

Welcome to:

Count on Reading

• The First Billion Books •

Count on Reading, The First Billion Books is an umbrella reading initiative sponsored by the American Association of School Librarians. It challenges the young people of the nation to read a billion books, knowing that readers who read their share will have developed life-long reading habits. Avid readers have a driver's license for the information highway. Those who enjoy reading enough to read often, according to Dr. Stephen Krashen in a review of 100 years of reading research¹, are superior in:

- Reading comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Spelling
- Grammar
- Writing style

Count on Reading does not seek to replace any reading initiative currently planned or in progress; rather, it seeks to build consistency over time, to put various short-term initiatives into a longer one—long enough and consistent enough to actually build avid readers rather than short-term spurts that have lesser potential to affect long-term results.

Why should you participate?

Avid reading provides the best chance to succeed in the world of literacy and the information society. Helping to create a love of reading is the best gift that can be given during youth. Look around you. How many young people are avid readers? How many are excelling on standardized tests? How many young people *enjoy* reading even though they might be able to do it passably well? Skill-based reading has produced a nation of young people who can do only basic reading but they neither like it nor choose to do it very often.

Who can participate?

Any school, public library, organization, or community group can participate. In fact, Count on Reading will succeed in communities where a number of groups band together to create a long-term reading challenge as opposed to a short one-time initiative.

What if I am already a part of one or several reading initiatives?

Great! You're well on your way.

Count on Reading does not compete with any other reading initiative. It can be considered as an umbrella that concentrates on long-term motivation. It encourages groups to create a number of short-term initiatives that hook together so that young people get into the reading habit and maintain it. Children's choice awards, Book-It programs, summer reading programs, author visits—all should be planned as pieces of a larger picture. The goal is to build a community of readers in the home, the classroom, the school, the town, and nation.

What are some fun ways to stimulate reading?

One billion half-inch books measures the diameter of the earth! Can your group help do its part? Can you read your way across the classroom, down the hall, out the door, down the block, and on to city hall (or a famous sports team, or a celebrity door) as your contribution to the national effort? States might read across their state and then help readers in states like Nevada and Alaska. Everyone can help. Even one more book helps.

¹ Krashen, Stephen. *The Power of Reading*. Libraries Unlimited, 1993 (P.O. Box 6633, Englewood, CO 80155. For hundreds of reading ideas, see *Reading Is Not a Spectator Sport* by Mary Pelton (same source).

Thermometers of reading will be published by city, state, and the entire nation to mark progress. Use these thermometers from the national Count on Reading Committee as motivators to have young people do their share and more. An example of a successful program is the two-year program of Dayton, Ohio when over two million books were read in a city-wide effort. Reading scores improved in the community, but when the reading challenge ended, scores began dropping again.

Dayton and other communities have found that school challenging school, and classroom challenging classroom developed enough motivation to capture student's attention. What will work in your area is really a local decision requiring creativity and cooperation.

What techniques are likely to produce long-term results?

The Krashen research points to a number of factors that have lasting value:

- Create a print-rich environment at home, the classroom, and the library.
- Provide unlimited access to materials from libraries.
- Allow young people to read what they like to read (including light reading and comics).
- Read aloud to young people every day (K-12)
- Use sustained silent reading as a tool.
- Models help (reading parents, teachers, librarians, etc.)
- Encourage reading (but extrinsic rewards may not be the best technique).

When does Count on Reading begin?

Count on Reading was launched by the state of New Hampshire in the Spring of 1994 and will continue for several years. Individuals, groups, and states can start immediately. National and state publicity will keep you abreast of progress. If you already have data from a project begun in the 1993-94 school year, submit that to the national committee.

How do we get started?

First, submit the following registration form:

Count on Reading Registration Form
Yes, I would like to be a member of the Count on Reading Initiative:
Names:
Title:
Address:
City, State Zip:
Telephone (daytime and evening)
Fax:
Electronic mail:
Do you already have a reading initiative (motivational program) in place?
If yes, please complete the following:
Dates of operation:
of participants:
Very brief description of activities:
_____ Send me information on how to turn my reading motivation program into an action research project which measures my success.
Return this form to Marjorie Horowitz, 10 Prospect Ave., Montclair, NJ 07042-1915

Then, as you begin your reading initiative, link it to Count on Reading and submit your first monthly report. It's simple. Every month send the following information:

Our Count on Reading Monthly Report

Your Name

Your Organization Name

Address

City, State

Project Name (if one has been selected):

This report is for the month(s) of _____, Year _____

_____ # of participants

_____ # of books (or book equivalents) read

Comments/successes, news for the national committee (adorable anecdotes)

Mail to: Count on Reading, P.O. Box 266, Castle Rock, CO 80104
(please duplicate as necessary)

The national committee will compile statistics from the above form and present them nationally, at the state level, and to participating communities.

Why should we submit monthly reports?

The national committee will use the statistics to attract national attention to reading, libraries, and other sponsoring organizations. For example, we are asking Congress for money to buy books for young people. Wouldn't a guarantee that the books be read and literacy increased be a powerful incentive to the national government? The national committee will also recognize organizations that achieve and surpass their goals.

Why are "books" being counted?

Actually, any reading can be counted. We chose books as easily counted items. We don't care what formulas are created to translate any type of reading to "books." But we do encourage local organizations to define something that makes sense in their local initiative. It is important that readers be allowed to choose material they want to read. Consistent reading on a regular basis is the key factor—and large amounts won't happen unless there is some enjoyment along the way. You can create local formulas to convert newspaper or comics reading to "books." Do what makes sense for your group.

Do we need to offer prizes?

Extrinsic motivation helps sometimes but at other times it can backfire. There are many motivational strategies that don't involve money, food, etc. Simple recognition, celebrity visits, and **the reading itself** are often sufficient. A variety of approaches is probably the best idea. Hundreds of ideas are presented in the literature and good brainstorming sessions will probably produce the desired techniques. Young people themselves are good sources of ideas.

What kind of reading should be counted?

All kinds of reading—books, magazines, computer books, newspapers, comic books, textbooks, books listened to (a teacher reading a book aloud to 30 students can count as 30 books), etc.

How will I know that our reading initiative makes a difference?

If you would like to conduct some locally-based research which demonstrates the power of free voluntary reading, send a self-addressed stamped (52¢) business envelope with your name and address to: **Count on Reading—The Research** at P.O. Box 266, Castle Rock, CO 80104 and you will be sent a description of simple studies you can do.

Suppose I would like additional training?

Training sessions for Count on Reading and the accompanying research project will be given at the following times and locations:

American Library Association. Miami Conference, Summer, 1994 (check program)

AASL National Conference, Indianapolis, November, 1994 (check program)

Count on Reading National Teleconference, Oct. 8, 1994, (Dave Loertscher and Blanche Woolls as leaders) sponsored by Dan Barron, University of South Carolina College of Library and Information Science, Columbia, SC 29208
Write for details and site arrangements.

State training sessions will be conducted at some state conferences. Watch your mail and state association news.

Can the national committee of Count on Reading use my help?

Please. Send your name to Marjorie Horowitz (10 Prospect Ave., Montclair, NJ 07042-1915). You might even suggest ways you might help, but we also have many tasks that need interested persons.