

## *The Joys of Reading*

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Sometimes I find that as I work to give even treatment to all subjects, I often end up shortchanging my favorite subject; literature.

I look forward to having an afternoon when I can curl up with a great book. I enjoy reading and discussing a good book with my students. Looking for connections and motifs, those repeated themes, values and truths we find, often create lively discussions.

The allure of a good story is found in the ability to express many emotions through careful crafting and in the accuracy of the written word. Ink and paper are mild enough as a medium to hold the excitement, the mystery, the passion that the words bring to us. The words and phrases speak to us and touch our hearts and minds. We don't just read with our eyes, but our head and heart as well. As we read about the characters, we get to know them and we live with them through the events of the passage. We have the opportunity to learn from the experience of a character, to vicariously participate in the adventures that we would not otherwise ever consider, and possibly come to some realization of the courage or fragility of the character in the story. We recognize the conflict and consider the solutions without real life consequences as we follow the plot. If we truly consider the story and conflict, we can discern wise and honest solutions which could help us as we relate to others in our daily lives and as we encounter similar struggles in real life. In short, we can cultivate wisdom and virtue in our students through stories.

This love of literature starts very young. I was reading to my children before they were born. I read stories to them and enjoyed the opportunity to use a range of voices, facial and hand gestures, varied characterizations, emotion and the like. My children and I often talked about the stories as old friends, considering choices made and predicting future plans. We reviewed past decisions and the results of those decisions. Then, my children could reflect on the characters' behavior, the effects it had in the characters' lives, and apply that insight to their own situations. It was a starting point in wisdom. We started by sharing and learning Bible stories. Non fiction gave us interesting information. We also learned from poems, Frog and Toad, Just So Stories, Anne of Green Gables, and on.

But reading a story is not the entirety of what we need to teach our students. We can also share and study a story through storytelling or acting.

My fifth and sixth grade class just completed reading and performing a play based on the book *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster. It is always an adventure to take a story and try to present it in a way that brings the story to life. It is also a challenge to have sixteen ten, eleven, and twelve year olds memorize and then recite their lines with expression and appropriate movements. The discipline of attending to the play at the ready for one's own lines, which will be recited with correct volume and expression, is a true exercise. There is also a great discipline in waiting quietly and attentively until it is time to speak one's part. Staying focused while going over the same words day after day brings about deeper understanding and clarity of thought. Again we experience the truth to the phrase '*Repetition is the mother of education.*' My

students succeeded nicely. They performed the play well, clearly expressing the message. I was especially pleased to watch them respond to each other and their audience while staying in character. They enjoyed the success, which encourages them to attempt future endeavors through speeches or performances. They gained several skills by presenting this play.

Literature has a valuable place in a classical education. We need to give our children a rich experience with many genres. They should read both fiction and nonfiction. Children need our encouragement to become life-long readers, looking for what is good, right, and beautiful in great books. Books of enduring value that have been read, re-read, and shared many times.

Mrs. Deborah Dikeman

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