

The Joy of Reading

By David Truitt, Superintendent

Each summer, I try to catch up on a few books making the rounds on different educational leadership social media sites. As a former reading teacher, one new book caught my eye that centers on the need for our children, while in our schools or at home, to read for pleasure or personal enjoyment. The book is Pernille Ripp's "Passionate Readers - The Art of Reaching and Engaging Every Child."

Pernille Ripp is an expert in literacy and dedicates her research and practice to developing engaged and empowered readers. She is a teacher, speaker, author, blogger, and passionate advocate for education. In 2010, Ripp founded The Global Read Aloud (GRA), a global literacy initiative that connects more than two million students in sixty different countries.

In "Passionate Readers," Ripp reveals her five keys to creating a passionate reading environment for children. She shares how teachers and parents can (1). Use their own reading identity to help create powerful, personal reading experiences for the children, (2). Empower the reader and their reading experience by focusing on the physical environment or layout for reading time, (3). Create and maintain easy-to-use classroom or home libraries, (4). Guide the reader to further develop their own reading identity, and (5). Build a love for books based on choice and individual ownership.

Ripp even strives to define what reading for pleasure means. It is surprisingly hard to define, but she believes it refers to reading that a child does of their own free will anticipating the satisfaction they will receive from the act of simply reading. It typically involves books that reflect personal choice, at a time and place that suits the reader. For me, I loved the "Choose your own Adventure," "Encyclopedia Brown," "The Chronicles of Narnia," and "Hardy Boys" series. I also had my favorite reading spot at my homework desk in my bedroom. I was hooked on books.

My hope is that the children of West can have the same enjoyable reading experiences I had as a child and what Ripp highlights in her book. I believe Ripp's work is applicable today in West ISD and across our community; specifically this summer while school is out. We cannot assume that children will just like reading; no matter what we do in the classroom or at home and what books we place in their hands. From the tasks we assign to how we teach to what we discuss, reading enjoyment is the key for educational success. Ripp writes that reading for enjoyment does not happen overnight or by happenstance. We must be purposeful and work as a team. Between West ISD and the home, we must strive to make reading fun. We must create meaningful opportunities to interact with others through the books we read.

Even though summer is almost over, it is not too late to help your child reconnect with books or become a better reader before the new school year begins. Summer is an important time for students to keep reading and improve their language skills. Ripp shares several ways to help your child from becoming a "rusty reader" over the summer and to strive to develop a love for reading in their lives. She shares how parents can (1). Encourage their children to read books they enjoy for at least thirty minutes per day, (2). Provide incentives, like basketball or video game time, for reluctant readers if they do their "daily reading," (3). Make reading a social act by establishing time during the day when all members of the family gather and read on their own, or take turns reading the same book aloud, (4). Connect the reading to family or friend outings like reading about dinosaurs and then head for a trip to the Waco

Mammoth National Monument, (5). Use language and reading opportunities throughout the day by talking with your child and pointing out reading materials wherever possible like menus, magazines and newspapers, signs, brochures, maps, etc., and (6). Make reading a lifestyle choice at your home by keeping books all around the house to cultivate an atmosphere of reading.

Ripp mentions several studies that indicate how students who do not read or read infrequently during their summer vacation see their reading abilities stagnate or decline. This effect becomes more pronounced as students get older and advance through the school system. We are blessed in West to have a wonderful Public Library and full libraries at each West ISD campus. We even have many online eBooks and opportunities for folks in West to donate books for home use. I am willing to drop-off books at any student's home.

There is still time to pick up a book this summer! I hope you will consider one of Ripp's six ideas for helping develop a love for reading in your Trojan. We are here to help, and it is our desire to see your child passionate about reading. Together, let's ensure our community promotes a love for reading. Let your Trojan pick out a book they are going to love today. They will be better readers tomorrow for it.