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.


**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 or my Facebook page: facebook.com/ADickinsonDaily.