

Read Aloud Week at Collicot School

Community leaders in Milton, Massachusetts, donated more than 50 hours of excitement and enthusiasm when they read aloud to students at Collicot School.

In one of the largest back-to-school partnership efforts ever in our town, 100 community leaders visited Collicot School, Milton, Massachusetts, to read aloud to our students. During Read Aloud Week, these volunteers gave more than 50 enthusiastic hours so that each classroom would have at least one visiting reader every day.

Most of us in elementary education have long believed that reading aloud to our students is worthwhile, if for no other reason than that they enjoy it. But when Jim Trelease, author of the *Read Aloud Handbook*, spoke to our Parent-Teacher Organization, he emphasized the value of reading aloud to young children to strengthen their language development, the growth of their imaginations, and their love of literature. He also explained the long-term academic payoff for students who had been read to as youngsters. In short, he provided the authoritative evidence for what we had sensed.

Following that PTO presentation, teachers began including read-aloud

time in their lesson plans; but we all felt the need to do more, to somehow involve the community and the parents. We began with the idea of contacting people our students would not usually think of as "readers." By bringing in dentists and priests and politicians, we hoped to show our students that reading is important to adults other than their parents and teachers.

We drew up a list of people to invite, a wish list that included the Vice-President of the United States. While waiting for responses to our invitations, we collected books from our school library, from the public library, and from our homes. The Student Council donated \$50.00 from their school store profits to purchase additional books for the week.

We followed up our RSVP deadline with phone calls (the Vice-President was busy), then invited more readers. We publicized our plans in the local newspaper and appealed for more volunteers. We filled all but two of the 106 time slots, in many cases matching volunteers with favorite



books they specifically requested.

The enthusiasm and ingenuity of our visiting readers surprised both faculty and students. One volunteer wrote an original story with a horse for the main character; on the day of the reading a companion brought a horse to school, complete with glasses and a school bag on his back. A local police officer read to the 2nd grade from the back of his police wagon, a parish priest conducted singing as a pre-reading activity, and a pediatrician read the poetry of Shel Silverstein.

The spirit of Read Aloud Week has lingered with us. Teachers began using their planning periods to read aloud to each other's classes. The local cable TV company taped readers each day and showed an hour's worth of tape each night. Collicot School's first Read Aloud Week was such a success that we are planning to make it an annual event. □



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