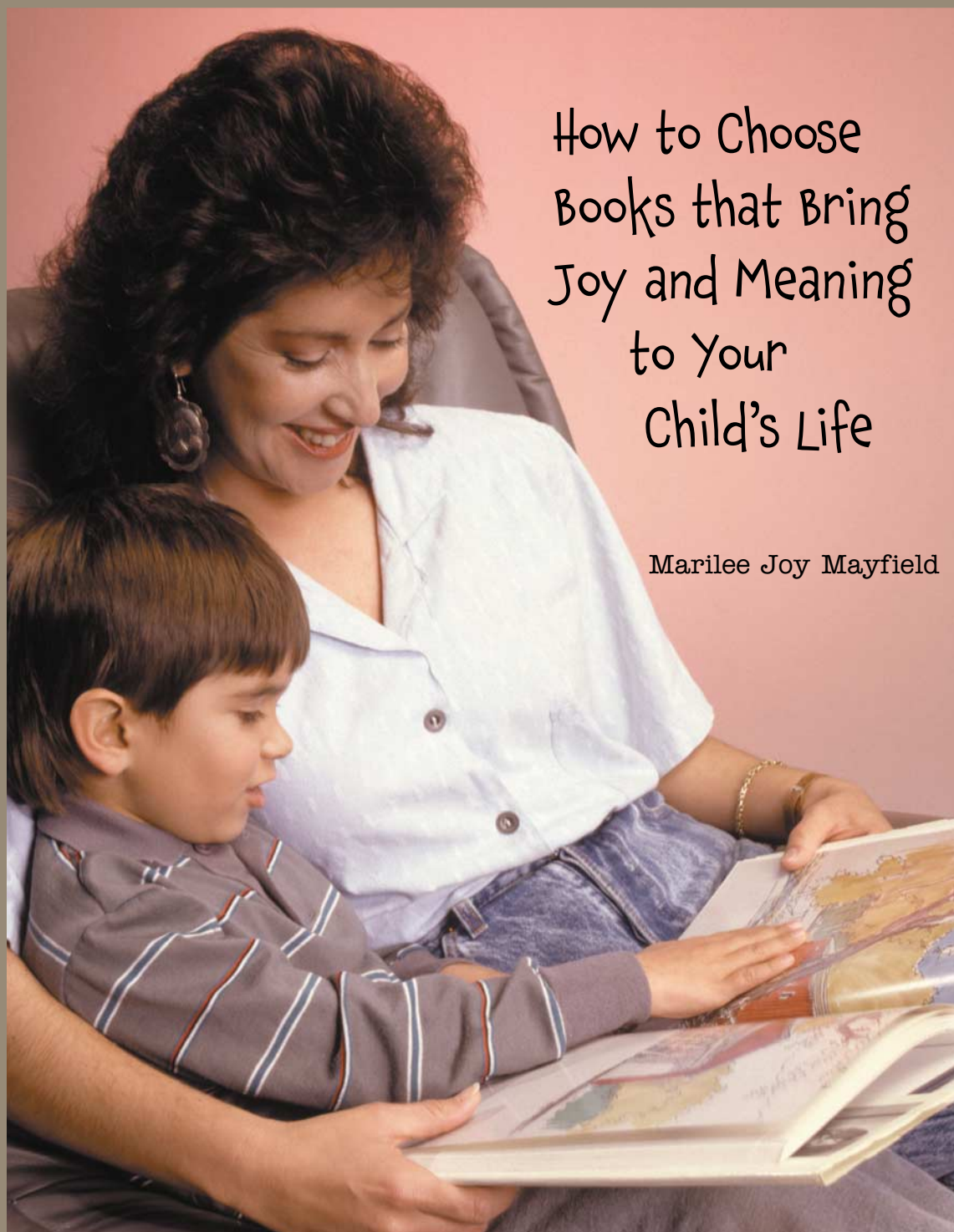


# The Enchanting World of Parent-Child Conversational Reading

How to Choose  
Books that Bring  
Joy and Meaning  
to Your  
Child's Life

Marilee Joy Mayfield



# The ABCs of Selecting Books for Children



**This report contains a powerful educational secret.**

You can hold this secret in the palm of your hand. With your guidance, this easy-to-accomplish technique has the potential to dramatically improve your child's growth and development *for the rest of his life.*

This simple technique takes only 15 minutes a day and is available to every parent regardless of economic constraints or social status. Parents, teachers and caregivers have been using this method for generations but only in recent years have the dramatic advantages of this process been firmly established by countless educational reports and government studies.

Even more amazing is that in addition to providing children with lifelong benefits, this method is also responsible for helping families develop closer bonds with each other. And, *as if these results were not phenomenal enough*, this process is also beneficial to the parents, teachers and caregivers who participate as well.

*Have you guessed what this powerful secret is? **It's 15 minutes of well-chosen stories and books read aloud every day.***

The simple steps to success with this process are:

- 1) Select stories and books for mind and spirit health, just as you select foods for body health.
- 2) Create an environment and atmosphere where reading together is fun for you and your child.
- 3) Read aloud to your child every day for 15 minutes.

As you introduce your child to the world of the spoken and written world, you begin by talking to him before he is born. After your child is born, you read aloud to him and show him the pictures in a baby picture book. Then as you progress to more sophisticated picture books, you read aloud, look at the pictures, point to the words and discuss the story. Reading together is a fun, everyday activity—a special intimate conversation where you and your child share the story and quiet time together.

As your child gets older, you will find that he is learning words and sentences from the repeated reading of stories that he loves. The excitement and pleasure derived from your reading aloud translates into a deep desire to learn to read by himself.

**Reading aloud has become a natural bridge to your child's first steps into the exciting adventure of reading independently.** As you support your child's beginning attempts at learning to read, you will notice certain patterns in the books your child loves to hear or read over and over again.

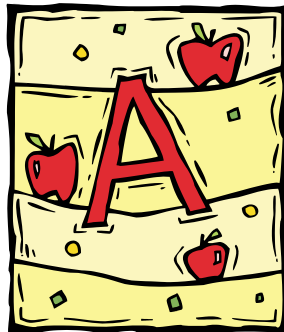
Imagine yourself in your local library or bookstore. In front of you is a dizzying array of books. There are hundreds, maybe even thousands, of books from which to select those with the potential to engage your child and excite her about reading. *Where do you start?*

It's all too easy to fall into the distracting trap of television cartoon characters and well-known brand names, especially if you are talking with and corralling three children while you are there! Not all of these high profile products are without merit, but many of them are heavy on style and light on substance.

**It takes some careful thought to find a soon-to-be-read-a-thousand-times book.** Much-loved books and stories are as divergent as flowers in a garden. But just as all flowers share certain characteristics, so do books with the potential to become childhood favorites.

*Here are some simple-to-remember A-B-C guidelines for selecting quality books for your children.*

## A is for Ability



As you select a new children's book, think of your child's ability to understand the story. If you are planning to read the story aloud and your child is not yet at reading age, pick a book that you feel is at the level or a little above the level of your child's current level of understanding. If you were picking an outfit for your child, you would pick one that fits just right or one a little larger so your child would grow into it. Pick a book the same way.

If your child is just starting to read and she is beginning to become interested in reading independently, have her look at some random spreads in the book with you. Is every word a struggle? Or are there just a few words that are new and can be figured out by the context of the page, by the pictures or by the mood of the story?

Ideally, you are selecting a book that your child can grow with so don't shy away from unfamiliar words altogether because after you read it together or your child reads it alone for the fifth time, the word or words won't be unfamiliar to her anymore!

**If your child doesn't show an interest in reading, you can help by finding books that match his special interests.** Maybe your son loves spaceships or is fascinated by the ocean. Finding a book about a topic he loves will make reading more appealing to him.

You could have the opposite situation as well. Maybe your son loves to read and is not being challenged enough in school. Let him help as you both find books that expand his horizons and spark his imagination.



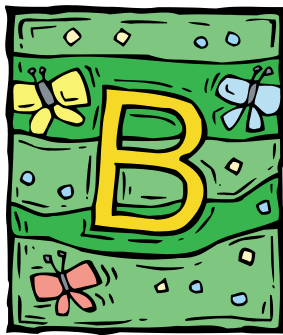
One clever mother I know had the challenge of finding books appropriate for her three children ages 3, 6 and 9. She set up special days of the week as story days—Monday for the three-year-old, Wednesday for the six-year-old and Friday for the nine-year-old. It was an informal set-up. Sometimes storytime became one-on-one time and at other times all the children or two of the children would participate. As the six-year-old and the nine-year-old learned to read they would read aloud to the youngest child as well.

Saturdays were family days and the children rotated in selecting a book or books of their choice. *These story days brought their whole family closer together as they shared and read to each other.*

Another mother I know was frustrated by the lack of interest her child showed in books and reading. But her little girl was attracted to a character doll that was packaged with a storybook. So she bought the doll and the storybook and started making up similar stories to share with her daughter as they both played with the doll.

That doll turned out to be a turning point for her child. After about a month of playing together, she asked her mom to read the book to her. When she started first grade a year later she was a proficient reader. **Somehow the tangible aspect of the doll made the abstract concept of a storybook more real to her.**

## B is for Beauty



*Webster's New World Dictionary* describes the word "beauty" this way: The quality attributed to whatever pleases or satisfies the senses or mind, as by line, color, form, texture, proportion, rhythmic motion, tone, etc., or by behavior, attitude, etc. **A children's book can display the combined beauty of art and language in many different ways.**

- color, form, texture and illustrations
- choice of language and rhythm

- storyline, message, lessons learned
- endearing and enduring characters who display interesting, and sometimes dramatic, attitudes and behavior

## Illustrations

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At the board book and picture book stage of your child's life, a book's artwork tells a great deal of the story. **Having a beautifully illustrated book in your home is like having an art gallery at your fingertips.**

Children love bright colors, energetic shapes and emotional characters. Ask your child: "Do you like this picture?" *You will get answers as varied as your child's personality: "I like the color; I think it's funny; It's very sad; I want to draw one like it."*



Illustration from **Crabby Lessons** by artist Randy Jennings published by Leaping Antelope Productions.

In some children's books, the illustrations carry a subplot not told in the story or a character who is never explained in the words. Children are fascinated by this hidden extra feature that enlivens the story. Still other books have art and words that do not match so children get a different meaning from the story than the face value of what the words say. You'd be surprised at how well children can "read between the lines."

Before I could read, my mother would turn the pages of a picture book and ask me what was happening in the story. Then later she read the actual story aloud. It wasn't long before I was reading the story myself and sharing it with my two younger sisters. I still made up my own stories even after I knew how to read the book! **Part of the beauty of a book's illustrations is the many ways they can be used as a child learns to read.**

Ask your child what is taking place in the illustration on the previous page. You'll be surprised how much your child can discover just from looking at that one illustration.

One of the major goals of a picture book illustrator is to create a three-dimensional world of emotion, character and place on a two-dimensional page. *Do the illustrations speak to you? Do they engage your child? Try to look at the book through your child's eyes. Would he or she be captivated by what appears on the page?*

When I was seven-years-old, my father brought home a gorgeous oversized volume of Aesop's fables for me. How I loved that book! My mother read the wonderful stories aloud to me and my sisters and as soon as I could read them myself I poured over that volume so many times that the pages were bent and broken in places. But as fascinated as I was with the illuminating stories, I was equally captivated by the remarkable illustrations. I still remember the name of the artist—Milo Winter.

## Choice of Language & Rhythm

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Writers of children's books are very sensitive to how rhythm and word selection enhance the stories and messages they want to impart to children. **Many of the best children's books contain prose or poetry that sound almost musical when read aloud.** Before children can learn to speak and read they hear the pattern of words, inflection and tone.

Just like great music, a memorable children's story resounds and calls out for repetition. You wouldn't listen to an inspirational

piece of music only once! The best children's stories are those that can be read over and over by parents and children and enjoyed every time. **Repetition of words and stories helps children learn how to read and how to understand their own emotions as well as the emotions of others.**

If your child loves a book, he or she will ask for it dozens if not hundreds of times. Stories with layers of meaning are understood at one level by a four-year-old, at another level by an eight-year-old and appreciated at another level by a parent or teacher.



When I was in high school, I used to babysit for a family of four children. They ranged in ages from 2 to 10. Every night I was there I read a story filled with their favorite characters. Getting into the spirit of it all, I came up with a different voice for each of the five characters in the book. They absolutely loved it!

I must admit that I did my job a little too well. The next time I was there they requested the same presentation with voice accompaniment again. They would correct me if I didn't get the intonation of a particular character quite the way I had done it before! By the time my services as a babysitter were no longer needed we had repeated that particular book hundreds of times. It was always fun, although I did develop temporary laryngitis a couple of times!

## Lessons Learned

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If you were selecting a television show or a video game for your child, you would want to be sure that whatever your child is viewing is safe and appropriate for her, mentally and spiritually.

**Books that demonstrate life lessons or strong values through character action give children time to assimilate and understand the importance of the message.** It's the difference between telling your children "It's important to be kind to others" versus demonstrating an act of kindness yourself when your children are watching what is happening.

The same is true in an engaging story. Children are not always told what the message is; they discover it themselves by watching the behavior of the characters in the book. Their favorite characters learn, change and grow and the actions the characters take or the decisions they make help children understand the virtues of generosity, tolerance, courage and persistence.

As children get a little older, they can also develop an understanding of the culture and values of other nations and people between the pages of books.

Picture books can also create the groundwork for more academic subjects such as mathematics and science as well.

Some books are frivolous and fun and this type of book entertainment in measured doses is also healthy for children. The perfect book diet is a combination of:

- classic allegories and fables with morals
- modern stories with life lessons to be discovered
- stories about other cultures and values
- books that teach the beginning steps to academic subjects
- biographies (primarily for older readers)
- silly stories with fun rhythms or unusual twists
- character series where the traits of the character provide a focal point

## Endearing and Enduring Characters

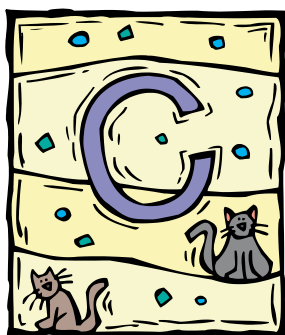
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When your child “falls in love” with a character it’s probably because he recognizes his good behaviors and virtues or his bad behaviors and vices as manifested in that character. The animal or human hero “speaks to him” in a special way and says “I’m just like you!” into his ear as he hears the words.

In a unique way, the author and artist of the book are also connecting with your child and family. They have created a heartfelt story to share with your child. A vital piece of their childhoods and their life experiences are depicted in the book’s characters and the telling of the story. They hope their collaborative effort has produced a book that will be treasured.

**This is the true beauty of the unique combination of words, pictures and story that becomes a quality children’s book; it has the power to connect people’s hearts over time and space.**

## C is for Creativity



*Great stories inspire your child to create more.* This desire expresses itself in role playing, writing, drawing, dancing, cooking, playing sports, exploring science, etc. Reading becomes a springboard for growing and becoming.

A few days ago I was wandering around in one of the local bookstores and I overheard a conversation between a mother and her little toddler.

“Mommy is looking for a book now and then we’ll go look for a book for you. What type of book do you want?”

Her daughter said in a very loud, commanding voice “I want a book about a ballerina!”

I stopped in my tracks...such a complicated word for such a tiny child. I tried not to be so obvious as I watched her twirling around and doing a dance as she said the word.

“Why do you like ballerinas?” her mom asked.

“I like ballerinas because they dance and wear pink costumes,” she said as she started walking on her tippy toes.

Wow! I paused again...another complicated word “costumes.” Then I tried to walk behind them slowly as her mom led her to the picture books and they started looking at ballerina stories.

*It made me want to dance just to listen to them!*

## Fictional Stories Create Bridges to Becoming



Books help me learn what I like as I watch the characters do the things I like to do.

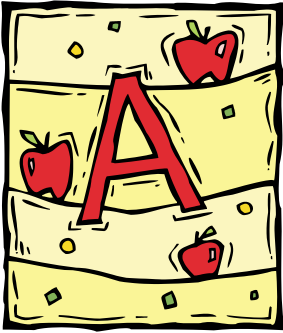


Books inspire me to perform and create.



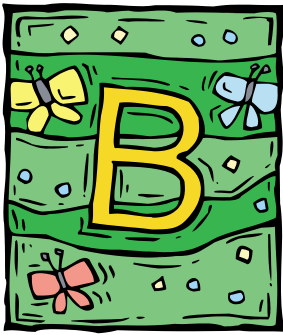
Books help me become the me I am meant to be.

# A Summary of the ABCs of Selecting Books for Children



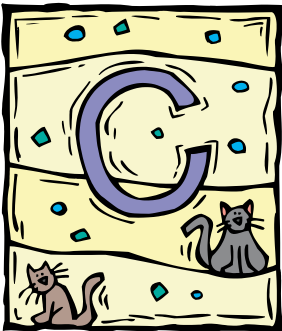
## A is for Ability

Select read-aloud books at the level or above the current level that your child understands. The pictures, tone and your repeated reading of the story will enhance his ability to understand.



## B is for Beauty

Hunt for books that provide you and your child with a beautiful experience as you share the illustrations, rhythmic language, colorful characters and lessons learned.



## C is for Creativity

Choose books with characters and stories that inspire your child to think and to be creative.

# Creating an Environment for Reading

When you read aloud to your child, you are having a special, one-on-one conversation with her. The first time you look at a book, you might just turn the pages slowly and look at the pictures. The next day, you might just read a part of the story and mark your place with a bookmark so you can pick up the book at the same spot during your next storytime. The next time you'll read the story from cover to cover and talk to her about her reactions.

*Did she like the story? Which illustration is her favorite? Which character does she think is most like her?* Little by little, the process of reading becomes more like an enchanted conversation that you share. There is closeness, there is understanding, there is a learning process that opens the door to the adventures of reading. It's fun to read, to laugh together, to cry together and to explore the world through the pages of books.

Sometimes your child will just want you to read a story and listen to your voice instead of sharing the pictures and turning pages. This soothing reading will help your child bring his or her day to a quiet place of closure.



**In order for reading to become a pleasure and not a chore it should always be approached gently and with the appropriate environment and attitude.**

Reading time should be sacred. The 15 minutes or more that you share with your child should not be interrupted. If you take calls or if music or the TV is blaring away, your child will get the message that this time is not important. Mom can't devote her attention to me, she's distracted.

Turn off the phone, click off the TV, and cuddle up together on your couch or bed. This time together is therapeutic for you as well as for your child.

**Not only will you discover new frontiers together, you'll also have the wonderful opportunity to discover the unique person your child is today. You'll also catch a glimpse of what he will become in the future.**

## Words of Encouragement

One of my colleagues revealed something surprising to me yesterday. She told me that when she was little her classmates used to make fun of her when she read aloud. She was struggling to learn to read and her teacher was not deft at managing the comments from other children. As a result she refused to read aloud in class. She finally learned to read but she always thought of it as a chore, not something she would ever do for pleasure.

As time went on and she reached her late twenties she decided for career advancement she wanted to go back to school. Then something really unusual happened. One day she was given a novel to read as part of her classwork. She took it home inwardly dreading the weekend of reading that was ahead. She read the first chapter slowly, but it was more interesting than she had thought it would be. When she finished the book, she was so proud of herself. She had read 400 pages in a weekend and she had enjoyed it! In fact, she started to search out other books from the same author. She told me she reads voraciously now and she wishes she hadn't lost so many years of reading for pleasure just because of that series of difficult experiences in school.

**Parents and teachers can do so much to enhance a child's experience with reading by guiding softly instead of pushing.** Harsh criticism, an overemphasis on the phonetic mechanics of reading, endless boring worksheets, and materials that are not matched to a child's interests can destroy the budding desire to read that is just beginning to emerge. Sometimes it will never have the chance to flower again.

## Finding Time

Finding time for reading in the busy times we live in is not easy. But if you focus on the important benefits this simple practice will yield for your child, you will find a way to carve out this special storytime.

*Here are some of the benefits your child will experience from this 15-minute daily read-aloud storytime.*

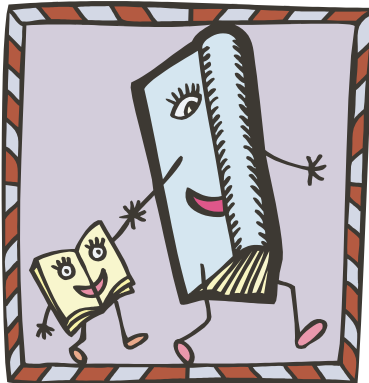
I call it "**The Reading Advantage.**"

- Helps your child experience the pleasures of reading, so reading becomes a lifelong activity.
- Increases your child's vocabulary and grammar skills.
- Assists your child in his or her compassion and empathy for others, thereby increasing emotional intelligence.
- Helps lay the groundwork for all future academic study.
- Provides your child with a reading role model.
- Improves your child's ability to write.
- Significantly increases your child's attention span.
- Improves the probability that your child will stay in school.
- Stimulates your child's imagination and creativity.
- Nurtures emotional development and increased self-esteem.

*Parents, teachers and caregivers benefit from storytime as well.*

Here are a few of those benefits:

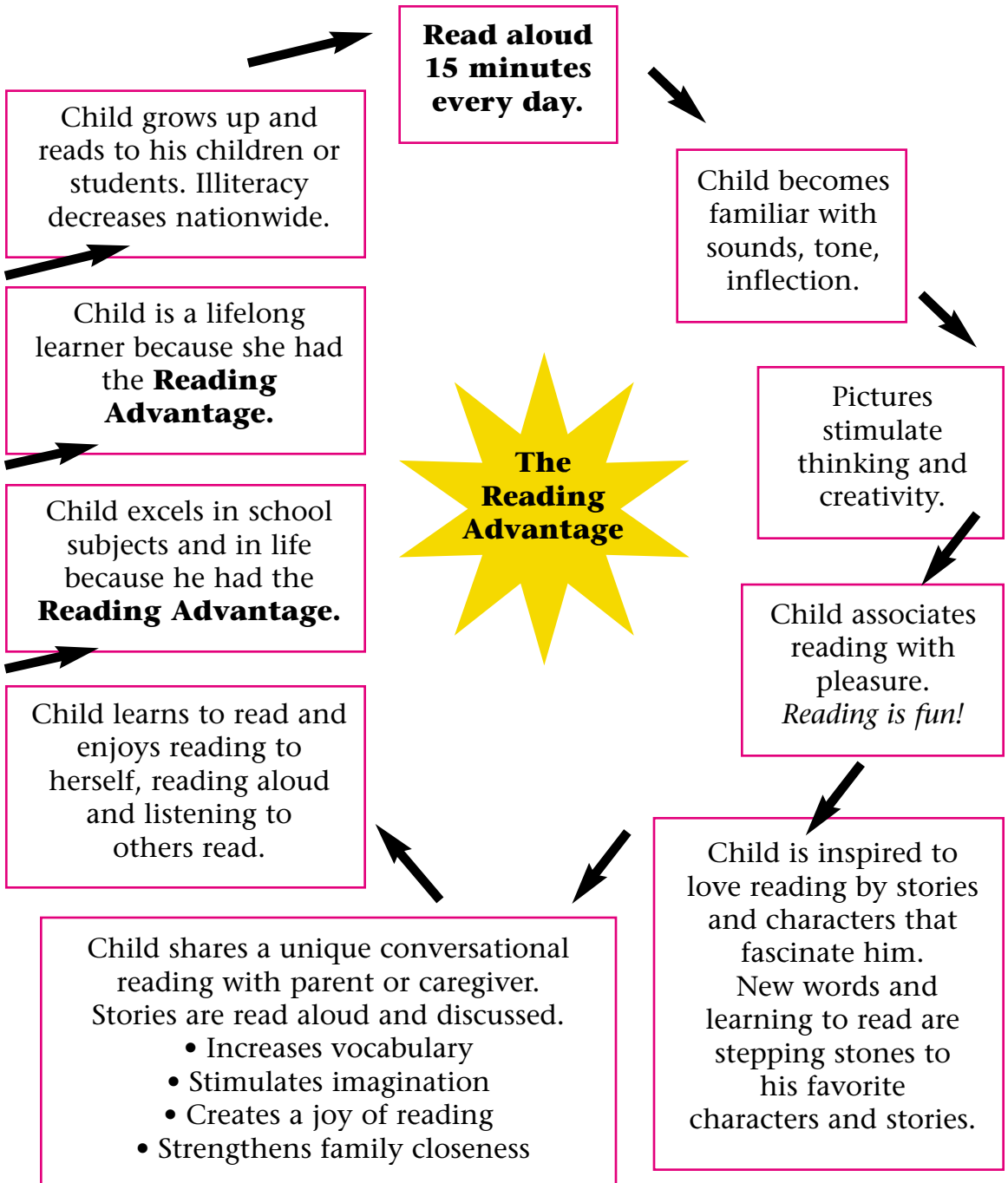
- Brings your family closer together.
- Helps you show your child the values you live by.
- Gives you greater insight into your child's thoughts and feelings.
- Provides you with peaceful, fun, one-on-one time with your child.
- Gives you an opportunity to uncover your hidden acting talents as you read and present to your child!
- Enriches your life as a parent or teacher as you watch your child grow mentally and spiritually.
- Helps you see the world all over again through your child's eyes.



# A Quick Visual Summary

**If you could do something for 15 minutes a day that would dramatically increase your child's potential for success in life would you take the time to do it?**

Parents, teachers, grandparents and caregivers...



This holiday season give a gift to your child with lifelong benefits—the gift of **The Reading Advantage**.

**Happy Holidays!**

*Marilee Joy Mayfield*

**The Enchanting World of Parent-Child Conversational Reading:  
How to Choose Books that Bring Joy and Meaning to Your Child's Life**

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Marilee has been involved in writing, teaching and publishing since she first wrote a series of magazines with her sister, when she was eleven years old and her sister was eight.

She started her career as a teacher, but she found she loved writing and editing educational books for children and young adults just as much as teaching, so she tried to find a way to do both. For ten years she worked in educational publishing, first as an assistant editor for middle school textbooks, then as an associate editor for high school textbooks and later as a developmental editor for college textbooks. Her interest in developmental editing and marketing eventually led to a position as a product manager.

Today Marilee lives with her husband in Palo Alto, California. They own two companies together and can kiss each other in the middle of the workday whenever they want.

Marilee is the author of five books for children. Marilee loves to hear from her readers. She can be reached at [mjmayfield@leapingantelope.com](mailto:mjmayfield@leapingantelope.com).

**Books by Marilee Joy Mayfield**

**More information and inside full-color pages  
from Marilee's books  
can be found at the websites listed below.**

**The Snowman's Song: A Christmas Story**  
with Illustrations by Tracy La Rue Hohn

**[www.snowmansong.com](http://www.snowmansong.com)**

**The Golden Cricket: A Story of Luck and Prosperity**  
with Illustrations by Randy Jennings

**Crabby Lessons**  
with Illustrations by Randy Jennings

**The Tiny Adventures of Big Sister and Little Sister**  
with Illustrations by Crista Kathleen McGinley

**Big Sister, Little Sister**  
with Illustrations by Crista Kathleen McGinley

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## **Highly Recommended Resources**

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### **The Read-Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease**

This well-researched book contains the strongest case for the “Reading Advantage.” Jim Trelease’s years of study in this field document why a parent or caregiver’s 15 minutes a day of read-aloud storytime is highly significant in a child’s development. By age six a child has been in school 700 hours, but outside school 52,000 hours! The importance of parents and caregivers as teachers cannot be overlooked if we expect to improve literacy throughout our nation.

In addition to educational findings and time-tested suggestions for parents and teachers, this book also contains a giant treasury of more than 1500 read-aloud books for children.

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### **How to Get Your Child to Love Reading by Esmé Raji Codell**

This fabulous book is an indispensable resource with creative ideas for how to bring books into your home and make stories an integral part of your life. It’s a fun-to-read parent’s guide that’s just like having the best children’s librarian in the world as your advisor!



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