

SEYI OLAOBAJU

RAISING A READING CHILD

14 SIMPLE STEPS TO MAKING YOU
AND YOUR CHILD AN ARDENT READER



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14 Simple Steps to making you and your child an ardent reader.

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— SEYI OLAOBAJU —

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, smiling as she reads a book to two young children. The children are looking down at the book. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text 'RAISING A READING CHILD' is superimposed over the lower half of the image.

RAISING A READING CHILD

14 STEPS TO MAKING YOU AND
YOUR CHILD AN ARDENT READER

Raising a Reading Child

14 Simple Steps to making you and your child an ardent reader

'Seyi Olaobaju

To

Oluwaseunfunmi,

For your everyday sacrifice in raising our gems.

Truly, you are my reward on the earth.

INTRODUCTION

It was in September, 2011 during a Mid-Morning Show, sitting opposite the TV Interviewers and answering many questions that borders around Reading Culture and Its Development, the dark haired man in a straightforward manner asked me, "Our Older parents, majority who were illiterates seems to value the culture of promoting reading but now, the younger educated parents seems not to bother or give it a priority... Can you respond to that?"

That was over seven years ago, I have tried to respond in many ways since then, however, this little book is sent to everyone there who is not only raising a reading child but interested in becoming a better reader.

The irony of our time is that as much as information has become ubiquitous, our ignorance rate is alarming, as it were, you are dodging bullets in a war field with bullets flying everywhere, this act, I believe, really requires some super skills.

I am about making you and your ward an ardent reader, someone who loves reading as one might love a favourite food, or clothing or toy. Raising a Reading Child has always been a challenge especially for young couples and they keep asking how better to make their child read. Interestingly, I have met parents who presumptuously say things like: "Children who love reading will eventually pick it up by themselves." "You cannot force a child

to read books, or he or she will not be able to develop any other life skills that don't require reading." among many other excuses.

In this short book, I will be showing you fourteen practical yet simple steps you can cultivate a reading child just as well as you can cultivate a garden.

Seyi Olaobaju

November, 2018

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STEP ONE.

Start Early.

Early could mean from the womb. Some science discoveries have proven that babies listen right from when they are in the womb. So, start reading to them from the foetus stage and continue. Even when they don't appear to understand, this creates a bedrock affection for reading. A study done in 2013 by the University of Oregon in the USA found out that when pregnant mothers were given a recording that included a made up word to play near the end of pregnancy, the babies were able to recognize that word when they are born. The researchers who did this study could discern this by neural signals emitted by babies that showed that they recognized the pitch and vowel changes in the made up word. The study also realized that the babies who heard the recording most frequently displayed the strongest response.

What this study and many others like it tells us is that it is not just an urban myth that children can in fact learn to read in the womb, it is a fact. So when you are pregnant, get interesting books to read to your foetus. This is not just for women alone, as a man, you can also read to your baby. It has been proven to increase bonding between the father and the baby and that when a father reads to the baby inside the womb, the baby will recognize the

father's voice when it is born. The method has even been proven to work for older siblings of the baby, so if you are looking for a way to reduce maternal stress during pregnancy, bond with your unborn baby and ensure that they are pushed towards learning at an early age, reading a book is your way to go.



STEP TWO.

Bring the Books closer to them. Let them love books

When children are young, especially when they are below five years old, the world will still be new to them and so they will be fascinated by anything they come across. This is the time to introduce books to them. If you make them familiar with books at that age, they will develop a fascination for books and reading that will make them book readers for life. Because at this stage children have neither the patience to care for books or the emotional attachment to books that adults have, they might rip the books to pieces or just scrawl illegibly over them. When that happens, just gently reprimand them and let them know that they have a responsibility to care for books. However, don't punish them so harshly that they start to see books as a source of punishment. Let them enjoy the thrill of opening the pages and scribbling "nonsense" over them. It is the beginning of the journey towards being an ardent reader. Once they acquire it at an early age, they will never let go of it.

If your children are in the habit of scribbling illegibly over books, one thing you can do is to get them started with inexpensive picture books where they can allow their imaginations to run wild without giving you a headache. As

they grow older and develop a sense of responsibility for taking care of books, you can then introduce them to your more expensive books.

According to various researches on the subject, a child who is taught to read early is at a distinct advantage over his or her peers. When a child starts learning to read as a baby or at the age of 2 or 3, there is no psychological pressure to be a good reader. The formal school system is yet to kick in, in most parts of the world. So, you can teach your child to read a little each day, in a leisurely manner. You can stop when you notice he or she is tired. Another thing you can do is to create reading games for your child from the start. You and your child can take the time to treat reading as an exciting adventure, rather than a bothersome chore.

Neil Gaiman, the award winning Science Fiction Writer talks about how he came to love reading and how he became a writer. He talks in particular about the librarians who made him love writing thus:

They just seemed to like that there was this wide-eyed little boy who loved to read, and would talk to me about the books I was reading, they would find me other books in a series, and they would help me in any way possible. They treated me as another reader – nothing less or more – which meant they treated me with respect. I was not used to being treated with respect as an eight-year-old.

The above quote is proof that if children are taught the art of reading as children, they acquire a habit that stays with them till they are old. Neil Gaiman did not become Neil Gaiman over night, he became Neil Gaiman through years of cultivated reading by individuals who shared his passion for books. Cultivate your children into better readers today. It is one of the best things you can do for them as a parent.



STEP THREE.

Model Reading.

I have this friend who is extremely passionate about Ibadan¹ history. I shall call him Ade. Ade is the person I run to anytime I need any past or present fact about Ibadan. The interesting thing about Ade is that even though he is from Ibadan, he was not born there and he spent the first twenty years of his life somewhere else and only moved back to Ibadan recently. That made me to ask him “how come you have so much knowledge about Ibadan even though you haven’t spent much of your life there?” He replied:

“I have always been conscious of the fact that I am an Ibadan person because my parents, in particular my father, has never ceased to remind me of my heritage. One of my earliest memories growing up was the nights in our house when my dad would gather me and my siblings and read to us from “Iwe Itan Ibadan” written by the late Oba I. B. Akinyele, former Olubadan of Ibadan. Listening to him reading about the great heroes of Ibadan always gave me a feeling of cultural pride and

¹ Ibadan is the capital and most populous city of Oyo State, Nigeria. With a population of over 3 million, it is the third most populous city in Nigeria after Lagos and Kano; it is the country's largest city by geographical area

nostalgia. My father was a great model reader and it was those nights that made me develop a fascination with not just Ibadan history, but history in general.

But my father didn't just read to us from *Iwe Itan Ibadan*, he read to us from popular Yoruba works, like the works of D.O Fagunwa and other early Yoruba writers. Last year my younger brother, who by the way graduated with a Second Class Upper Degree in English Language, Obafemi Awolowo University, got a grant to be a Yoruba Language Teaching Assistant in a University in the USA, that is where he is now. I guess that should really tell you all about how much of an influence my Dad's reading of Yoruba all those years ago had on us and our linguistic abilities."

My friend's story is an extremely profound illustration of what I often say when I tell parents about the importance of being a model reader for their children. As my lawyer friends often say "You cannot deliver what you do not have." If you are not a reading parent, you cannot teach your child to read. To use the words of an English teacher I had in secondary school, "It is an impossibility that can never be possible." Recently I saw this widely shared video on Instagram of a boy no older than four or five, dancing the shaku shaku² dance that young Africans nowadays are so fond of. The boy

² Shaku shaku is a dance that's performed by crossing your arms in front of each other at the wrist, widening your legs slightly, and launching into a graceful half-gallop.

got the moves so perfectly that everyone in the video was wowed. I do not know if that little boy gets exposed to reading as much as he gets to shaku shaku, but imagine how good he would be if he had an adult who exposed him to reading as much as adults exposed him to shaku shaku. As you try to help your children to read, make sure you buy books, newspapers, journals that you can also read as you go along with them. My friend's story proves, if you are a reading parent, there is no way you will not produce reading children.



STEP FOUR.

Reward Reading

A mantra that I have always followed in my work life is to treat everything like a project, in that it always has an achievable end. The fact that reading to your child at an early age is what you usually do at your convenience does not mean you should just do it without a sense of purpose for it. No matter how young your child is when you are teaching them to read, treat it like a project. It can be difficult to achieve reading goals with children because of their short attention spans, and their lack of attention to detail. To make sure they are invested in reading, you must constantly encourage them in their reading. You can give them stickers, awards and give them treat when they finish their books and when they achieve their reading goals. Document their milestones and make sure they can see it themselves. It instils in them the belief and the self confidence

Create an incentive chart and monitor their progress. On the incentive chart, make sure you list all the books that you both have read in the past. It will also give the child a sense of achievement and improve their self-esteem. A child who learns to read joyfully at home, at an early age, with a loving parent or caregiver, grows in self-confidence and independence. Reading

goals promote greater maturity, increases discipline and lays the basis for moral literacy. It sparks curiosity about people, places and things and also satisfies the child's curiosity by providing explanations of how things work. It exposes the child to a range of problem-solving techniques. In addition, early reading ignites the child's creativity and imagination.

The Uruguayan football star, Edinson Cavani likes to talk about a memory from his days as a child, of playing football in his small town in Uruguay. He said that the coaches in order to keep the children motivated on the football pitch usually awards an "Ice cream goal". The ice cream goal means that the player who scores the last goal before the match end would get ice cream. It is little wonder that the PSG star is one of the most prolific strikers in football and has won several trophies for club and country. That is proof that motivation and reward not only works in the short term, it works in the long term too. Apply the same process to making your children avid readers, it works like magic.



STEP FIVE.

Engage Participatory Reading

My friend, Ade, whom I shared his story about his father reading historical works to them, shares another story about his childhood reading memories.

He said:

“My Dad had this tape recorder that he used to record stuff. So one day when he came home from work he told me and my siblings, that we were going to do an activity called “story time.” All of us, from the eldest who was about fifteen at the time to the youngest who was about four, each of us would tell a story in whatever language we are comfortable and my Dad would record it. My father made sure he got everyone’s voice on the record, even that my four year old sister with her incoherent sentences. My Dad himself joined in at the end and added his own story to the recording. We had fun listening to the recording over and over again, and it was a source of pride to us for a long time. I can imagine the effect that recording had on my little sister. I know because she told me herself that the memories are blurry for her but that incident was part of what helped to build

her self-confidence, the fact that as incoherent as she was, she was still able to contribute her own knowledge to a conversation with her father and her older siblings.”

In a previous chapter I talked about how you can help your children become better readers by reading to them, but reading works best when it is treated as a democracy, where everybody can participate and where strengths and weaknesses can then be assessed and reading goals achieved. Ask them about the books they are reading, what they have learnt from it, an assessment of what is missing from the book, etc.

It has more value for both you and them when you are involved in their reading. So make sure to participate and let them realise you care about their reading habits and their reading goals.



STEP SIX.

Introduce them to Children's Book Club and take them along to Book/Literary Events.

The Ben Carson story of how he went from the bottom of his class to the top of his class because his mother made him take his reading more seriously. However, the part of his story that is most striking to me is the point where he realizes that all the work his mom had forced him to do is beginning to bear fruit. It was while he was in class among his mates that he realized that he was no longer a hopeless academic failure.

There is something that commentators in football call a “training ground move” or a “training ground goal”. It happens when a team practices a set of plays on the training ground and then they play exactly that way and it results in a goal. Training ground goals are the kind of goals that both coaches and players are proud of because they are sign that the coach’s methods are working. As a parent, you are like the coach and the children are like the players. Therefore you must give them the opportunity to practice their reading in an actual reading group or class.

As a parent, you might have been working hard to make sure your children get their groove on in the privacy of your house, but the only way you can know if your reading programme with your child is having an effect is to take them to book readings and book clubs. Take them to intellectual book reading events, allow them to participate in book clubs, organize a book party in your neighbourhood, and create a “bring your child to work” event, where children and parents can bond over books, in your office. Allowing your children to hang out with other children gives them the opportunity to relate to their peers on a more confident, more competent level as they are already being recognized for their superior accomplishments. Such experiences increase the child's social status among peers as well as his or her self-image and self-confidence. It will also help you to share your reading experiences and goals with other parents and guardians. Such experiences will help you know how to work on your reading goals.

Register your children for Reading Competitions. Not allowing children to share what they have learned with their peers is like a football player who trains regularly but does not play in a real match. That player will still eventually become match rusty. Like that footballer or any professional whatsoever with any recognized skill, you cannot know how much progress you have made, until you practice it among real people. So my advice to you is this, do not let your children become rusty, Let them start sharing their book knowledge with their peers.



STEP SEVEN.

Be intentional about the choice of school your children attend

According to an estimate, by the time you are eighteen, you had spent a third of your life in school. That is if you go to day school, if you went to a boarding school, the number is much higher than that. This is why it is extremely important to make sure that the place where your children are spending a third of their lives every day is a place where all the reading you do with them at home will be enhanced, not where it will be undone. You must ensure that the school you want to send your children to have values that align with your goals about how you want your children to read. These days, many schools now focus more on extra-curricular and fun activities at the expense of quality reading and learning. Ensure that you ask what the school's plan is for promoting reading and writing at the earliest age. Find out, and confirm they stick to their promise. Visit their library, check the books they have. Don't leave it to chance or hearsay. Check and double check.

In *Marita's Bargain* a chapter of his book "*Outliers-The Story of Success*" Malcolm Gladwell talks about a girl called Marita who changes schools to go to a middle school called KIPP Academy. Marita did not have parents

who read to her at home and so when she got to that academy she found that she had to read avidly to be able to cope with the syllabus there. It was hard work, but she was able to cope through perseverance and effort. The reading she did in school eventually helped her to become an even better reader, even at home.

As I have mentioned before, it is the height of negligence to believe that because you pay a high fee to a school, then you should leave them to treat your child anyway they see fit. It is not enough to ensure that your child is in a school with a good vision for reading, it is also important for you to be part of Parent and Teachers Association meetings where you can raise awareness about reading-friendly programmes.

I know a Professor in Obafemi Awolowo University, my Alma Mater, who still supports library projects and participates in reading mentorship activities in four schools in Ile-Ife, one primary school and three secondary schools. The reason for the specific schools is that those were the schools that his children attended. Even though all of his children are now university graduates, with Masters degrees and even a PhD, he still continues to support the secondary schools they graduated from because: "These schools helped my children achieve their reading goals while they were in school, so it is fitting that I continue to do my part in helping the coming generations to benefit from the thing my children benefitted from." The role of a school

in the educational development of a child is something that must not be trifled with.



STEP EIGHT.

Actively build their Personal Library immediately they start school.

In the second step of the Raising a Reading Child Series. I talked about how to make sure that you create an ambience where your children can keep their books, even if it's in a paper carton. Let them build a strong archive for books. They can always reference them and make judicious use of them later in their lives.

Jodi Kendall, popular blogger and Children Book Author offers some advice:

“Designate a **READING NOOK** in your home. It doesn't need to be big! You don't need an entire playroom. We're a family of four + a dog living in a 900(ish)-square foot apartment in Manhattan. Work with what you've got. If your vision is a library that rivals the one in *Beauty and the Beast*, then go for it. For us, we dedicated a linear section behind the couch along the windows for our little library. This zone gets lots of natural light, so it's bright and cheerful, and doubles as a play area with age-appropriate toys. For other families, a little home library might be a space in the child's

bedroom, or a nook under the stairs, or a corner of the family room. But it should be safe, accessible, welcoming, and well lit.”

Bringing children into a library can transport them from the commonplace to the extraordinary. From story hours for pre-schoolers to career planning for high schoolers, parents who take on the role of librarians for their children make a difference because they care about the unique developmental needs of every individual who comes to them for help. Children get a handle on personal responsibility by having a library of their own, a place that gives them access to new worlds in books, videos, audiotapes, computers, games, toys, and more.

One of the problems that Nigeria has as a nation today is the fact that a lot of our history is lost because they are not documented in books. As the saying goes: “If you do not know where you are coming from, you will not know where you are, not to talk of where you are going.” A prominent economist also posited “A nation cannot prosper if it continues to use solutions devised by people in another country for its problems.” The question is where are we going to get our own solutions to our problems, if most of our history is lost?

It is not too late to make amends as a nation for decades of irresponsibility, but the only way it can happen is for us to start making our children to understand that they have a responsibility to understanding the history of

our nation. The only way that we can do this is to make sure that they understand the value of books.



STEP NINE.

Don't keep them in school for too long

Because children, especially when they are of preschool age, typically have very low attention spans and an inability to cope in a formal and rigid environment for a long period, they may not enjoy school immediately and may even find it tedious and boring. School is a necessity for every child and there is little a parent can do about that, however you can work with them so that they do not hate school or let the formal rigidity of school affect their attitude towards learning. Let them rest and refresh after school. Especially between ages 1 to 8. Don't make school boring for them.

These days because parents are always too busy with work they tend to leave their children in school for longer than is necessary. The problem with this behaviour is that the more young children spend in the formal and rigid environment of the school, the more they become disenchanted with the idea that school is a place of learning and instead believe that it is a place where they are subjected to so much tedium. A lot of parents even go as far as putting their Pre-School and Nursery school age children in boarding schools. It is a bad idea and it will have a telling negative effect on their

perception of school in later years. This will in turn have an effect on their ability to gain useful information out of school work

The idea of keeping children away in school till evening/nights when you return home actually causes more harm to them than good. Children need plenty of time to play, away from the environment of the school where the formal environment of the school interferes with their ability to enjoy their relaxation. As time goes on they will likely develop the stamina and maturity to be able to cope with long periods of work without play. However it must be in progressive stages. The popular adage says: "You cannot feed a malnourished child to full health in one day". Reading is exactly the same thing. Your reading with your children must be administered in manageable doses, so that it does not become tiresome to them.

Your children should be exposed to something different from formal education. Let them travel, but if money is not available for traveling, take them out to new places. Even though we have mentioned that too much TV exposure is not good for your child, allowing them a few hours of movies or cartoons everyday can help them relax as well, let them learn new skills like swimming, artwork, tailoring, hairdressing, barbing and so on. Children are not machines, even machines require time for rest or else they will breakdown.



STEP TEN.

Make them enjoy Fairy Tales

The genius scientist, Albert Einstein was asked once how parents can make their children intelligent. His reply was both simple and wise. "If you want your children to be intelligent," he said, "read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales." He understood the value of reading, and of imagining. I hope we can give our children a world in which they will read, and be read to, and imagine, and understand.

In the world we live in today, globalization, which is driven by the internet, has continued to make the world smaller and smaller every day. The world is such that the poor people of the future will not be the people who do not have material resources it will be people who cannot read and learn. Without the ability to read and gain knowledge you will not be able to get information and without information, you will not be able to use your imagination. The best way to develop your imagination is through stories. So if you want your children to using their imaginations to engage with their environments early in life, you must start engaging them in reading stories

As human beings we are fascinated by a story (which is why start-up founders always talk about creating a story for their brand). This rule applies to children even more because they have little experience of reality, and so the stories are what shape their view of the world. Read stories to them often. You should not only read the story to them, you should also allow them to role play as fairy-tale characters. It helps them to develop their confidence. The more stories they have access to, the better for them and their imaginations.

I find the bible unique because of the stories contained in it. A story which is particularly special to me in the Bible is the story of David defeating Goliath. Though it is in the bible, it is a story that anyone can relate to regardless of culture or religious belief. A young kid defeats a fearsome giant that everybody else had been running away from. More than the characters in that story or where it can be found, it is an illustration of the power of self-belief. That story is important to me because it was told to me as a young child and till today whenever I face a problem that looks hard, I always remember the story of David and Goliath for inspiration. Stories are like food for your children regardless of what they want to become. So as you are feeding them physical food to help them grow physically, feed them stories too so that they can grow mentally.



STEP ELEVEN.

Give them Reading Autonomy and Variety

As Children grow older their personalities form and the kind of adult they would grow up to be becomes more obvious. Some children are artistic, they create worlds in their imagination and try to impose their own creativity on the world around them, while some others are scientifically curious, and they want to know how the world works. They are the ones who take toys apart to see how the different pieces work. Both of these two mentioned categories of children can be taught reading but they require different kinds of reading material. While the imaginative child might enjoy fairy tales and adventure books, the scientific child might prefer comics and scientific books. As a parent it is your duty to make sure you study each child and find out the kind of person they are and what kind of material they want to read. What you can do is to stock your library (and theirs) with various genres, so that you can then observe the kind of book that your child loves to read best. Regardless of what your child likes to read, encourage them to read other genres too. In “Think Big” Ben Carson talks about how he read many things before he finally stumbled on Medicine, the profession where he achieved fame. Carson learnt about Geography, Classical Music, History, Biology and

many other fields. Carson says for example that the first thing that drew him to Larcena Rustin, (the woman he later married) was their shared love for classical music.

Well-meaning adults can easily destroy a child's love of reading: stop them reading what they enjoy, or give them worthy-but-dull books that you like, the 21st-century equivalents of Victorian "improving" literature. You'll wind up with a generation convinced that reading is uncool and worse, unpleasant.

Here is where I have a problem with schools managed by some religious organizations, especially at Primary and Secondary School level. Most of the time the children are taught to only read literature that pertains to their religion or sect. When these children graduate, they struggle to cope in the real world and tend to be bigots because they do not have any knowledge that is not related to their religion or sect.

Someone said "You can be as wise as Cicero or Socrates, you can gain all the knowledge that explorers like Ferdinand Magellan, or Christopher Columbus gained from travelling the world, You can know things that geniuses like Albert Einstein and Leonardo da Vinci can only dream of, you can be a more talented creative than the likes of William Shakespeare and Michelangelo, all without taking a step out of the comfort of your room. It is all in the books you read. Do not try to force your own choice of reading

material on your children, let them read other genres that may appeal to them.



STEP TWELVE.

Practice Word Game, Songs, Games and Stimulating Activities.

How many of you reading this can remember some of the marching songs you used to sing in your primary and secondary school. I still remember quite a number of them, but two in particular have stayed in my memory I call them the “Rivers in Africa” song and the “Hippopotamus” song. Even these days when I am trying to spell “Hippopotamus”, I still find myself humming “H-I-P for the Hip” in my head, even though it is more than three decades since I last sang it in school. For me and many students of my generation, the reason why we know how to spell Hippopotamus is because of that song. Same goes for the “Seven Rivers in Africa” song. That song is how some of us knew there are seven rivers in Africa before we had the opportunity to read it up on the internet. Ditto for the first 20 elements in Chemistry.

What I am trying to say with my little illustration above is that sometimes, handing your children books for them to just read can be tedious and can make them bored, and this makes retaining information sometimes an uphill task. Studies have shown that songs is a great way for children (especially when they are of pre-school age) to assimilate information. This is the reason

why cartoons more often than not have songs in them. It is also the reason why we had marching songs in school. When children march or dance to songs, it is easier to retain the information contained in its lyrics. Singing, dancing and marching are stimulating physical activities, so encourage your children to do them from time to time. Also games like picture puzzles, word puzzles and scrabble are also intellectually stimulating. They help the children develop their world and image recognition skills and they are also great for learning spelling

These days there are several applications and games on the internet on the internet that children can play and be stimulated. There is for example an app that I like called the "Talking Tom" app. It is an app in which an image of a cat or a dog repeats words and phrases said to it back to the speaker. It is great for developing listening and speaking skills. There are several games and intellectually stimulating applications, which can help the child learn faster.



STEP THIRTEEN.

Introduce Journal Writing to them.

According to language experts, there are four skills required to use language. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. The level of mastery of each of these four skills is what determines how an individual is rated in the use of that language. Therefore, it is not enough to teach your children how to read or listen, it is also important to teach them how to write too. I like to tell people that reading without writing is like pumping water into a tank without an outlet for it to go out through. The tank will eventually become full and will not be able to take anything else in. If you read and you do not write, all the knowledge you have gained will eventually become useless. If you read and do not write, you are like a stagnant pool, collecting water to itself and not allowing it to flow out. That pool will soon be filled with dirt and weeds and will start to smell.

There is an adage that goes thus “the faintest pen is sharper than the brightest mind”. When you teach your children how to write and keep diaries, it improves their language skills. Again the story of Ben Carson becomes poignant. (You will notice that I have mentioned his story a few times in this book, because for me that story is one of the biggest illustrations

of what a reading child can achieve.) Sonya Carson did not just make her children read books; she also made sure that they wrote a report for every book they read. Studies have shown that when you write things down, it becomes ingrained in your memory. As a parent you can also follow Sonya Carson's example, teach your children to write books reports and to keep diaries, it will deepen their abilities and reinforce their reading habits. Let them keep a notepad always in their pocket to note new words, knowledge and discoveries.

Journal keeping is not just about writing words down. Research has shown that some children do not have the ability to express themselves with words, but are good at creating pictures, encourage them to draw as well. Like writing, drawing and painting also allows children to use their imagination more in interacting with the world around them. It also helps them to understand the way the world they live in works better. Therefore whether they want to write, or draw or paint, or even sculpt, they are all mentally stimulating and expressive activities that will help your child in both the short and the long term.



STEP FOURTEEN.

Seek Expert Advice

In his book *“Losing My Virginity”* Billionaire CEO of Virgin Group, Richard Branson, talks about how he struggled with his reading, and how he was severely beaten and berated in school because he had trouble with reading or spelling. His teachers felt he was just being lazy and so felt that flogging him as much as possible was the solution to his problem. It was much later that he was diagnosed with dyslexia, a condition where sufferers have issues with spelling and pronunciation of words.

When my generation was growing up, nobody knew anything about reading disorders, if you didn't know how to spell or pronounce or write a word, like Richard Branson, you were simply beaten or called a dullard in school until you did. Many people are school dropouts today because they felt they had no hope of becoming good students, when in fact their problem was merely a reading disorder that could have been helped if it had been detected in time. Thanks to advances in medical science and psychology, many more children who would otherwise be unable to function because of learning problems are now getting the help they need.

Some of reading disorders that may affect your child in school could be Dyslexia, where your child has problems with spelling and pronunciation and recognizing words. It could be Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, (ADHD), where the child has difficulty staying focused during reading and other activities. Another reading problem that your child may also have is Auditory Processing Disorder (APD). In this case, the child has difficulty linking sounds with words. Visual Processing Disorder (VPD), the inability to link the information taken in through the eyes into the brain, is also another learning disability that have been identified by experts and which may affect children especially in their early reading stages.

The good thing about all these conditions and others like them is that they are manageable and someone suffering from them can still be a good student, even become a great writer. Leonardo Da Vinci, the famed Italian Artist and Painter possibly suffered from ADHD. One of the most famous detective novel writers in history, the iconic Agatha Christie, suffered from dysgraphia, a learning disability that made her unable to remember the spelling of words and unable to memorize numbers. Irish Poet and 1923 Nobel Prize in Literature Winner, W.B. Yeats also suffered from an undiagnosed learning disorder which might have been dyslexia. Therefore if you notice that your child has issues with reading, you should consult an expert in learning conditions. There are so many therapists who have the knowledge of working with children with learning disabilities and special

needs children. If your child is a special needs child, there are schools where experts handle children with special needs and conditions. There is no need to be shy or lock your child struggling with normal learning needs in the house. There are many support groups that you can join, where they can relate with whatever your child might be going through. There is no need to be ashamed.

Talk to their teachers; build a healthy relationship with them. If your child has special needs, let their teachers know how they can be helped. Make sure your child with learning disabilities only gets positive vibes from you, there is no need for them to feel like they cannot function in a normal society because of whatever condition they may suffer from.

Final words

The best time to plant a cocoa tree was twenty years ago. The second best time is now. For so long, we have always talked about the myth of self-made men, people who neither depended on parents or family to develop ideas that changed the world. However we have come to realize that the myth of the self-made man is false. From Bill Gates, to George W. Bush, to Steve Jobs, to Mark Zuckerberg, to Cristiano Ronaldo, to Lionel Messi, to Serena Williams, every “genius” became so because of the values that their parents cultivate in them. Read up the history of all of these people, you will find the concerted effort that their parents and societies exerted in their lives that led to them becoming what they became.

In “The Trouble with Geniuses” another chapter in *“The Outliers-The story of Success”* Malcolm Gladwell talks about two people who can be considered geniuses. Chris Lagan, who is regarded as “The smartest man in America” and Robert J. Oppenheimer, the head of the Manhattan Project (the project that developed the first atomic bomb). Chris Lagan had to push through life on his own because he had no father and his mother was uneducated and poor. At the end, he missed many opportunities to get scholarships that he was smart enough for and had to drop out of school. Oppenheimer, on the other hand, had a father who actively cultivated his belief and self-confidence and he became the head of what is described as “One of the most important American projects of the 20th century.”

What Gladwell was using the stories of both men to illustrate is that rich people and educated people engage their children in productive activities when they are young, they buy books for them, enroll them in music or art classes, encourage them to learn a skill, or put them in sports camps. Poor and uneducated people on the other hand just leave their children to mindlessly watch TV and play all the time. It tells on the children in the future.

I should also add a few words on something that I am passionate about, the subject of National History and Culture. If you are really committed to making and keeping Nigeria a better place, then you must ensure that your children understand Nigeria's history. So that they do not fall into the rank and file of nationals who are citizens in name only and have a zero understanding of the rich history and culture. The men who built the industrialized nations of the world knew the history of those nations. As parents, it is time to start correcting the mistakes that our parents' generation made, so that we don't produce the same conditions we are in now for our children.

So if there is anything you should take home from this series so far, it is the often repeated saying that a child's mind is like a garden, leave it fallow, it will be filled with weeds and poison, cultivate it carefully and it will become a beautiful and admirable place to everyone that sees it. It's not too late to

begin imbibing these qualities and imparting them to your children. If you do so, you will experience sterling performance from them onwards.

So what kind of parent or leader are you going to be?

It is your call.



Postscript

Tell me a tale of Leaders who were great,
Many of them used books as a bait.
Read of men that lived so great,
What you read would tell your fate.

Child, go to the shelves and pick a book,
Flip and read every nook and crook.
A reading child is a leading child,
For he takes books as his own guide.
He set the pace and others follow,
He shines in the midst of his fellow.
He knows too much that others do not,
His heart is rich and he has a lot.

A reading child is sowing good seed,
She becomes queen, one who loves to read.
Powerful are her words, filled with wisdom indeed.

Tell me a tale of men who loves to lead
I'll show you men who loves to read.

Maryanna Iyere

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About the Author



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