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# Connections



# August

La Crosse County  
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Dept.

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## Why Read Aloud?

By Lee Tobin McClain, PH.D.

Want to bond with your foster kids? Add simple pleasures to family life? Enhance your kids' school success, employability and life happiness?

Just read aloud, every day.

We all know the statistics: Youth in foster care are often at least one grade level behind their peers, and are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school. Only 3 percent of kids from the foster care system graduate from college. We can't change all the reasons why, but building reading skills is one big step in the right direction.

As a writer, English professor, reading tutor for at-risk children and adoptive parent, I see books as the cure for many of life's problems. Studies and statistics back me up, so much so that Fostering Families Today has agreed to make this reading-based column an on-going part of the magazine.

Why read aloud?

### Modeling and Bonding

When we read aloud, we usually choose fun, light books in line with a child's interests. There will be more book choices in a future column. If we put the expression into our voices and ham up the funny parts, we're modeling reading pleasure—and children learn more from what we do than from what we say.

*(continued on next page)*



*(Why Read Aloud—continued from page 1)*

Many children aren't comfortable with direct, probing discussions with adults. They do better side-by-side with a parent, focused on something outside of themselves.

Snuggling up, listening to a gentle voice, helping to turn colorful pages—these bonding experiences go beneath the surface, touch the senses, and may be remembered throughout life. Less idealistically, hearing a familiar story may ease the anxiety of waiting for a court date or therapy appointment.

### **Vocabulary and Background Knowledge**

Phonics drills and worksheets are good and necessary, but it's hard to sound out a word you've never heard spoken. While listening to stories, your child will absorb hundreds of words and their meanings. His or her vocabulary will improve, and he or she will recognize more words in stories while reading to him- or herself.

Similarly, background knowledge helps students understand what they read. Kids in foster care often lack experiences more privileged kids have had: a visit to a farm, a tour of an art museum or dinner at an ethnic restaurant. You can't fill in every gap first-hand, but you can introduce a lot of life through stories.

### **Keep Him in School**

Reading is important not just in English class, but in social studies, science, and even math. Kids get better at reading by practicing. And anyone who's watched a kid bounce a basketball for three hours straight knows that kids practice what they enjoy.

It's a circle: By reading aloud, you help your child associate reading with pleasure as you gently enhance his or her abilities. When reading gets to be more fun for your child, then he or she does more of it...and the more he or she practices, the more reading skills develop.

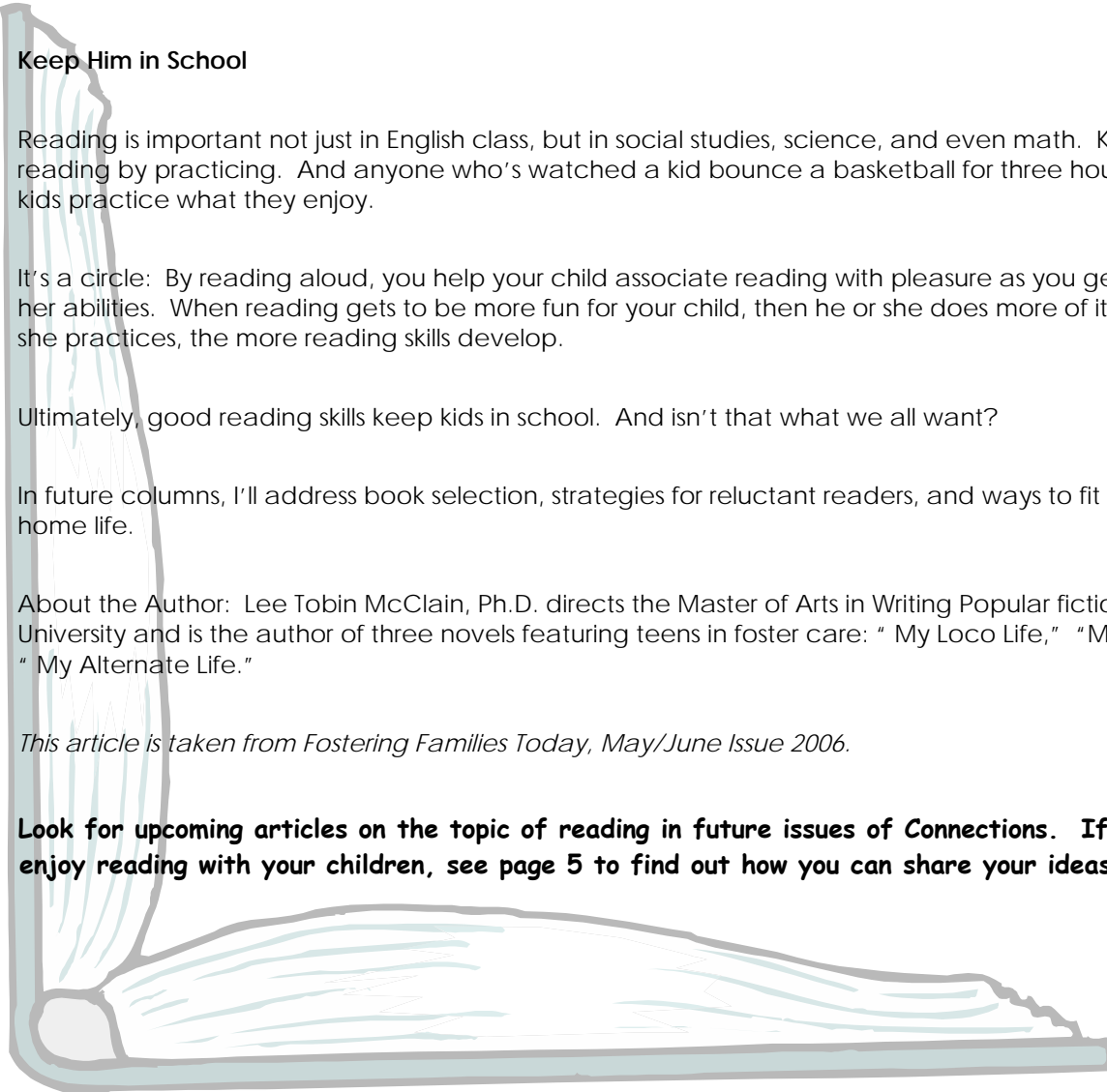
Ultimately, good reading skills keep kids in school. And isn't that what we all want?

In future columns, I'll address book selection, strategies for reluctant readers, and ways to fit reading into a busy home life.

About the Author: Lee Tobin McClain, Ph.D. directs the Master of Arts in Writing Popular fiction at Seton Hill University and is the author of three novels featuring teens in foster care: "My Loco Life," "My Abnormal Life" and "My Alternate Life."

*This article is taken from Fostering Families Today, May/June Issue 2006.*

**Look for upcoming articles on the topic of reading in future issues of Connections. If there are books you enjoy reading with your children, see page 5 to find out how you can share your ideas with other families.**





# THE ROCKS



A philosophy professor stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When class began, wordlessly he picked up a large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks right to the top, rocks about 2" in diameter.

He then asked the students if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. The students laughed.

He asked his students again if the jar was full? They agreed that yes, it was.

The professor then picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else.

"Now," said the professor, "I want you to recognize that this is your life. The rocks are the important things - your family, your partner, your health, your children - anything that is so important to you that if it were lost, you would be nearly destroyed.

The pebbles are the other things in life that matter, but on a smaller scale. The pebbles represent things like your job, your house, your car.

The sand is everything else. The small stuff.

If you put the sand or the pebbles into the jar first, there is no room for the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your energy and time on the small stuff, material things, you will never have room for the things that are truly most important.

Pay attention to the things that are critical in your life. Play with your children. There will always be time to go to work, clean the house, give a dinner party and fix the disposal. Take care of the rocks first - the things that really matter.

Set your priorities. The rest is just pebbles and sand.

At the end of the professor's demonstration, one of the students took the jar (full of rocks, pebbles and sand) and added a full glass of water which was absorbed by the sand.

*Moral : whatever your life is filled with, there will always be some room left for more if you set your priorities!!!*



## Welcome New Foster Parents

Please welcome **Florence Nordstrom** to our foster care community. Florence lives in Onalaska with her dog, Precious. She comes to foster care with the hope of providing care for teenage girls. She feels that she can be a mentor and positive influence on these girls as she has learned a lot from life herself. She has some connection to foster care as she visits a foster family occasionally and has been able to enjoy the company of children in care. Florence will be looking to some of you for guidance specific to caring for adolescent girls. She will be attending PACE this fall to further connect with the foster care community. If you should see her at future trainings or up and coming foster care events please welcome her to this new adventure in her life.

## Mark Your Calendar!

**August 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>:  
A Weekend to Remember**

### **Great River Great City Sesquicentennial Celebration**

**Jazz**

River Jazz Fest—Mardi Gras style parade Friday night between 6:00-7:00 pm. Ecumenical Jazz Church Service at the Riverside Park Band Shell on Sunday, August 6, from 9:00-10:00 am

CenturyTel's Sand on the Riverfront—Sand sculpting competition and demonstration in Riverside Park with food, fun, and entertainment for the entire family.

US National Log Rolling Championships—Mississippi River Log Boom features log rolling championships family activities, music and fun. Don't miss this exciting event!

For event times and details visit [www.lax150.com](http://www.lax150.com) or call the La Crosse Area Convention and Visitors Bureau at (608) 782-2366.





### Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center

Looking for information on Foster Care or Adoption? Visit us at our webpage:

[www.wifostercareandadoption.org](http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org)

or you may feel free to contact the resource center at our toll free number: 1-800-947-8074

or via email:

[info@wifostercareandadoption.org](mailto:info@wifostercareandadoption.org)

## Is there anything you'd like to contribute to our newsletter?

Parenting tips or advice? *Ideas for fun family activities?*

News of upcoming trainings or special events? *Recipes?*

**Interesting articles you've come across?**

**Poems?** Quotes? Personal experiences? *Inspirational stories?*

**Interesting articles you've come across?**

**Book or movie recommendations?**

If there's anything you feel is worth sharing with the rest of the foster care community, please submit your ideas by mail, phone, or email to:

*Sharon McHugh*

*La Crosse County Human Services*

*300 N. 4th St.*

*La Crosse, WI 54601*

*mchugh.sharon@co.la-crosse.wi.us*

*(608) 785-6056*

Help educate, support, and encourage each other!



## *What Do You Mean By .....*

**Oppositional Defiance Disorder (ODD):** Behavior that lasts six months and includes at least five of the following characteristics: loss of temper; arguing with adults; refusal to obey adult requests; deliberately annoying others; blaming others for mistakes; being touchy, easily annoyed, angry, resentful, spiteful, and vindictive; swearing and using obscene language; or impulsivity.

Parents of these children must be firm and consistent. Family counseling is often helpful.

**Firm, Consistent, Able to Set Limits:** Parents with these characteristics lovingly insist that children follow family rules and routines and set consequences for undesirable behavior. Firmness and consistency make children feel secure and show them their parents care enough to protect them.

*Excerpted from Adopt! January 2005. Published by Adoption Resources of Wisconsin.*

## *Preventing Adolescent Suicide*

Foster children are often aware of the contrast between how they feel inside and the happiness that seems to be all around them. Placement out of the home is a serious stressor in a child's life and foster parents and helping professionals must be sensitive to the unique situation our children face. Children and adolescents who are prone to depression and impulsiveness are at increased risk for suicide during triggering times in their lives.

Suicides among young people nationwide have increased dramatically in recent years. Each year in the U.S. thousands of teenagers commit suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for 15-to-24 year-olds, and the sixth leading cause of death for 5-to-14 year-olds.

Signs an adolescent who may try to kill themselves:

- change in eating and sleeping habit
- withdrawal from friends, family, and regular activities
- violent actions, rebellious behavior, or running away
- drug or alcohol use
- unusual neglect of personal appearance
- marked personality change
- persistent boredom, difficulty concentrating, or a decline in the quality of school work
- frequent complaints about physical symptoms, often related to emotions, such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- loss of interest in pleasurable activities
- not tolerating praise or rewards

A teenager who is planning to commit suicide may also:

- complain of being a bad person or feeling rotten inside
- give verbal hints with statements such as: I won't be a problem for you much longer, Nothing matters, It's no use, and I won't see you again
- put his or her affairs in order, for example, give away favorite possessions, clean his or her room, throw away important belongings, etc.
- become suddenly cheerful after a period of depression
- have signs of psychosis (hallucinations or bizarre thoughts)

People often feel uncomfortable talking about death. However, asking the child or adolescent whether he or she is depressed or thinking of suicide can be helpful. Rather than putting thoughts in the child's head such a question will provide assurance that somebody cares and will give the young person the chance to talk about problems.

If one or more of these signs occurs. Parents need to talk to the child about concerns and seek professional help if the concerns persist.

With support from family and professional treatment, children and teenagers who are suicidal can heal and return to a more healthy path of development.

### **Where to Get More Information:**

American Association of Suicidology 303-692-0285 [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org); National Association of School of Psychologists 301-657-0270 [www.naspoline.org](http://www.naspoline.org); Suicide Awareness/Voice of Education (Save) [www.save.org](http://www.save.org)

*Taken from Family Works, Inc. Family Notes December 2005*



## Squigly's Secret Code

### Directions:

Each letter has a symbol, to decipher Squigly's code just print the letter on the line given, that goes with the symbol. Good Luck


A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
..	:	''	::	=.	/	./	<	>	/	{}	=	^>
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
*	:]	()	\	<^	<	)	::	:	'''	*	^*	..



### Find the Diamond!

Ten shiny diamonds are hiding in the picture below. Find every one, then color them yellow.



..	=	'''	..	^*	<	'''	=	..	<^				
..	<	..	)	..	*	:							
<	::	*	<	''	<^	=	=	*	'''	<	=	*	
()	=	..	^*	>	*	/	:	::	)	<	>	:	=

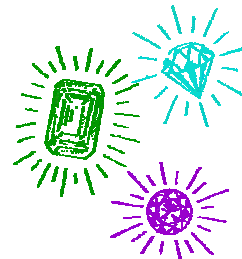


<http://www.squiglyshouse.com/PencilPuzzles/Summer/SecretCode1.html>

## Make your own gemstones!

### You will need:

- newspaper
- smooth, egg-shaped rocks, some light-colored and some dark-colored
- scrub brush
- dishwashing soap
- foil pie tin
- water
- clear nail polish



### Here's how:

Cover your work area with newspaper. Scrub the rocks with soap and water. Rinse them well and let them dry completely. Fill the pie tin with water about 3/4" (2 centimeters) deep. Let just one drop of nail polish fall into the water. The drop will spread out over the surface of the water, making a cellophane-like film. Holding the side of the rock with your fingertips, roll it slowly across the bottom of the pie tin. Put the rock on the newspaper. Don't touch it for several hours, until it's completely dry. To add sparkle to another rock, skim leftover nail polish from the water with a paper towel, then repeat the process. Use your iridescent rocks as paperweights or just dazzle your friends with the "precious stones" you made.

Source: <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/index.html>

# fostering perspectives

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## Tips for Working with Birth Parents



**Reach out to parents.** Tell parents what wonderful children they have. Even if you believe the children should not go back home, you can still send pictures, talk to the parents, and listen to them.

**Expand your notions of partnership.** In MAPP training we learn about the partnership that exists between DSS and foster parents for the benefit of children. To ensure positive, permanent results for children we must include birth parents in this partnership.

**Never run parents down to their kids.** For example, if a parent has a problem with alcohol, make it clear to the child that it's bad to drink too much, but don't talk specifically about his or her parents. When children know you accept their parents, regardless of what they've done, they are easier to deal with. If you disapprove of their parents, often they think you disapprove of them, too.

**Offer to talk with kids after they visit with their birth families.** Ask them what they talked about, what they did, and how they feel. This shows them that you care about and recognize the importance of their bond with their family.

**Don't be judgmental.** As Brenda puts it, "That's not my job as a foster parent — my job is to help the child through this transition and to show him what life's supposed to be like."

**Look for something good.** Although sometimes we feel birth parents don't have any redeeming qualities, there is good in everyone. If you know this and remember to look for it, you'll find it, even if it's just that they have a beautiful child.

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