

# Massachusetts reads and succeeds!

A bi-monthly series dedicated to the people and the organizations whose efforts in literacy make Massachusetts a great place to live and learn.



Sponsored by a partnership between Verizon and the Massachusetts Literacy Foundation.



## It's a Family Affair

All parents want the best for their children, as success in learning is the key to success in life. We know that students do better in school when they are reading, writing and participating in literacy activities with their families. This November, in celebration of Family Literacy Month, we invite you to meet three Massachusetts Literacy Champions whose work is guided by the belief that learning is truly a family affair.

### "I Am Your Child—So Read with Me!"

*Family Reading in an Era of Early Childhood Development Public Education Efforts*

Literacy Champion Megan Lambert is an author and Instructor at The Center for the Study of Children's Literature at Simmons College. Throughout her professional life she has inspired thousands of children and adults to embrace the joys of reading aloud together and has been elected to serve on the 2011 Caldecott Committee. Following is an excerpt from a recent article by Lambert entitled "I Am Your Child - So Read with Me!" that can be accessed in full at [www.massliteracy.org](http://www.massliteracy.org). It touches on our fears and anxieties as parents of young children and the distinction between "reading to" and "reading with."

As a first-time parent, nothing quite prepared me for 1997's onslaught of well-intentioned advice and instruction about The First 3 Years of Life. I vividly recall lying in my hospital bed, nursing my hours-old son Rory and seeing Rob Reiner, President Clinton, and Dr. T. Berry Brazelton come on TV to talk about the "I Am Your Child" public education campaign on early childhood development. It turns out that the day Rory was born, April 16, 1997, was also the launch of this campaign at The White House, just blocks away from the Columbia Hospital for Women where I watched, elated, transfixed... and increasingly, desperately anxious.

As I listened to Reiner, President Clinton, Dr. Brazelton and others talk about the importance of stimulating infant brains and reading to children, the overwhelming sense of responsibility that I already felt as a new mother was compounded: I felt an immediate pang of guilt for not having packed any board books in my hospital overnight bag. Really. Sure, I was supposed to be focusing on recovering, and on diapering and nursing, and bathing my baby, but what about reading to him? What about stimulating him with black and white toys?

*Article continued at:*

[http://www.massliteracy.org/making\\_connections.htm](http://www.massliteracy.org/making_connections.htm)



## Recipe for a Successful Book Reading

Believe it or not, it takes only a few simple ingredients to engage the three-year-old listener on up to the third, fourth or fifth grader.

- **Begin by carefully selecting the text.** Your local library can suggest quality children's literature.
- **Stir** the mind with wondering anticipation, make predictions. Look at the picture and title on the front cover.
- **Ask**, "What do you think this story is going to be about?" "What do you see that makes you think that?"
- **Add a sprinkling of rare words.** Building a sophisticated vocabulary is a key to reading success. The literature should provide you with new words. Take the time to talk about the new word. Look at the pictures or expand the understanding by using the rare words in a context the child can relate to.
- **Connect the text to real life.** Is there something familiar about the story? Can the child relate something in his past, present or future to the story? Personal connections inspire the child to think more deeply which builds comprehension.



## The Gift of a Quiet Mind

By Lauren Leikin Hogan

We all know what it's like to seek peace at the close of a stressful day; to need a moment apart from a busy world. For the last seven years, Chris Kane, Director of the Early Books program at the South Boston Neighborhood House, has found her peace through yoga. This year – the year she also became a parent – Kane decided to design a program to help other parents and caregivers find their peace as well. Family Zen, says Kane, "is a combination of three things that are significant to me: literacy, art, and yoga. Doing the program has allowed all my worlds to come together." And in bringing her worlds together, she has brought a new world into the lives of the 24 women and 18 children who are taking part in the 8-week pilot program at Julie's Family Learning Program.

Every Wednesday morning, mothers and grandmothers gather with their yoga mats, bought through Kane's Literacy Champion grant award from the Massachusetts Literacy Foundation. They get their journals out, and push the toys off to the side of the room. They write and draw what they feel – "one issue they keep stumbling on," Kane explains – and then they begin their movements, poses, breathing. "Yoga has been an experience I'll never forget," says one mom. "I've learned how to cope with my problems and relax." "It gives me a sense of strength and resilience,"

adds another. At the end of each session, the women are led through guided meditation, while their kids clamor eagerly at the door. "I don't think we've ended on time once," admits Kane – a testament to the women's enthusiasm for the class.

Yoga time for the children begins with story time. They read a book about body parts, or about animals and then they learn lion pose, up dog and down dog, cat and cow, and of course, child's pose. Kane is taking photos of all the kids for a yoga deck of cards that



they'll each take home at the end of the program, along with a DVD of the classes, also funded through the Massachusetts

Literacy Foundation. Like their parents and caregivers, the kids write and draw in journals of their own, where they paste a "B" for "butterfly" and dictate to their teachers. They practice poses at home, with their families, strengthening their bonds through sharing and time together. "Yoga is hopeful," says one parent simply. Kane, who left corporate culture 13 years ago to devote herself to giving back in the neighborhood where she was born and raised, is hopeful too – for the kids, their parents, and for the future of Family Zen.

*For a list of family yoga book resources:*

[http://www.massliteracy.org/making\\_connections.htm](http://www.massliteracy.org/making_connections.htm)



- **Think out loud.** This too is a comprehension strategy. As you read, stop to think. Give the child something to wonder about. "I wonder why Goldilocks is going into the house." Skillful readers think while they read. Stop to think and tell your reader what you are thinking.
- **Use words of encouragement.** Whether you have an emergent reader who is sounding out words, a fluent reader who is working on comprehension or a pre-school listener, your praise will greatly assist in the development of a good reader.
- Last but not least, **enjoy** your reading time together!



Kathy Huges, 2009 Massachusetts Literacy Champion, is Early Reading First Coach at Little Sprouts Inc. She is a staunch advocate for Universal Pre Kindergarten, believing that early education is as valuable and important as in every other grade. Finding innovative ways to engage parents and incorporate literacy activities into their daily family life is a welcome challenge for her. This is her family recipe for a shared reading experience.