

STOP THE SUMMER READ



JACK
Book 105—Miss Stralander
SEPTEMBER 13

I don't want to
become busy
don't want poetry

Girls do.

Miss Jack, who tells his story with a
little help from some paper, a pencil,
his teacher, and a dog named Sky.

"Readers will love that dog, and the book."
—Publishers Weekly (starred review)

"A really special example."
—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

"This book is a tiny treasure."
—School Library Journal (starred review)

SHARON CREECH
WINNER OF THE NEWBERY MEDAL FOR *WALK TWO MOONS*

**LOVE
THAT
DOG**

A NOVEL



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READING SLIDE

Kids who don't read over the summer can lose ground. Here's how to keep books in their hands and skills at a peak.

By Meg Lundstrom

When you wave goodbye to your students as they head off for summer vacation, you might just be bidding farewell to some of their hard-won gains in reading skills. The “summer slide” is well-documented by research: Unless students read regularly during the break, they fall behind about three months in their reading achievement.

As teachers know from experience, particularly vulnerable are low-income students, who may already be struggling. In fact, the losses add up and “by middle school, produce a cumulative lag of two or more years, which accounts for 80 to 100 percent of the achievement gap between low- and middle-income students,” says ▶

reading expert Richard Allington, Ph.D., of the University of Tennessee. The good news is that the latest research shows children who read at least four books over the summer maintain or even increase their skills.

Teachers Need Allies

Although teachers have always encouraged their students to read during the summer, other groups are joining the push. "What's striking now is that there's a much more concerted effort at the federal, state, and district levels to encourage kids to read in the summer," says reading researcher Jimmy Kim, Ph.D., of the University of California at Irvine. The No Child Left Behind Summer Reading Achievers pilot program distributed free books last summer to children in 10 cities. Those children who read 10 books were given prizes. Connecticut gives its schools cash incentives if 60 percent of their students turn in a summer reading journal. Joining the effort, Scholastic Inc. is kicking off a major online campaign, *Summer Reading Counts!* (www.scholastic.com/summerreading), which helps parents and teachers boost their kids' reading. "We're dedicated to helping kids be the best readers they can be," says Sylvia Barsotti, Scholastic.com editor in chief.

The Closer the Better

To be spurred into reading, some kids simply need to get their hands on good books that hold their interest, the research shows. For suburban kids with bookcases in their bedrooms and libraries or bookstores nearby, that usually isn't a problem. But for inner-city kids, public-library use drops off if the library is more than six blocks from their

homes (compared with two miles for middle-class kids). Add to that the finding that 61 percent of low-income families have no children's books at home, and it's clear why access to the school or classroom library can be key.

"Don't lock up the books all summer. It's often the best collection of ▶

SUMMER SLIDE AFFECTS millions of children each year. Here are the key facts we need to know:

■ **IT'S REAL** "Summer slide" is the decline in reading achievement children suffer just from being away from school.

■ **KIDS WHO READ, SUCCEED** The amount of time that students spend reading for fun is the key predictor of students' academic achievement. (Gallik, 1999)

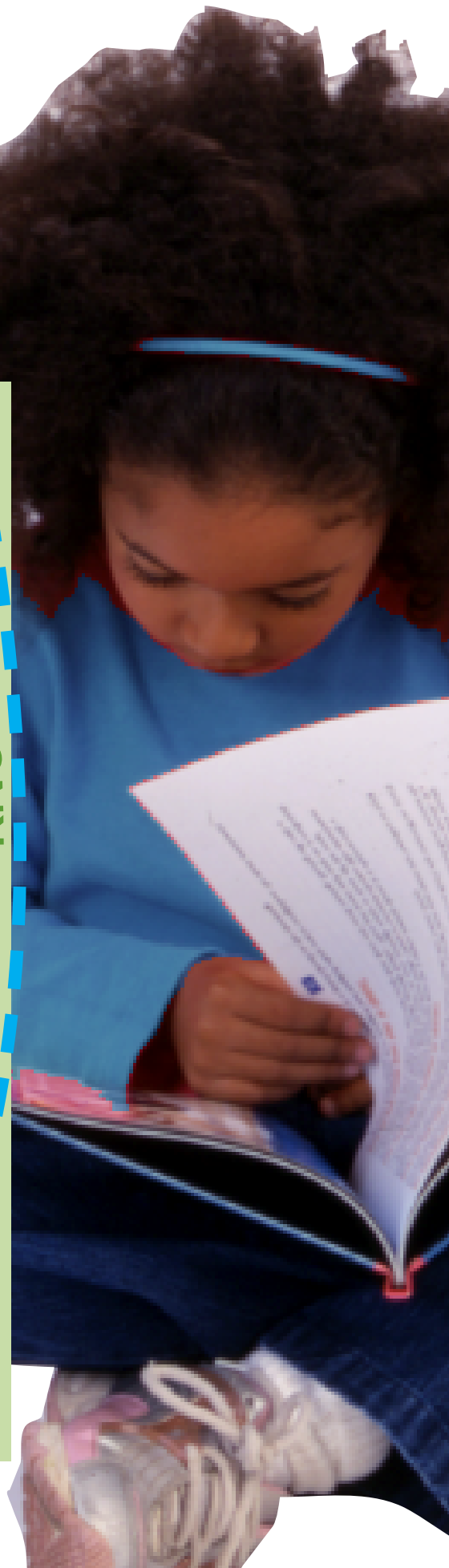
■ **IT TAKES PRACTICE** Reading, like playing a musical instrument, is not something that is mastered once and for all at a certain age. It is a skill that continues to improve through practice. ("Becoming a Nation of Readers," 1985)

■ **THEY'VE GOT TO HAVE THE BOOKS** For the poorest children, a lack of books poses the greatest barrier to achieving literacy. Low-income families have on average four children's books in their homes. (Needleman, 2001)

■ **ROLE MODELS MATTER** Students who see adults reading daily or weekly tend to read more and have higher reading scores than those who don't. (McCormick and Mason, 1986)

■ **THE BOTTOM LINE** With access to books and reading encouragement, kids can avoid summer slide. Studies show that reading just four or five books over the summer can be enough to maintain reading skills.

KNOW THE FACTS



age-appropriate books around,” advises Allington. Some schools open their libraries one afternoon each week. Others have regular “book fair” evenings at which kids buy, borrow, or exchange books. At some schools, teachers set up a “Take a book/leave a book” rack filled with inexpensive paperbacks outside the front doors of the school.

One simple idea is to allow children to take four or five classroom books home for the summer. Nancy Weatherspoon, a retired reading teacher in Alderson, California, gave students her phone number. “They’d call me and I’d meet them at school so they could take out as many books as they wanted,” she says. In one Illinois district, children win prizes by leaving messages on the school’s answering machine, reading from books or summarizing them.

Motivation Is Key

Even if children have books in hand, they have lots of competing interests, from sports to television and video games. To motivate them to read, educators use both sticks and carrots.

Many schools require summer book reports, or ask parents to verify that their children have read specific books. Kim’s research in a large suburban district shows this plan

works somewhat. Required book reports were turned in, at most, 45 percent of the time. ▶

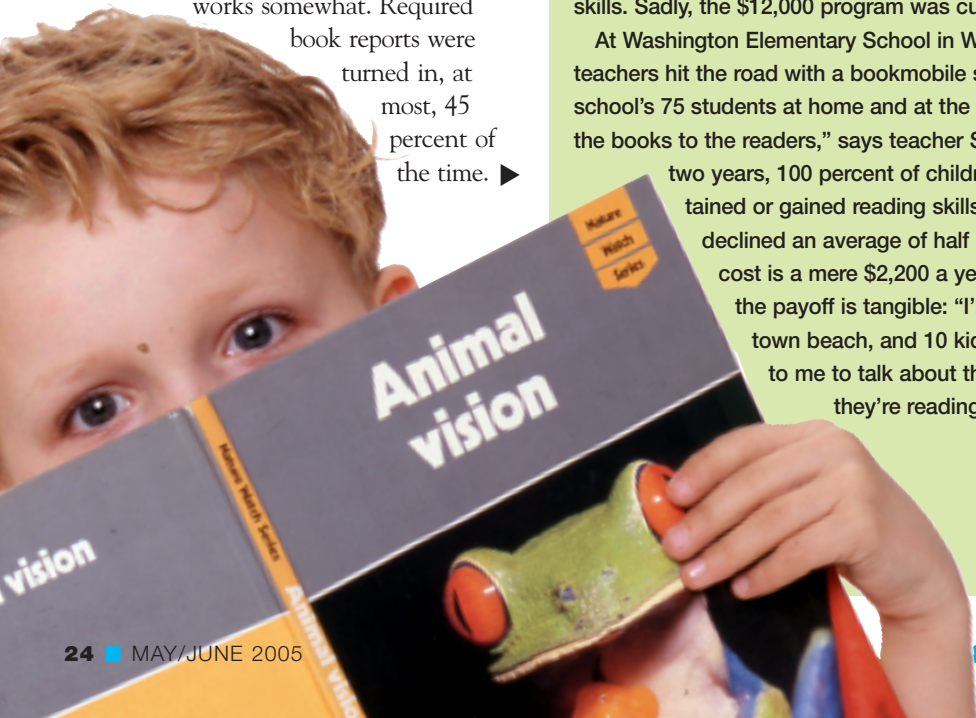


WHEN TEACHERS TACKLE a problem, they are sure to find a creative answer. How can we get books into the hands of hard-to-reach kids? Bookmobiles are a surprisingly low-cost, high-success strategy.

The discovery that only 22 percent of incoming second graders retained their reading skills over the summer led teachers at Nicolet Elementary School in Green Bay, WI, to fill an RV with books and head out into the city streets four days a week. “We realized that we had to go to them,” says first-grade teacher Denise Malach. Twelve teachers signed up for shifts, stopping in parks in their students’ neighborhoods and giving the kids books and guided reading lessons. The result: 76 percent of the second graders retained their skills. Sadly, the \$12,000 program was cut the following year.

At Washington Elementary School in Washington, NH, concerned teachers hit the road with a bookmobile starting in 2003, serving the school’s 75 students at home and at the local beach. “We match the books to the readers,” says teacher Suzanne Lull. In the past two years, 100 percent of children who used it maintained or gained reading skills; those who didn’t declined an average of half a year in skills. The cost is a mere \$2,200 a year, Lull says, and the payoff is tangible: “I’ll be sitting on the town beach, and 10 kids will come up to me to talk about the books they’re reading.”

REACH KIDS WHERE THEY LIVE



Mandating specific books also has a danger: It can turn kids off reading for pleasure, particularly if the books are too difficult. "The research has absolutely nothing good to say about forcing hard reading on kids," Allington says. "Why should we be surprised? If adults preferred hard reading, *The Economist* would be flying off the shelves of 7-Elevens."

One common "carrot" approach often used by public libraries is giving prizes, books, and other incentives for reading a certain number of books. But, Kim says, it may encourage children to "read only easy books to win prizes and to read books rapidly with little comprehension."

Some research shows that the best way to encourage children to read outside of school is to increase access to books they *really* want to read—which are often different from the books teachers and parents pick out for them. In a University of Florida study conducted by Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen, Ph.D., low-income children were asked to select 15 books from 400 choices. The boys most often chose humor or pop-culture titles such as

Captain Underpants and books about rapper Lil' Romeo; girls chose books about actress Hilary Duff, and singing group Destiny's Child. They also often picked kid-friendly series (such as *Junie B. Jones*), and, notably, nonfiction books about sports and animals.

Talking With Parents

Summertime parent involvement is key, and teachers have found that many parents want direction and parameters. Julie Woodard, a fourth-grade teacher at Dorothy Smith Pullen Elementary School in Heath, Texas, sends home letters to parents that suggest helping students set specific goals (a series, a Newbery Medal-winning book). She gives order information for books, and provides a list of author Web sites that kids might like. But in the end, she says, "I don't care if they're reading Rudyard Kipling or Roald Dahl, as long as they're excited about it."

Ultimately, it's a teacher's enthusiasm and creativity that makes the difference. Sarah Fitzpatrick, an eighth-grade language-arts teacher at Mercer Middle School in Seattle, gives outgoing seventh graders four prestamped, plain postcards (along with colored pencils, a book, and a library brochure). When a child finishes a book, he sends her a postcard illustrating and summarizing it—and she sends back encouraging words on a picture postcard of her vacation spot. About 80 percent of the children send her at least one postcard.

In the fall, she is a step ahead because she knows their interests and skill levels—and she has established a bond. "Many of them didn't think they'd get a postcard back," she says. "When they did, it made them feel that reading was important—it really did matter." ■

PARENTS CAN MAKE all the difference in

inspiring students to read. Visit our Web site (www.scholastic.com/instructor) and download a Letter to Families **Reproducible** filled with great ideas for parents and kids:

■ MAKE THE TIME

Establish quiet reading time after lunch or in the morning as a part of your child's daily summer routine.

■ SHOP SMART

Look for children's books at garage sales, yard sales, or used-book stores. You could buy a whole summer's worth for a few dollars.

■ BECOME AN EXPERT

Read up on reading! Check out "Be a Reading Coach," "Make Your Home Reading Central," and more articles for parents on www.scholastic.com/summerreading.

■ TURN OFF THE TV

During the summer, it's more important than ever to limit the number of hours of television children watch.

■ REWARD READING

It's okay to use incentives. Start a sticker chart and let your child earn new paperbacks or special outings with you.

■ COOK AND READ

As you prepare a meal together, have your child read the recipe aloud to you.

■ ORDER UP

Consider subscribing to children's magazines (such as *Nick Jr.* or *Sports Illustrated for Kids*).

GET PARENTS INVOLVED

