

Before I Let You Go...

I'm Gonna' Teach You Myself!

7 Tips for Bringing Out the Reader in Your Black Child

Sandra L. Drew

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Aquarius School for Kids

Atlanta, Georgia

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to black parents, guardians, and caretakers of black children everywhere seeking an alternative to how our children are educated. May this book encourage you on your quest to find or create an African-centered learning experience for our beautiful black ones.

- *Jinaki*

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Chapter Six



“As long as we are not ourselves, we will try to be what other people are.” - Malidoma Patrice Somé

Read, Baby Read!

Vocabulary and comprehension go hand in hand. One of the best ways to improve both of these components of literacy in your rising reader is to read with your child.

Tip #3: Read a book with your child every day.

I can't stress the importance of reading with your child every day. As the slogan goes, "Just Do It!" Reading introduces your child to the world. What better way is there to travel the globe from the comfort of your own couch. It's budget friendly too. Reading with your child spurs connectedness. It gives you an opportunity to impart morals and values through the lessons embedded in the stories that you select. It is an awesome way to introduce your child to our African heritage, culture, and perspective.

I believe that we must teach our children about ourselves first. This is foundational and empowering. When children see themselves and learn about who

they are, they develop a positive self-image. Positive self-image leads to a better learning experience.

I remember there was a student in another kindergarten class who always seemed to give his teachers a hard time. I personally never had any difficulty with him, but to be fair, he only spent about 45 minutes every day in my class for reading instruction. The rest of the day was spent with his homeroom. So, I can't necessarily discount his teachers' experience with him. One day, one of his teachers brought him to my class because he was having a difficult time cooperating. OK. OK. He was pretty much falling out on the floor. (I hate when that happens.) At the time that he was brought into my class, I happened to be reading a book about Alvin Ailey to my students. His teacher sat him down on the carpet with us. Boy was he grumpy. Anyway, I continued to read and I noticed that he started to pay attention to the story. He was actually focused. I could see that his interest was piqued and his mind was churning. He raised his hand with the rest of the students in my class and began to comment and ask questions. It was a wonderful experience.

I truly believe that he was excited to see someone who looked like him depicted in a story. You see, at this particular school where I taught, we did not have many books or stories with black people in it. I could probably count on both hands the number of books that we had in our class curriculum or library that were specific to black people.

I always supplement my class library and reading time with books about black people. Whatever books I have or whatever books I can find I put them in the library, even if the text is way over my students' heads. I rather they peruse and look at the pictures in a book about African people that contains complex vocabulary than have nothing at all to use. I say all of this to support my assertion that knowing yourself is essential to one's success in learning. Let's take time to read books to our children that teach them who they truly are.

Reading to your child shows your child that you value this skill. The amount of time that you read together does not necessarily have to be lengthy, but it must be consistent. Devise a reading time routine that will work for you daily. By reading to your child consistently every day, you teach him or her that this

habit is important and should, without question, be a part of his or her daily routine for a lifetime.

When you're not reading to or with your child, let your child catch you reading to yourself. Be sure to have African themed books as part of your reading selection. This image will leave an indelible positive imprint on your child's mind. It's not what you say, it's what you do. Your child is watching you, wants to be like you, and will emulate your example.