

1000 Books before Kindergarten

By Kathryn Tatnall, Youth Services Librarian

Did you know that children whose parents read to them just five books a day will hear over 1.4 million more words by the time they enter kindergarten than children who are not read to each day? Ohio State's Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy member, Jessica Logan, says this research into the "million word gap" came from one of her earlier studies. In that study they found that almost one-fourth of children in a national sample were never read to and another fourth were seldom read to, perhaps only once or twice a week. "The fact that we had so many parents who said they never or seldom read to their kids was pretty shocking to us. We wanted to figure out what that might mean for their kids," said Logan.

In 2019 her team collaborated with the Columbus Metropolitan Library to identify 100 of the most circulated board books and picture books. They then randomly chose 30 books from both lists and counted how many words were in each type of book. Board books were found to contain an average of 140 words and picture books had an average of 228 words. Armed with that information the team set out to calculate how many words a child would hear from birth through their fifth birthday. The assumption was that babies and toddlers would be reading board books and three to five year olds would be reading picture books. Here is how many words children would have heard by the time they were five years old and likely entering kindergarten:

Never read to, 4662 words;

Read to 1 or 2 times per week, 63,570 words;

Read to 3-5 times per week, 169,520;

Read to daily, 296,660 words; and

Read 5 books per day 1,483,300 words.

Besides being exposed to all that new vocabulary there are several other benefits to reading to your child often. Reading aloud to your kids supports positive brain development; it improves language skills, and increases concentration and discipline. Reading aloud to children also improves creativity and imagination, and cultivates a lifelong love of reading while developing a special bond between you and your child or children.

How can the library help? Well, not only do we have a wonderful and growing collection of board books and picture books, but we have been partnering with New Ulm's Early Childhood and Family Education for years to bring you the 1000 Books before

Kindergarten challenge. Stop by the library to sign up to accept the challenge of reading 1000 books with your child before they enter kindergarten. You will receive a folder of helpful early literacy tips and log sheets to keep track of your progress. The log sheets only require you to check a box for each story read, not record titles which can be time consuming. Come see us after each one hundred books read for a small prize to keep your child's motivation high. Check in all ten completed log pages and you're done! If you have any questions please give me a call at 507-359-8331, I'm happy to help.

The library is located at 17 N. Broadway and is open to the public Monday to Thursdays 9:30 a.m.-8 p.m. and Friday and Saturdays 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m.