



**CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION**  
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**September 8, 2010 – Storytelling**

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I did not enjoy reading independently until I was in eleventh grade. Reading in school was a chore. By third grade, I'd labeled myself a bad reader, and for a long time, I thought I just needed to try harder. As I got older, I learned how to play the game by skimming, taking in just enough to provide adequate answers for my teachers. The crazy thing was, I'd loved stories my entire life.

The house I grew up in was stuffed with books. I remember one shelf in particular. *Cars and Trucks and Things That Go*, *The Encyclopedia of Dogs*, and *Where The Wild Things Are* stood in a diversified row. And this non-reader grabbed them often. Early on, I gawked at the cool pictures of fire trucks, and later I needed to know more about my neighbor's Great Pyrenees. Even though someone else read it to me, I always fell into Maurice Sendak's fascinating world where Max was King.

My elementary school teachers read the most exciting books aloud. Some of my fondest school memories are sitting on the carpet with twenty-four of my classmates, staring wide-eyed, waiting to find out what happened on the next page. My father read to us every night. I remember begging him to read the little known Grimm's Fairy Tale: *The Giant with the Three Golden Hairs*. There is magic in storytelling, and just because I wasn't interested in reading independently, didn't mean I had to miss out on that magic.

In eleventh grade I had an English teacher whose classroom bookshelves reminded me of my parent's. They were packed with novels, and with guidance, he let us choose our books. I must admit, I chose the skinniest one I could find. But it happened to be Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*. Lucky pick? Maybe. Since then, I don't think I've gone a single day without reading.

I've always enjoyed having books around; they just needed to hold stories or topics I found interesting. That's how we read as adults. We find books that match our interests or provide answers to our questions. We read at our own pace, and we abandon books we don't like.

As a classroom teacher, I know many kids who crave a good story but aren't quite ready to take off as independent readers. Parents and teachers can provide those stories. Our children are never too old to enjoy a good read aloud. Take thirty minutes each night to turn off the televisions, close the laptops and read together, independently, or both. Fill baskets and shelves with books that might spark an interest. Talk about what you're reading and why you enjoy it. Visit the library. After reading a book together, go see the movie version so you can all complain about how much was left out and how it was an embarrassment to the book. Most importantly, be patient, because the path to life-long reading is different for each of us.

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