

LINES with MEANING

When you listen to actor Ed Herrmann speak, it is easy to imagine him in the authoritative role of president Franklin Delano Roosevelt or as Richard Gilmore, the grandfatherly voice of reason on the *Gilmore Girls*. His deep and self-assured voice is often heard on Dodge commercials, History Channel and PBS specials, and dozens of audio books. With more than 35 years of film, television, and stage credits to his name, the Emmy and Tony Award winning actor has been performing his most important role—that of a real-life father—for the past 12 years.

Herrmann's daughter Emma has grown up listening to her father read aloud to her. And when he reads, the words on the page are never just lines. They become impassioned works of art filled with the subtext and deep meaning that the writer intended. Herrmann is, himself, passionate about understanding the meaning behind the lines that he recites in books or acts out on stage or for the camera. "Before I was an English major, I was a History major, so the context of what was happening at the time and why people said what they said or did what they did is important to me. Kids today love to take tests and get As, but then they forget the facts. Kids are learning, but are they learning *meaning*?"

Herrmann and his wife Star are constantly challenging their daughter to derive more meaning from what she reads and studies in school. At age twelve, Emma is already tackling the difficult language of Jane Austen, and with her father's help is learning to appreciate the style of writing that she finds so strange. "The language wasn't strange to Jane Austen at the time," says Herrmann. "When I read some of it out loud to Emma and she gets used to how the characters speak, the language and the story become irresistible." Herrmann believes that many people underestimate kids and what goes on in their brains. "If you read Shakespeare to a child, there is no reason why they can't understand *Twelfth Night*."

"I'm all for reading, writing and 'rithmetic, but I don't like to be stuck in them. What we say and what we mean has to suggest something beyond itself. It must project out beyond the literal into the imagination. Books, poems, plays, music, buildings, and really all works of art convey some passion within and a need to express something. We learn language to express our own feelings. If we can't express what we mean simply and clearly then we can't be successful."

— Karen Kane

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Ed

Herrmann