



“Children are made readers on the laps of their parents.”

Emilie Buchwald, award-winning children’s author

But what if there are no books, and no time on the lap of a parent? Will those children never become readers? Will they never know the wonder of books?

What about parents who were never read to themselves? Will they know the joy of a good book and an eager child on their lap? Will they read aloud?

Welcome to ReadAloud.org

Founded in 2008, ReadAloud.org is a non-profit organization that works to ignite a passion for reading aloud in families nationwide. Through reading aloud together, families can build literacy skills, reinforce knowledge-based learning, and enhance communication across generations. In other words, we believe that families that read aloud together will be stronger, smarter and more successful — so we want more families to read together every day.

Raising Awareness, Touching Lives

ReadAloud.org seeks to raise awareness about the importance of families reading aloud together in two main ways:

- Through dynamic **public outreach** at major events such as the National Book Festival and the Los Angeles Times Book Festival.
- Through everyday, local **community outreach** with its Big Box of Books program.

Raising Public Awareness

ReadAloud.org deploys two incredible tools to broadcast its message.

Family Read Aloud Authors are writers, and sometimes illustrators, who share our commitment to encouraging families to read aloud together. They have written books that are ideal choices for families to read aloud, they have demonstrated a great connection and understanding of their audience(s) and, most important, they are passionate about families reading aloud together.

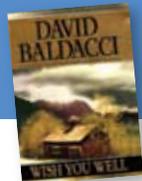
These authors spread the read-aloud message in public appearances with ReadAloud.org at major public venues, such as the National Book Festival in Washington, D.C., and the Los Angeles Times Book Festival. These unique events give families a chance to hear authors talk about their personal experiences with reading aloud and be inspired to make reading aloud part of their family’s daily routine.

Family Read Aloud Authors’ works are also ideal choices for reading aloud; ReadAloud.org plans to include these authors’ works in its ongoing Big Box of Books community outreach project.

2010 FAMILY READ ALOUD AUTHORS



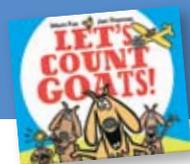
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THE BIG BOX OF BOOKS



How else can you focus families' attention on the importance of good, old-fashioned reading aloud? Well, perhaps with a little good, new-fashioned high tech gadgetry.

Enter **Hilda, the talking goat**. Hilda is the unique and captivating spokesperson for ReadAloud.org. Harnessing the latest in animation technology, the character of Hilda is brought to life to interact with children and adults in real time — answering their questions and speaking to them about his love for books and the importance of reading aloud. He (yes, he) travels with the Cole Family Barn to major events for ReadAloud.org, but he's also appeared on smaller screens via the Internet for live chats at schools and libraries. In the past few years, Hilda has appeared before thousands of families in live performances in places as varied as Stone Mountain, Ga., Frankfort, Ky., Alexandria, Va., and Dallas, Texas.



Family Read Aloud Author Antwone Fisher speaks with Hilda, the Read Aloud Spokesgoat, at the Los Angeles Times Book Festival April 25, 2010.

Touching Lives

ReadAloud.org's new initiative, the **Big Box of Books** project, seeks to build a read-aloud library for the most vulnerable families. Our Big Box of Books will contain five to six books that build knowledge on a core topic — examples might range from books about numbers and counting, to books about overcoming obstacles, to tales of space exploration and the solar system — that ignite a family's curiosity and, most important, provide a stage for bonding, learning, and having fun while reading.

The Big Box of Books will also contain learning aids and tips for getting the most out of reading aloud together. Each kit will be age-appropriate, according to a family's needs.

ReadAloud.org will partner with community non-profit service organizations, libraries and schools to target families that would benefit from the program, and to stage community sharing and learning sessions where the Big Box of Books will be distributed to families twice a year in summer and winter.

The Big Box of Books will benefit families who have no or limited books in the home, who agree to read aloud as little as 15 minutes per day, and who are willing to participate in the twice-yearly community learning and sharing sessions where the boxes are distributed. Some families will be asked to participate in more comprehensive longitudinal assessments of individual learning and family dynamics around reading to enhance the program's efficacy.

As with all such projects, partnerships are an indispensable part of the Big Box of Books initiative.

- From the local service organizations that provide leadership in identifying



families, providing essential fund-raising, hosting community events, and distributing books;

- To the national organizations, such as **FirstBook**, which helps to identify and provide books at discounted cost as well as helping ReadAloud.org to find local partners;
- To the institutional organizations, such as the **Center for the Book at the Library of Congress**, which has helped ReadAloud.org establish a network of partnerships;
- To the corporate partners and grant-making bodies, whose philanthropy and generosity will make the Big Box of Books project a reality.

ReadAloud.org will launch the Big Box of Books program in the winter of 2010 in Antrim County Michigan with the leadership and support of Communities in Schools-Mancelona, Helena Township Library, and Friends of the Library.

What makes ReadAloud.org unique?

Experts — from teachers, to researchers, to wise neighbors — have long understood that reading aloud is crucial to raising good readers and, in turn, successful, thoughtful, intelligent people.

And yet... this simple advice is difficult for many families to follow. According to the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, only 48 percent of families below the poverty level read to their preschoolers each day, compared with 64 percent of families whose incomes were at or above the poverty level. Children from low-income families are also less likely to have exposure to print materials.

ReadAloud.org aims to change that, and its approach is unique from the many organizations that are, thankfully, attacking this problem.

1. ReadAloud.org focuses on family members of all ages reading aloud together.

There is no doubt that it is crucial to read to children from a very early age; studies



A winner in Hilda's popular reading game enjoys her prize — a handsome stuffed goat! — at the National Book Festival in Washington, D.C., in September 2009.

have shown that it is essential for building vocabulary, cognitive skills, and the foundations for literacy.

And yet, is it ever too late to begin?

ReadAloud.org asks family members of all ages to read aloud together — to find enjoyment in a good book, to learn something new, to share ideas, to be entertained, and of course, to become a lifelong reader. Our Big Box of Books project, for example, includes children up to age 12 — and we boldly hope that its materials will engage teenagers and adults as well, from mothers to grandmothers.

ReadAloud.org hopes that reading aloud does not end when a child outgrows an adult's lap, and that the pleasure of sharing a good book can extend to a person's entire life — and family.

2. Our reading program seeks to build knowledge and enjoyment of reading, not simply literacy skills.

Reading, at its most basic, is not merely deciphering letters strung together to make sounds. Reading is about ideas. Reading is about knowledge. Reading is about human curiosity. What better way is there to learn than to read?

For vulnerable families, this building up of knowledge could not be more vital. As University of Michigan Professor Susan B.



Neuman argues, the growing “knowledge gap” may be far more detrimental than any gap in achievement scores. Not only does it impede literacy (after all, you may read a text, but can you understand it?), it can limit social and economic opportunities, cause health and safety problems, and lead to an overall disenchantment with learning in general.

That is why ReadAloud.org strives to choose books that not only entertain, but also build knowledge. A Big Box of Books, for example, may include a tale of a magic school bus exploring the Milky Way galaxy, a book of photographs and facts about the planets, a water color tale of the launch of Apollo 11, and a lively, fun fantasy about friendly aliens coming to Earth. Each book builds on the knowledge gained from the others, encouraging questions, piquing curiosity, and inviting stories and play that reinforce and build on the knowledge readers have gained. What’s more: It’s fun!

Reading aloud, reading for knowledge. In this way, families and children can ignite a love of reading and a spark of curiosity that will not be easily extinguished.

3. Through encouraging the act of reading aloud, ReadAloud.org hopes to also strengthen family bonds and communication.

The moments when many modern families come together seem to be increasingly few and far between. What’s more, they are often moments bombarded by distractions: the television, the Internet, the cell phone, the text message.

By encouraging families to read aloud together, ReadAloud.org hopes to



Author Jennifer Liu Bryan helps a contestant in Hilda’s Reading Game at the National Book Festival in Washington, D.C., in September 2010.

reclaim some of those quiet, thoughtful, meaningful moments for families — all through the power of a good book. In sharing a pot-boiler plot, some fascinating new fact, or answering little brother’s questions, family members might learn to communicate better, be more understanding of one another, and feel all the more close, all through the shared experience of reading aloud.

About ReadAloud.org

ReadAloud.org grew out of one family’s commitment to exploring its past, and finding reading aloud near its center.

In 2008, Jennifer Liu Bryan and Hazel Cole Kendle co-authored *Cole Family Christmas*, a tale based on a beloved true family story of a very special Christmas in the coal-mining town of Benham, Ky., in the 1920s. It was written in the hope that it would be read aloud, just as the eleven-member Cole family read aloud each night. Inspired by this sentiment and history, the descendants of the Cole family founded ReadAloud.org in 2008.

When in 2009 Bryan published *Hilda, A Very Loyal Goat*, following the fictitious adventures of the Cole family’s goat — ReadAloud.org found a surprisingly articulate spokesperson, er goat, for its read aloud cause.

ReadAloud.org is a non-profit 501(c)(3) tax exempt corporation. Contributions are tax deductible. For more information, contact Bob Robbins at (231) 409-2665 (robbins.bob@readaloud.org) or visit ReadAloud.org.

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