



Books that Kids Will Love

Advice for Parents from Award Winners

by Randy Kambic

While kids may list movies, video games, music downloads and other media featuring their favorite athlete, actor or music star as priority holiday gifts, books will expand their thoughts, curiosity and dreams by exposing them to a different set of role models and aspirations.

Reading takes kids away from tech screens and expands horizons in ways that can improve their school grades, maturity and overall inquisitiveness. Many wise-hearted parents are recognizing the benefits, as children's book sales were up 5 percent in the 12-month period ending in mid-October 2016, according to the American Booksellers Association. Humor, fantasy and magic, classics, nonfiction, time travel and participatory activities rank among the most popular topics.

Award-Winners' Advice

"Children can't be what they can't see," says author Laurie Lawlor, of Evanston, Illinois. Her 2017 book *Super Women: Six Scientists that Changed the*

World—a nonfiction account designed to excite kids 8 and up about math, science and engineering—cultivates positive role models via inspirational personal stories. She points out that most of those depicted were not that well known, and therefore can be emulated and more readily related to.

One of these is Katherine Coleman Johnson, a black National Aeronautics and Space Administration research mathematician and physicist, portrayed in the recent film *Hidden Figures*. Marine scientist Eugenie Clark, known as the "shark lady" for her daring underwater research, and major pioneers in cartography, archaeology and other fields also stir inquiring minds.

"I wanted to provide a variety of fields, backgrounds and ethnicities," remarks Lawlor. "They were all determined, very smart and persistent, and made strides in opening doors for women." Lawlor's 2012 children's book *Rachel Carson and Her Book That Changed The World* describes how Carson's seminal 1962 book

Silent Spring helped spawn the conservation and pro-environment movement by chronicling the dangers of pollution.

Children's fascination with nature and wildlife can also be met through the *Dog and Bear* series by Laura Vaccaro Seeger, out of Long Island, New York, and Vermonter Jim Arnosky's scientifically sound wildlife chronicles (*JimArnosky.com*).

Kelly Barnhill, of Minneapolis, whose latest work is *The Girl Who Drank the Moon*, characterizes children as quiet, yet highly active when reading. "They are encountering characters and then building, inserting themselves and more information into the stories, making it more relevant to them," she says.

The former middle school language arts teacher advocates parental reading aloud with children. "Make it a daily practice of turning to a separate book from what they may be reading on their own. You're helping them develop cognitive structure by reinforcing and

explaining. It's a shared lens on life."

Cultivate Reading

✓ **Know the child's interests.** "If they like horses or birds, you're certain to find great related books," advises Lawlor.

✓ **Lead by example.** "Seeing you reading or gardening or making things invites them to learn more about what they like," says Lawlor.

✓ **Be flexible and share.** There's no clear-cut time to transition from reading aloud to having a child do it on their own. Try taking turns reading a paragraph and then a page with them. "Women tend to read more than men, so get Dad involved, as well," says Barnhill.

✓ **Access quantity.** "Make many books available to kids," advises Barnhill. "They'll enjoy having a choice." Thrift stores are stocked with heavily discounted used books.

✓ **Empower them.** The interactive, hands-on format of Ellen Sabin's new *The Imagine It Book* allows children to "dive in and see how they can make an impact, be innovative, play, fail and then succeed," says Sabin. "Make them feel like they are 'driving the bus.'"

Welcoming diversity and providing a safe and reassuring community space for both confident and vulnerable youngsters, the American Library Association (ala.org) provides libraries with positive, unifying resources for children and families. They include a Storytime for Social Justice Kit; booklist for Hope and Inspiration storytime events; resource list on Talking to Kids about Racism and Justice for parents, caregivers and educators; and curated media list on immigration.

The Barnes & Noble bookseller groups selected children's books—including classics such as Dr. Seuss titles, poetry, nature, sports, history and science—in five age categories from newborn through teenage years.

"It's an amazing era for children's books," assesses Barnhill. "The success of the *Harry Potter* series reminded people that kids like real stories. There's been a boom in creativity, vigor and technical skills in story construction."

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BOOKS EXPAND KIDS' HORIZONS

Launched in April, Reading Without Walls (ReadingWithoutWalls.com) is a national initiative celebrating and encouraging reading, diversity and appreciation for those unlike ourselves. "We feel that this will change lives," says Shaina Birkhead, strategic partnerships director with the Children's Book Council, one of the program's partner organizations.

Under the program umbrella, libraries, bookshops, teachers, community youth groups and parents can host "challenge" events. An online guide includes tips on setting up displays and props; fun crafts and drawing activities; how to talk about reading; writing and design contests, word games and puzzles; and bookmark prizes.

"Reading opens up minds and hearts to new people, places and things," says Gene Luen Yang, a national ambassador of the program and author of the youthful tale *American Born Chinese*.

