

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #39: Jim Trelease

The Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease is a milestone publication for both parents and teachers alike. This book first surfaced in 1979 as a self-published book by Trelease. Penguin picked it up in 1982, and it was on the New York Times bestseller list for 17 weeks. Since its inception, it has gone through numerous reprints and revisions. The latest copyright is 2001. This book is a must-read for any teacher and/or parent. "It is divided into two parts: the first half contains the *ways* and *whys* of raising readers and the last half consists of an annotated bibliography. This is not a book about teaching a child how to read; it's about teaching a child to want to read."

Even without the book in front of you, you can access the information by going to <http://www.trelease-on-reading.com>. This is the "web version" of his handbook. Bookmark it! You will quickly get immersed in his common sense, his easy-to-read advice, his professional references to research, and of course his treasury of booklists. (You will love his suggestions for short novels.)

Some highlights on the web site too good to miss:

CHAPTER 1: Why Read Aloud?

- 32,000,000 fewer words

Trelease describes the two common factors found in the best student readers from around the world:

- 1) Frequency of teachers reading aloud to students
- 2) Frequency of SSR (sustained silent reading/pleasure reading in school)

A research study was conducted to find out what could cause differences so early among young, American children. "The researchers began by identifying 42 normal families; no drug, alcohol, or spouse abusers and non-transient. Three socioeconomic groups were represented: welfare, working class, and professional. Beginning when the children were seven months old, researchers visited the homes for one hour a month, and continued their visits for two and one-half years... When the daily number of words for each group of children was projected across four years, the four-year-old child from the professional family will have heard 45 million words, the working class child 26 million, and the welfare child only 13 million. All three children will show up for kindergarten on the same day, but one will have heard 32 million fewer words—which is a gigantic difference."

So what can we do for our students at middle school? We can continue to read to them every day (in all core and elective classes). Reading a novel can become a monumental task when you are faced with only a 45-minute



class period, but reading a short poem, a quote, a weird fact, or an article from the newspaper is manageable. In addition, we need to get creative in finding time for our students to participate in silent sustained reading. I know I have written about this in a previous email tip, so I won't dwell on the various management structures you can implement. (See Tip #24 - *Independent Reading* in the new teacher binder)

CHAPTER 6: Libraries—Home, School, Public

Creating a Print-Rich Environment

"The last decade's research by respected researchers like Krashen, McQuillan, Allington, and Lance unmistakably connects access to print with high reading scores, and conversely, lack of access brings lower scores. The high NAEP reading scores can be found in states with better libraries, more bookstores, more print in the home, and more free or independent reading."

Dr. Steve Krashen presented at the Alaska State Literacy Association conference in Anchorage a couple of weeks ago. He passionately spoke about the need for improved libraries and access to books across the United States. Jim Trelease references Krashen's work throughout chapter 6 of his book, and there are links to Krashen's research studies and home page there, too.

Krashen and his colleagues completed research in three California districts (only 20 miles apart geographically) on the amount of print accessible to the students. The table below shows the average number of books found in homes, classroom libraries, and school libraries. It also shows how many bookstores are in the immediate vicinity. Trelease writes, "One look at the chart clearly shows the print desert surrounding urban children, versus the rich print climate surrounding others." Can this affect student performance on state testing? You bet...

Print 'Climate' in 3 California Districts

DISTRICT	BOOKS PER				
	home	classrm	sch. lib.	pub. lib.	bkstores
Bev. Hills	199	392	60,000	200,000	5
Watts	.4	54	23,000	110,000	0
Compton	2.7	47	16,000	90,000	1



www.trelease-on-reading.com/rah_chpt6_p1.html

Rain Gutter Bookshelves

So how would you rate your own classroom library? About how many books do you have? What percentage is non-fiction (the preference of most teenage boys)? Do you collect your bonus points from Troll and/or Tab book clubs and put them toward new books? Do you exchange books at Title Wave trying to keep your collection up-to-date? Are you troubled with how to best organize your classroom collection? Jim Trelease, of course, has suggestions for you.

"Bookstores don't place every book face-out, but the ones they really want to move, the new arrivals, the bestsellers — those always go face-out. Unlike most educators and librarians, publishers know the cover sells the book, so not only do they work extra-hard designing the right cover, many pay the book chains as much as \$750 a month per book to have the cover shelved face-out. That's how important the cover is."

I think about my classroom library and how I agonized over how to keep track of the books I loaned students and how to best organize them on my Wal-Mart plastic bookshelves. I wish I had spent more time thinking about



how to display more of the books face-out. I did have one small area where I was able to display books face-out using library-style book rests, but those were limited and expensive. My 8th graders took notice of those books and often lingered in front of them. It was labeled GOODMAN'S GREATEST. Students, like adults, do appreciate book recommendations.

Trelease suggests rain gutters as a quick fix - "rain gutters that are purchased at the local hardware store for about \$3 per 10-foot strip, and made of



enameled, reinforced plastic. As plastic, they're easily cut to any size, and supported by plastic brackets that can be screwed into almost any wall, including concrete."

Obviously, check with your principal first about putting these into your classroom.

Consider applying for mini-grants from your PTSA or local business partners to cover the cost. Here's a photo off of Trelease's web site that shows a classroom that has been reconfigured with rain gutter bookshelves.



www.trelease-on-reading.com/rah_chpt6_p4.html#rain-gutter

