

The Goodwill of Reading

At My Book Stork, we believe every child deserves to receive the gift of reading. The written word has the power to transcend all class, race, and status divisions, providing education and entertainment across a wide spectrum of readers. The sad reality, though, is there are many kids who simply don't have access to the appropriate, high-quality books or instruction they need, resulting in startlingly high rates of childhood illiteracy.

Studies have shown that if a child does not develop healthy reading skills by the fourth grade, they'll often completely lose the enthusiasm to learn. This has a negative ripple effect across all areas of study—after all, if a child can't read, how is he or she supposed to excel in math, science, or social studies? Reading is at the core of all learning, and without it, it's simply impossible to achieve any level of intellectual development. The benefits of reading are widely known: an enhanced vocabulary, a richer imagination, improved speech patterns, and a greater capacity to learn.

The good news is, everyone has the capacity to help. By donating just a little time each week, you can help to foster underprivileged children with the skills and enthusiasm they need to truly appreciate the joy of books.

Below, we've compiled some easy ways for you to make a difference in introducing reading and books to disadvantaged children:

- **Donate.** This is perhaps the easiest way to help. Set aside an afternoon and take stock of your collection of children's books. If you have older children, ask them to help you make a pile of reading material to donate. Don't just select the most battered or time-worn books—strive for a diverse mix that caters to a wide variety of interests. You might even encourage your children to sacrifice one treasured book as a gesture of goodwill. Once you've got your collection ready, you'll just need to find a place to take it. Nearly every city has a number of local organizations that help make books available to needy kids. Another easy option is a local Goodwill or Salvation Army donation center. Check with local libraries and schools for groups in your area, or hop online to find out more. Once you've selected a donation venue, take your children along to help you drop off the books. Actively participating in the contribution will help them feel good about themselves and will teach them the valuable rewards of philanthropy.
- **Host a story hour.** Most libraries host regular story time sessions for various age levels, and they're almost always eager for guest readers. Call your local branch to gauge their need. No library nearby? Consider holding a story hour at another public

venue, such as a park or recreation center. Place an ad in a local paper or online to attract young readers in your area.

- **Volunteer at a school.** Many inner-city schools are low on funds and staffing, and the students pay the price of sub-par curriculum and lack of individualized attention. If you live near one of these struggling schools, contact the administrators and offer to come in and read to a classroom of kids once a week, bi-monthly, or as often as your schedule permits. Many schools are also in need of private tutors to help kids who have dyslexia and other learning disabilities and may require some special time and attention to overcome extra hurdles. Spending just a couple of hours a week with a struggling child can do wonders to increase their reading abilities and level of self-esteem.
- **Visit a hospital.** For kids who are suffering from a serious illness or recovering from surgery, maintaining a positive outlook can be tough. Introducing the joy of reading can help even a very sick child achieve a new level of optimism. Contact your local children's hospital and ask about getting involved in a volunteer reading program. Whether it's a pediatric oncology ward, a burn center, or a critical care unit, you'll be surprised at how quickly a simple book can bring a smile to the faces of the patients.
- **Encourage other kids to get involved.** No-one has the power to influence a child quite like their peers. Rally the kids in your own neighborhood to do their part to foster a love of learning in their fellow students. Host a "reading rally" on your street or in your home, where each child reads their favorite book to the group. After the readings, encourage the attendants to donate their own books, to help coach other students who need a little extra instruction, and to volunteer their spare time to read to other kids.

It doesn't take a huge sacrifice of time or money to help introduce underprivileged or challenged kids to the delights of reading. Whether you can spare one hour or ten, your little efforts will go a long way toward promoting childrens' self-esteem, imagination, and a lifelong love of learning.