

Ready, Set, Read

Making Quality Books More Accessible to Rhode Island Children and Families

by Wendy Fachon

Reading aloud with young children is one of the most effective ways to expose them to enriched language and to encourage specific early literacy skills needed to promote school readiness. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, more than one in three American children start kindergarten without the language skills they need to learn to read. Approximately two-thirds of children each year in the United States and 80 percent of those living below the poverty threshold fail to develop reading proficiency by the end of third grade, the most important predictor of high school graduation and career success.

Reading with young children is a very personal and nurturing experience that promotes parent-child interaction, social-emotional development and language and literacy skills during this critical period of early brain and child development. Fortunately, initiatives are sprouting up all around Rhode Island to make quality books more accessible to children and families of all income levels.

F.I.T. Club

F.I.T. Club (Framework for Integrated Teaching) focuses on using children's literature to embed concepts of food, fitness and farming into the classroom. The physicians and educators that founded this Rhode Island-based nonprofit organization also published the F.I.T. Family brochure (download

at TeachFitClub.org), which encourages *servicing books daily*. This brochure is a carefully curated list of books including classics like *The Little Red Hen* (Jerry Pinkney), *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Beatrix Potter) and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Eric Carle) as well as more contemporary titles like *The Little Red Hen Makes a Pizza* (Philemon Sturges), *Tops & Bottoms* (Janet Stevens) and *The Food Parade* (Elicia Castaldi).

Across the United States, both children and adults are facing an unprecedented epidemic of obesity,

diabetes and associated chronic diseases. Many lack basic knowledge and know-how about meal planning, food budgeting and cooking. As our public schools devote more time on teaching math and reading, there is less time to teach about the links between nutrition and disease. F.I.T. Club connects educators and students with high-quality fiction and nonfiction books and offers **free** lesson plans, which can be taught during or afterschool.

F.I.T. Club's website lesson plans and annotated reading lists are centered on three themes—Young Farmers Club, Young Chefs Club and Young Doctors Club. The lessons integrate Common Core Standards for English language arts and mathematics with science and social studies to educate students about food sourcing and production, cooking, sustainability, nutrition and disease. While the material is designed for school age children, each lesson plan has a list of suggested books that parents can read at home with younger

Suggested Reading

curated by Susan Lehr, Ph.D., Past Professor and Chair of the Education Department, Skidmore College

- *The Little Red Hen (Makes a Pizza)* by Philomen Sturges
- *Tops & Bottoms* by Janet Stevens
- *E-I-E-I-O: How Old MacDonald Got His Farm with a Little Help from a Hen* by July Sierra
- *Secrets of the Garden* by Kathleen Zoehfeld
- *Living Sunlight* by M. Bang and P. Chisholm
- *What If There Were No Bees?* by Suzanne Slade
- *The Food Parade* by Elicia Castaldi
- *Pick, Pull, Snap!* by Lola Schaeffer
- *Gazpacho for Nacho* by Tracey Kyle
- *I Will Not Ever Eat a Tomato* by Lauren Child
- *Wiggling Worms at Work* by Wendy Pfeffer
- *To Market, To Market* by Anne Miranda
- *Seed by Seed: The Legend and Legacy of John "Appleseed" Chapman* by Esmé Raji Codell
- *Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z* by Lois Ehlert
- *Maisy Goes Shopping* by Lucy Cousins

