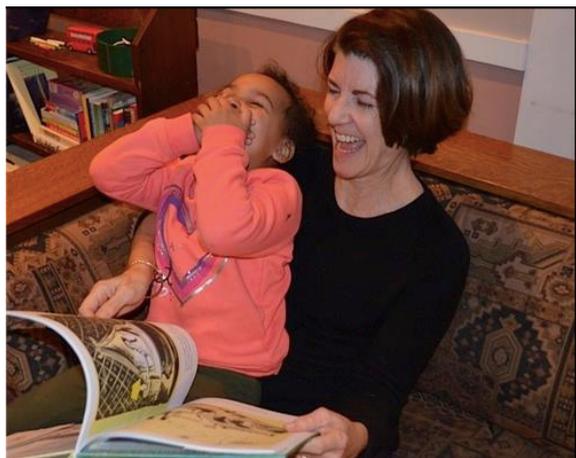


# IT'S TIME TO PUT A BOOK ON EVERY BED

BY AMY DICKINSON 2019

## “ASK AMY” ADVICE COLUMN



### Dear Readers:

This is a special day for me, because this is the day I take a break from hosting your questions to advocate for a cause that is very near and dear to me: literacy.

In my long career as a writer and reader, I have volunteered in classrooms, libraries and prisons, reading with others and sharing the work of writers important in my own life. I do so in honor of my late mother, Jane, who passed along to me her own love of reading and writing — first as a young child on our somewhat isolated dairy farm, and later as adults, when we shared books and letters back and forth, sometimes over great distances. This is a legacy I continue to happily share — through the many books I recommend in this space, and the two memoirs I have written.

What I learned from my mother's life lesson is that when you have a book, you are never alone. Literacy imparts real power, and this is especially important for people who feel powerless.

The magic of literacy can happen at any time, but it is especially important in childhood. Reading helps a young child's brain develop and mature. Reading for pleasure is a lifelong gift of entertainment and learning.

Today, in memory of my mother on her birthday, I joyfully share a simple idea that adults can easily adopt -- to give the children in their lives the gift my mother gave to me, by putting “a book on every bed.”

### Celebrate the giving season

Here's what to do: On Christmas morning or New Year's Day (or whatever holiday you celebrate), make sure that each child in your household wakes up to a wrapped book at the foot of their bed. The gift could be a new book or an old favorite from your own childhood.

After the child unwraps the book, the most important aspect of this gift is unveiled, when the parent sits and shares it with the child. The sad fact is that more than a third of families in the United States do not regularly share books with their young children. Starting a celebration morning by reading together will forge an unforgettable intimacy for both the child and the parent.

This year I am partnering with Children's Reading Connection, a national early literacy initiative founded in my hometown of Ithaca, N.Y. The organization's advocacy focuses on the importance of helping families to share books with babies and children. Even babies too young to talk tune in, in a deep and abiding way, when they are held and read to.

This is an important prescription for health and success in growing brains — and sharing a book is a wonderful way for families to connect. Every year I hear from teachers, librarians, church groups, parents and grandparents who tell me they have adopted the “book on every bed” tradition in their homes. I can think of no nicer way to kick off a busy Christmas morning than by snuggling up with a book before opening other gifts.

### Reading is a beautiful liberation

As a literacy advocate (and huge fan of libraries), I am inspired by the career and legacy of the US Librarian of Congress, Dr. Carla Hayden, who is the first woman and the first African American to hold this august post.

Dr. Hayden emphasizes how important it is for young readers to identify with and be inspired by characters, as she was as a child: “Literacy is the ticket to learning, opportunity and empowerment. It's important that children see themselves in the books they read. It's become commonplace to say that books are windows to a world of imagination and creativity, but books should also be a mirror to their readers. Marguerite de Angeli's ‘Bright April’ allowed me to see myself in a book — a young girl who was a brownie with pigtails — and it inspired me that anything was possible.”

Closing the literacy gap in childhood starts with having books in households, and with children being read to.

Writer and illustrator Peter Reynolds says, “Picture books are wisdom dipped in art and words.” His book, “The Word Collector” (2018, Orchard Books), is a great read-along book for an early reader. The book's engaging and lively young hero, Jerome, finds and collects words everywhere he goes.

### Spread and share literacy in your own way

Parents and caregivers can put a book on every bed in their own households; you can also help to spread the cause of literacy by generously sharing this idea in your own community. For families who celebrate through service projects, I suggest adopting a local classroom or day-care center and providing a book for each child.

To learn more, and to share your own literacy story, go to [childrensreadingconnection.org](http://childrensreadingconnection.org) or my facebook page: [facebook.com/ADickinsonDaily](https://facebook.com/ADickinsonDaily).