

HEAD LINES

A Monthly Message from Chip Denton, Head of School



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The soul is contained in the human voice. • Jorge Luis Borges

The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles
but to irrigate deserts. • C. S. Lewis

Dear Trinity Community,

I have a simple assignment for the entire Trinity community this summer:

- Find a family member, or a whole passel of them;
- Sit down on a couch, or some other commodious piece of furniture, side by side or in laps, as you please;
- Open A.A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* (making sure you have a hard copy with Ernest Shepard's "decorations");
- Read the first chapter out loud...and then try to save some of the book for subsequent reads.

This is Trinity Reads 2019. To kick off our 25th year, we are returning to our roots, letting the frigate of Milne's clever prose take us lands away to the Hundred Acre Wood.

And when I speak of reading this book out loud, I really mean it. Let Pooh's Tra-la-las be sung with your best imitation of a Bear of Very Little Brain. Let your children actually hear you saying "Woozle" and "Heffalump," for the fun of it, but also for the good of it.

Reading aloud does a child a heap of good. It builds language, enriches vocabulary, and teaches subtle lessons in syntax that diagramming sentences can never match. Neural pathways are strengthened through reading aloud, as studies in brain and behavioral science are beginning to show us. In her book *The Enchanted Hour*, Meghan Cox Gurdon, children's book reviewer for the *Wall Street Journal*, has written quite an apologetic for this ancient, simple, but profound practice.

Unlike screen technology, reading aloud trains the attention. There is a profound human exchange that happens when one person reads to another, creating bonds that last a very long time. And the cultivation of the moral imagination is maybe the best part of the bargain—who wouldn't want her child to have the patience and kindness of Christopher Robin with his "silly old bear"? Stories create a safe way for us to empathize and identify with characters, making it possible for us to see things about ourselves that are otherwise hidden to us.

We've been reading aloud at Trinity since the beginning. I remember driving over to Hope Creek Church the first year of the school to read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to one of the classes at lunch. Kathy Tyndall, a Trinity founder and beloved teacher for nearly two decades, was telling me recently about her encounters with former students. "Do you know what they remember about our class?" she asked. "The books we read aloud. One of them could even name the whole list."

Please turn over...

Trinity's early intuition that reading out loud was a good thing was inspired by our mission: it's classical (introduce students to great works); it's rich (let them come to love these books like old friends); and it's unhurried (gratuitous reading, not for a test, but for the sheer joy of it). Reading aloud is also a means of imparting our Christian mission, for in the shaping and inspiring of the imagination the real work of spiritual transformation happens.

A few notes before we all crack open the book:

- This is for the Middle and Upper Schoolers among us, too. I know it may be a stretch to get them onto the couch beside you, but make it happen. Let them do the reading if they want to. Reading a book *together* creates a sort of third space where people can go together, sometimes even if their relationship is not close.
- Read the book, don't watch the movie or try some animated e-book version. Unless it's the only way you can do this, don't listen to the Audible version. FMRI's show the beneficial neural impact that reading a physical book with pictures has on our minds. One alternative is to video yourself reading the book, so you can "read" it to your children when you're unable to be with them.
- Don't be hidebound about having to finish the chapter, or the book. Stop along the way and take a side trail. Let the book take you where it takes you...maybe down a greenway trail and over a bridge, where you can play Pooh Sticks.
- If you finish the book and want more, read it again. Or go get the second volume, *The House at Pooh Corner*.
- If Pooh is not your thing, don't worry. Find another book that captures your family's attention and read *that* out loud. No book will speak equally to us all. Our goal is for everyone to find *something* to read together, to delight in together.

I hope you have a wonderful summer, full of good books and good friends to enjoy them with. See you in August!

Non nobis.



Head of School

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