety of purposes**, from enjoyment to gathering information.
- » Become comfortable with a variety of different written forms and genres, including both **fiction and non-fiction** books.

Children who can't read fluently often get discouraged and lose interest in reading. Here's how you can help:

- **Encourage independent reading** by taking children to the library, reading with them, and buying books as gifts.
- Encourage **re-reading of favorite books**.
- Subscribe to **children's magazines** that relate to their interests.
- **Limit television viewing, video games, and computer games.** It's hard for reading to compete with these activities, especially when children are still struggling to develop reading fluency.
- Bring along books or magazines for children to **read during "waiting" times** such as doctor or dentist appointments.



Program 4 Writing and Spelling



Writing and Spelling, hosted by actress Vivica A. Fox, features activities that promote writing practice, vocabulary growth, and spelling proficiency in children.

Segment 1: Spelling Patterns

The Johnson School in Charlottesville, Virginia, has its own homegrown reading program called RISE (Reading Initiative for Student Excellence). **(Length – 3:41)**

Segment 2: Invented Spelling

In a Connecticut suburb, first-grade teacher Carol Spinello turns a spelling lesson into something of a game. **(Length – 4:00)**

Segment 3: A Writer's Secrets

Kate Duke, best known for *Aunt Isabel Tells a Good One* and *One Guinea Pig Is Not Enough*, frequently visits classrooms to teach kids about plot, character, and setting — without writing down a word! **(Length – 3:05)**



Top 10 Things You Should Know About Reading

by Diane Henry Leipzig

1. Learning to read is complex. Reading — making meaning from print — is a complex process that draws upon many skills that need to be developed at the same time.

2. Teaching reading requires an integration of methods. In past years, the merits of phonics instruction (which focuses on decoding skills) and whole language instruction (which focuses on meaning-making) have been hotly debated. Recently, most people have come to agree that skilled teachers integrate both skills and meaning into a balanced program.

3. A lot of American children do not read well. Researchers estimate that 10 million American children are poor readers (Fletcher & Lyon, 1998). Thirty-seven percent of fourth graders read below the “basic” level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test (NCES, 2001).

4. Kids from all kinds of families have reading problems. About 20 percent of elementary students have significant reading difficulties. The rate of reading failure for African-American, Hispanic, limited-English, and poor children ranges from 60 to 70 percent. However, one third of poor readers nationwide are from college-educated families (AFT, 1999).

5. Kids who struggle usually have problems sounding out words. Difficulties in decoding and word recognition are at the core of most reading difficulties. When word recognition isn’t automatic, reading isn’t fluent, and comprehension suffers.

6. What happens before school matters a lot. What preschoolers know before they enter school is strongly related to how easily they learn to read in elementary school.

7. Learning to read is closely tied to learning to talk and listen. Families and caregivers need to talk and listen to young children in order to help them learn a lot of the skills they will need for reading. Children with language, hearing, or speech problems need to be identified early to avoid developing future reading difficulties.

8. Without help, slow starters don’t improve. Eighty-eight percent of children who have difficulty reading at the end of first grade display similar difficulties at the end of fourth grade (Juel, 1988). Three quarters of students who are poor readers in third grade will remain poor readers in high school (Shaywitz et al., 1997).

9. With help, slow starters can succeed. As many as two-thirds of reading-disabled children can become average or above-average readers if they are identified early and taught appropriately (Vellutino et al., 1996; Fletcher & Lyon, 1998).

10. Teaching kids to read is a collaborative effort. Parents, teachers, caregivers, and members of the community play an important role in helping children learn to read.

An excerpt from the Reading Rockets Web site.

The full document is available at www.ReadingRockets.org.



Resources and References

Books to help you learn more

- Hall, Susan L., & Moats, Louisa C. *Parenting a Struggling Reader*. New York: Broadway Books, 2002.
- National Research Council. *Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1999.
- Spear-Swerling, Louise, & Sternberg, R. J. *Off Track: When Poor Readers Become "Learning Disabled."* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996.
- Trelease, Jim. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin, 2001.
- Allington, Richard. *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers*. New York: Longman Publishing Group, 2000.

Web sites packed with useful information

Reading Rockets

- >> www.ReadingRockets.org — A continuously updated Web site with tips for parents and guidance for educators on teaching kids to read and helping those who struggle.
- >> www.pbs.org/launchingreaders — Includes additional interviews with experts and other extras from the making of this television series.

LD Online

- >> www.ldonline.org — The leading Web site on learning disabilities for parents, teachers, and other professionals.

Television Series

For WETA/Reading Rockets

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