STORY TIME

“The stories we love best do live in us forever.” —JK Rowling

Reading is critical to children’s education. Kids who aren’t reading at grade level by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school.1 Unfortunately, 68% of fourth graders in the US do not meet national proficiency levels.2 United Way is working around the world to boost children’s literacy rates and we’re thrilled to have you join the effort.

Reading to children can:
- build language and pre-literacy skills
- expose them to new ideas
- build their social, emotional and problem-solving skills
- inspire them to have fun and become lifelong learners

Find more information on children’s literacy at earlygradereading.unitedway.org.

WHAT IT IS

Story Time projects can include reading and tutoring. Volunteer readers can spend 20-30 minutes reading to a single child or group of children. Volunteer tutors work individually with children to teach them reading skills.

GOALS

1. **Define your goals.** Find data about literacy and dropout rates in your community from your local United Way, school districts and literacy groups. Use this to pinpoint challenge areas in your community. This information can help focus your efforts and demonstrate the importance to potential volunteers.

2. **Frame the challenge** as part of a need for systemic change. A child who is hungry can’t focus on reading, even with the best of volunteers. A child who misses school frequently because his family cannot find a permanent home may find it hard to keep up with learning to read as well. Early grade reading challenges do not occur in a vacuum. Read more in the *Engaging Volunteers in Education: A Volunteer Reading Guide*, accessible to United Way staff members.

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1 Early Grade Reading Toolkit
2 U.S. Department of Education
PLANNING LOGISTICS

3. **Select a site.** Start conversations with your local United Way, school districts, parents, libraries, teachers, school principals and other parties already involved or interested in taking part.

4. **Outline responsibilities** with your site. Make sure your group and all affected parties at your site (which could be teachers, principals, librarians, cleaning crews, parents or others) communicate clearly about what you'll be doing and what you will and won't be responsible for. These are the people you might need the most support from—build good relationships with them! Thank them consistently and meaningfully. Make sure your site has the infrastructure to handle volunteers and is a place volunteers would be motivated to spend their time.

5. **Collaboratively decide how the program will take place** once you've found a site: in a classroom with the teacher, outside of the classroom or after school. How often will you tutor or read to the children? What age group will you work with? Choose a regular time and location.

6. **Determine how you will get books:** through a library, a book distribution program, a company donation, a book drive, etc.

7. **Create a timeline** for the year, keeping in mind holidays and exams at both your school and the children's school(s).

8. **Map out a budget.** This could include transportation expenses, snacks, reading materials, printing costs, supplies for any projects, special gifts for the children and volunteers, and LIVE UNITED shirts for volunteers.

VOLUNTEERS

9. **Prepare for volunteers.** Decide whether they will need background checks or special screening. Figure out training, communication and recognition for volunteers and select people to oversee these roles. An orientation session can provide volunteers with a clear sense of what United Way is, how to best help the children and why it matters. Consistently thank them for their work.

10. **Recruit and retain volunteers.** Take a look at our “Recruit Members” and “Retain Members” downloadable in our Resources section for helpful tips.

READING TIPS

- **Choose a book that:**
  - Reflects the diversity and interests of the class
  - Provides opportunities for conversation with the children
  - Has captivating illustrations
  - Is fun to read out loud
  - Is one you like
  - If read in a group, is shorter

- **Prepare:**
  - Read the book out loud ahead of time
  - Think of ways to engage restless children through questions, clapping and mimicking
  - Post sticky notes on pages to remind you of your plans

- **Manage the setting and the children:**
  - Strategically choose where and how you sit, and ask the children to sit the same way
  - Minimize distractions
  - Follow the children’s lead occasionally and talk about what they want to talk about
  - Ask versions of “What do you think will happen next?” to get back to reading the story when discussion strays too far for too long

- **Find your reading style:**
  - Be expressive; make the snake hiss and the door creak
  - Slow your pace so the children have time to understand and appreciate the story and pictures
• Project your voice but don’t shout
• Know the story. Read it to yourself several times so you know what happens next

• Engage the children:
  • Ask varied questions about facts, opinion, inferences, how the text relates to the child’s own experiences, how the text relates to another text, predictions, what the child would have written as the author and vocabulary
  • Involve the children by asking them to read out loud, count, talk about the story and pictures, mimic, vote or star as characters in the book

• Read one-on-one:
  • Let the child choose and hold the book, set the pace, turn the pages, read out loud and have fun

Give children time to sound out words but don’t force them to. Help them quickly if they ask for it. Give lots of praise. Provide gentle corrections. Focus on building relationships with the children in addition to boosting their reading skills.

Find more excellent insights, project examples and management tips in Engaging Volunteers in Education: A Volunteer Reading Guide.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Book recommendations listed below for kids in K-3rd grade. Find more recommendations on the National Education Association’s Educators’ Top 100 Children’s Books list; the International Reading Association’s Children’s Choices Reading List; and lists published by Parents Magazine.

| All the World by Liz Garton Scanlon | Listen to the Wind: The Story of Dr. Greg and Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson and Susan L. Roth |
| Benny and Penny in the Big No-No! by Geoffrey Hayes | Mommy, Mama and Me by Lesléa Newman |
| Big Wolf and Little Wolf by Nadine Brun-Cosme | Mouse and Mole: Fine Feathered Friends by Wong Herbert Yee |
| Birds by Kevin Henkes | A Book Mordicai Gerstein Book Fiesta!: Celebrate Children's Day/Book Day; Celebrяемos el día de los niños/El día de los libros by Pat Mora |
| The Curious Garden by Peter Brown | Pearl and Wagner: One Funny Day by Kate McMullan |
| Gracias * Thanks by Pat Mora | Posy by Linda Newbery |
| Growing Vegetable Soup by Lois Ehlert | Red Sings from Treetops: A Year in Colors by Joyce Sidman |
| Higher! Higher! by Leslie Patricelli | Sweet Potato Pie by Kathleen D. Lindsey |
| How Do Dinosaurs Get Well Soon? by Jane Yolen | Thunder-Boomer! by Shutta Crum |
| How Do Dinosaurs Eat their Food? by Jane Yolen | Waiting for Winter by Sebastian Meschenmoser |
| I Spy Fly Guy! by Tedd Arnold | Yummy: Eight Favorite Fairy Tales by Lucy Cousins |