

“JOY!”

A Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 1 / Issue 2 - June 2022

Welcome to our second quarter KJGM Newsletter!

Since the inception of the Museum, one of our main focus points has been on the importance of reading more and communicating the appreciation of the written word.

As many of you know, Mrs. Gilliam was an **avid** reader. She literally read everything that came before her. Including, but not limited to, the mountain of materials that she received each month from the Dallas Independent School District as she prepared for regular school board meetings. Not only was she interested in what was being written and presented to her, she exercised good reading habits to achieve the following:

- Reduce stress and help relax
- Improve concentration and memory
- Expand vocabulary and strengthened writing abilities
- Enhance knowledge
- Increased imagination and creativity

The Museum doors will open soon. We hope that you will visit and will spend time reading some of the many books that Mrs. Gilliam cherished.

This month's newsletter will dedicate to the art of “READING” and the accomplishments received from doing so. We hope you will find your reading pursuit in Joy!

KJGM

READING TIP: We learn best (and comprehend faster) when we can see an idea playing out before us. As we read, we should try to focus on the meaning rather than the words. We should flex the imagination muscle and learn to quickly construct visual representation of what we are reading as we read.

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The Blue Back Speller

By: M. Lorraine Parson

Here's a true story about the "Blue Back Speller" -- a first grade speller book which was my great grandmother's prize possession. My great grandmother was affectionately called "Mama." My mom's mother died when she was five years old and so Mama raised my mother and her siblings as their mother. Mama could not read or write. She had not been allowed to attend school, but she always made sure her children knew the importance of getting an education.

When Mama's grandson (Leon) was drafted and sent to World War II, he wrote to her often. She looked forward to the letters and would, of course, have my mother read each and every letter to her. Being the wise woman she was, on one occasion, she figured out that a letter that had been read to her was not read accurately. There appeared to be some gaps that could not be explained. So, she sat me down and advised me that I had to read the letter to her in the absence of my mother. I was only five and had not even started to school yet, however, I did know my alphabets.

They had been taught to me by my older siblings. Mama pulled out her "blue back reader" as she referred to it, and somehow with my spelling and her help and, of course, the "blue back reader," she figured out that Leon had been sent to Germany. I'm sure my mother wanted to spare her the agony of knowing he was being shipped even further away.

When my mother came home, she told her that she had me help her read the letter again and was upset that she had left out the part about him being sent to Germany. She warned my mother not to punish me for doing so. I think that was when I first understood the importance of learning to read and thanks to Mama, I never forgot it.

Reading has always been an important part of our family life – it nourishes the soul and the mind.

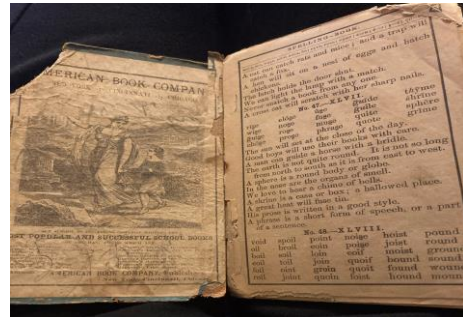


Figure 1 - "Mama Donaldson's Blue Back Reader" is displayed at the Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Museum"

(* Webster's The American Spelling Book was commonly known as the "blue backed speller" due to its blue cover and was one of the most popular spelling books since its first publication in 1783. The speller was followed by a book on grammar in 1784 and a reader in 1785.

The Priceless Gift of Reading for all Ages

By: Stanton Eugene Lawrence



We have often heard it said that a child's mind is like a sponge, and we should embrace that as truth. For our little ones, their young brains are swiftly absorbing whatever stimuli comes within proximity, and that includes the good as well as the not-so-good influences. My memories are quite vague regarding when my mother began making certain we had access to books at an early age. Her best friend from childhood just happened to be the

community librarian, and you had best believe we participated in the reading clubs/programs every summer.

It is no surprise that we grew up loving to read as children without ever quite understanding why. What I failed to grasp at so young an age, however, were the vast benefits my newfound fascination would afford me later in life. Today, unfortunately, most parents have found it more

convenient to engage their young children in streaming movies or playing video games. Keeping their children glued to and focused on the television or device screens provides such parents freedom to involve themselves in other matters. But are they doing themselves and their children a disservice which will show up later in life?

Several compelling research studies emphasize the correlation between early reading involvement and later life success. "The relationship between reading age, education and life outcomes" ((Mulcahy, Bernardes and Baars) "find robust associations between reading ability and educational success" Students who learn to enjoy reading at an early age are much more likely to not only succeed in high school, but they are much more likely to attend and graduate from college.

On the other hand, there is overwhelming evidence which suggests that adolescent students who lack adequate early literacy skills will struggle to persist through high school to graduation. These students are at higher risk of dropping out of school and engaging in risky behaviors which will heighten their prospects of becoming teen parents. Others are prone to being more susceptible to engage in substance abuse as well as entering the juvenile justice system. The investment in getting our children reading as early as possible will more than likely yield benefits for a lifetime.

While the advantages of early age ready involvement are extensive, reading can also be quite enjoyable for seniors. In addition, the advantages it provides to older readers makes it a wise choice. According to the journal Aging and Health, continuing to read frequently enhances memory. It sharpens their decision-making and critical thinking skills. For those who are concerned about dementia, including Alzheimer's, reading diminishes the prospects of such health conditions.

Other pluses associated with reading in the senior years are the reduction of stress and anxiety. Many seniors, including the writer of this piece, suffer from sleep deprivation disorders. If you want a more effective remedy for sleeping soundly than counting sheep, you might want to pick up a book and thumb through a few pages. Overall, reading is a pastime that can be enjoyable from early life through the later years.

As a steadfast proponent of reading for all ages, the Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Museum Board and staff invite you to join us in June for "Reading Under the Oak." This event will help us to heighten awareness of the importance and benefits of reading and how rewarding it can be for young children, teens, young and older adults, including seniors.

Stanton Eugene Lawrence is a career educator currently serving as Assistant Superintendent for Administration in Victoria ISD.

The Kaleidoscope Book Club

By: *Gladys Smith*

Pseudo Secretary for the KBC!

The book club idea originally was borne out of a telephone discussion with my sister who is a member of a book club in California. I then called five ladies whom I have known for many years and invited them to meet at the Highland Park Cafeteria (cause you gotta eat!) in January 2003 to discuss forming a book club. Because we had all have the same interest in common: a passion for reading! We decided to ask others to join us. We had our first book read in February 2003 lead by Pauletta. The book she chose was "P. G. County" by Connie Briscoe.

Now for some background on the KBC. One of our original members came up with the name **Kaleidoscope Book Club** because she said we reminded her of our different tastes, our different color hues (all African American) and overall different interests. Wow! We all agreed. When we met for our first book read, each of us was asked invite someone we thought would "fit in" with us. Now we are a group of eight and have been the

same since number our inception; one of the original members left due to a job relocation in another city. When we started out, we were employed, vibrant, etc. Now we are all women of a particular age and we've all, except one, have retired! Our goal has always been to read 4-5 books a year. The person whose turn it is to select the book hosts the read. We meet, have wine, eat a fabulous meal, drink more wine, and oh, did I mention, discuss the book! So far since our existence we've read a whooping 78 books! In addition, because of our group size (8) we only have to host a book read every two years. We read a variety of authors including many African American writers. We've enjoyed some great books; we've laughed at some selections, delved in deep on some and cried through others. Our greatest read was when we went to Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts in 2013 to celebrate our 10th year together as a book club. We did our book read there. It was "The Wedding", by Dorothy West who lived on

Martha's Vineyard. We were quite amazed at the rich African American history of Martha's Vineyard.

We have cried, prayed, loved and mourned the passing of parents, the birth of grandchildren, a divorce and even a first marriage at the ripe old age of 63! We have a great time fellowshipping by way of a Big Christmas Party at a fabulous restaurant to exchange Christmas gifts. We have one get together a year where we bring our spouses and/or significant other. In addition, we celebrate our birthdates by having one get together by going to lunch at a nice restaurant

I hope you have enjoyed this article written by a novice and be encouraged to start your own book

club to feed the soul and to garner lasting **friendships!**



Figure 2 - The Kaleidoscope Book Club

Jasmin and Friend's Corner



Jasmin Johnson

Introducing **Ava Bolden**, a third-year debate team student who has aged out of the Kathlyn Joy Gilliam Museum youth debate team program but continues to be involved with the Museum and its programs.



Ava Bolden

Q: Hello Ava! How have you been?

A: **I'm doing good!**

Q: What school are you currently attending? What grade are you now?

A: **I am currently attending Irma Rangel YWLS, and I am in the 8th grade going to the ninth this fall.**

Q: How was your school experience this past year?

A: **My school experience was a little rough given the COVID restrictions and the Honors and AP classes I was taking.**

Q: We understand you are a past KJGM debater. What school did you attend while on the debate team?

A: **During my time as a debater, I attended Charles Rice Learning Center.**

Q: What are some of the things you feel you learned from being a part of the debate program?

A: **I think a very important thing to me that I learned was speaking up and making my voice heard.**

Q: What about your reading skills? Did they improve while participating in the debate program? If so, in what way?

A: When I joined the debate team, I was already reading at a higher level than my grade and age. I think debate helped me read faster, but also at the same time slowed my sentences and words down when speaking or reading aloud.

Q: Assuming you enjoy reading – is that correct?

A: Yes, I enjoy reading very much.

Q: How old were you when you read your first book?

A: My mother first started reading books to me when I was a few months old, but I think I read my first book on my own when I was 18 months old.

Q: What books have you read recently?

A: I have read *Under A Painted Sky*; *Thomas Jefferson and the Tripoli Pirates*; *Pájaro Blanco* (which is a book in Spanish), and so many more that I can't even think of.

Q: What type books do you like reading and why?

A: I personally like to read romance books because romance is a complex thing and I like to challenge myself. Also, I'm just a sucker for love.

Q: We understand you are interested in becoming a junior coach for the debate team. What do you hope to accomplish while serving in this capacity? How will serving in this capacity help new students?

A: One of the things I hope to accomplish while I am a junior coach will be to help soft-spoken students learn how to speak louder. I would also like to help students who have difficulty reading certain words understand. I think serving as a junior coach will help new students because it's not going to be just adults in the room, it will be someone who is young and around their age who they can feel more comfortable coming to talk to.

Q: Would you like to add anything else to this interview?

A: I would just like to add, whoever is reading this newsletter that the debate team changed my life and if you have any young kids who are in grades three through five then you should tell them to come on down and join this debate team. It's free of cost and it's honestly a great opportunity for young children.

Thank you, Ava. You are a shining star!

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