



**WPBS**  
TELEVISION

# Intellevision News

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## A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

*Airs: Tuesday, October 14 at 9:00PM*

*Encore: Sunday, October 19 at 2:00 PM*

### Two Schools. One Problem. One Compelling Hour.

*"We get children here at Walton coming in sometimes in first grade — they don't know their letter sounds, they can't write their name, they don't know what the title of a book is. They don't even know what the book is for."* **Vanessa Kemp, lead reading teacher, Walton Elementary**



You could almost forgive superintendent Reggie Barnes if he gave up on the kids in his Mississippi Delta school district. Nearly everyone else has. The problems faced by schools around the country are magnified in Sumner, Mississippi. Low pay? Starting salaries are less than \$25,000 per year. Mediocre teachers? Barnes cannot afford to fire them, because they're so hard to replace. Uninvolved parents? Just 10 people came to the year's first PTA meeting. It's no wonder many of the children can barely read.

Across the country, schools are struggling with their most basic job: teaching kids to read. Thirty-six percent of all fourth graders read below the "basic" level, meaning they cannot understand a simple story, or they can barely read at all. "A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS" tells the intimate story of parents and teachers who are fighting for change in two schools with long histories of failure. Academy Award-nominee Morgan Freeman narrates this PBS special.

"Readers are made, not born," says executive producer Noel Gunther. "'A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS' is an intimate story about what it really takes to teach a child to read. We spent a year inside these schools and found a story of hope, of faith, and of the power of committed adults to help shape the life of a child."

**A Tale of Two Schools** was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

# *A Tale of Two Schools*

## Teachers' Discussion Guide

For copies of the parent, community and teachers' discussion guides, visit [www.pbs.org/twoschools](http://www.pbs.org/twoschools).

Like a lot of people, Bearden Elementary teacher Jill Todd underestimated the complexity of teaching reading. And the reality of a classroom was overwhelming to her. She had a group of 23 children with a wide range of reading levels, and she had no training in handling such a challenge.

Teachers are charged with discovering the proper balance of instructional methods that work for each individual student. They also must find successful ways to coordinate literacy efforts, since successful reading instruction involves others in the school, community, and home. And because good teachers continually hone their expertise, teachers must attend to their own professional development. As an educational professional, the teacher is responsible for the enormously challenging task of finding the magical mix that works for each child.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jill Todd had just completed a degree in elementary education, yet she didn't know how to teach reading. Who is responsible for making sure teachers are ready to teach?
2. When schools like Bearden and Walton hire teachers who haven't been adequately prepared in college, what can they do to make sure that the teachers are ready to face a room full of children needing to learn to read?
3. At Walton Elementary, lead teacher Vanessa Kemp was devoted to making sure each teacher had everything they needed to teach every child to read. When a school isn't lucky enough to have a Vanessa Kemp, what can teachers do to get what they need to do their jobs well? What could Jill Todd have done differently?
4. Walton was committed to one specific reading program, Reading Mastery. And when a child struggled with Reading Mastery, they received more Reading Mastery. What are the challenges of counting on one reading program to work for all children?
5. Both Walton and Bearden used packaged reading programs that they purchased from an outside vendor. But a lot of schools across the country create their own reading programs, using a combination of materials from different sources. What are the pros and cons of using packaged reading curriculums?
6. Even though Bearden had purchased a comprehensive, research-based reading curriculum, the children there weren't reading well. What are other elements that go into creating a successful reading program? What could your school do to improve its reading program?
7. Walton's development of a coordinated reading program took years. What are the steps they took?
8. Ms. Todd's kids got a lot of reading instruction but very little writing instruction. What can teachers do to incorporate more writing into daily lesson plans?
9. Ms. Todd experienced great improvement in her teaching skills over the course of the year, yet she felt bad about not being better trained for the first part of the school year. What yardsticks can teachers use to gauge their own success?
10. Both Ms. Morgan and Ms. Jackson at Walton and Ms. Todd at Bearden struggled with involving parents in their students' education. What's the best way for schools to elicit support from the parents and greater community?

**A Tale of Two Schools** was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

# Facts about reading

From WETA's "Tale of Two Schools" Website

- Nationally, 36 percent of fourth graders read below the "basic" level - meaning they can't understand a simple story, or they can barely read at all (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2002).
- One third of poor readers nationwide are from college-educated families (AFT, 1999).

## What happens before school matters a lot.

- Research shows that preschoolers whose parents read to them and teach them the alphabet and letter sounds before they enter school, are less likely to experience difficulties in learning to read than other preschoolers (Adams, 1990).
- Learning to read is closely tied to learning to talk and listen. Families and caregivers need to talk and listen to young children in order to help them learn a lot of the skills they will need for reading.

## With help, slow starters can succeed.

- Research suggests that many children who have difficulty reading in first grade, remain struggling readers unless they receive intensive and appropriate reading instruction (Francis et al, 1996; Torgesen & Burgess, 1998).
- Children who are struggling readers in the early grades become worse readers over time, while good readers tend to become better readers as they get older (Stanovich, 1986).
- Over 90 percent of struggling readers can be brought to grade level if reading instruction is: comprehensive, includes phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, fluency, comprehension, ongoing assessment, and provided by well-trained teachers (Lyon, 1997).
- As many as two-thirds of struggling readers can become average or above-average readers if they are identified early and taught appropriately (Vellutino et al., 1996; Fletcher & Lyon, 1998).

## Programming Highlights: Science

### BrainFood

*Airs: Sunday, 9/28 at 1:30 PM*

BrainFood is food for your brain; it's science you can eat; it's a half-hour of food, cooking, and science!

Math and science are all around us - and you can find them in the kitchen! BrainFood uses food and cooking to explore density, a mainstay of the middle-school curriculum. Our hosts serve up pickles, ice cream, soup, salad and dressing - all with a delicious twist.

"Molecules, density, and emulsions become easier to understand when you can find them at your own kitchen table," says Vice President of Education at WQED, Karen Farmer White.

### Young Scientists with John Merrow

*Airs: Wednesday, 9/24 at 8:00 PM*

This program follows John Merrow as he spends a year following a group of high school science students as they struggle to complete their research for the biggest science fair, Intel's International Science and Engineering Fair, and win \$50,000.

### NOVA

*Airs: Tuesdays at 8:00 PM*

- 9/30: Infinite Secrets
- 10/7: Who Killed the Red Baron?
- 10/14: The Lost Roman Treasure
- 10/21: The Perfect Pearl
- 10/28: The Elegant Universe



## **Reading Rockets** to air on WPBS-TV this fall!

Starting Friday, Oct. 17 at 5:30 PM

*Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers* is a series of five half-hour television programs airing on public television stations nationwide. Hosted by Fred Rogers, Annette Bening, Vivica A. Fox, Deborah Norville, and Frank McCourt, the programs were filmed in schools, childcare centers, libraries, research centers, and homes around the country. The series looks at different reading strategies that help young children learn to read; features practical advice for parents; and interweaves the personal stories of children, families, and teachers.

Each program also includes a profile of a prominent children's book author, such as Norman Bridwell (*Clifford the Big Red Dog*), Kate Duke (*Aunt Isabel Tells a Good One*), William Joyce (*George Shrinks*), Walter Dean Myers (*Harlem*), and Rosemary Wells (*Max and Ruby*).

- **Program 1: "The Roots of Reading"** looks at the earliest stages of literacy in such locations as a baby speech lab and a Head Start center. The program examines how parents, childcare providers, and kindergarten teachers can get children started on the road to literacy.
- **Program 2: "Sounds and Symbols"** focuses on how children learn the relationship between sounds, letters, and words as an initial step before

being able to decode the printed word.

- **Program 3: "Fluent Reading"** explores the ability to decode quickly and achieve fluency. The program also demonstrates how early testing and intervention can help struggling readers.
- **Program 4: "Writing and Spelling"** examines the connection between reading and writing and between spelling and composition. The program features successful methods for encouraging children to write and build their vocabularies.
- **Program 5: "Reading for Meaning"** highlights effective strategies to help kids understand - and care about - what they read, the ultimate goal of learning how to read.

*Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers* was filmed in more than 40 elementary schools, preschools, and community centers in 17 states. Among the sites visited are the legendary Lab School in Washington, DC, which specializes in teaching students with learning disabilities, and a kindergarten class at Mark Hopkins Elementary School in Sacramento, California, where six different languages are spoken.

**Reading Rockets** is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

## **PBS Literacy Web Sites:**

[pbs.org/shareastory](http://pbs.org/shareastory)

[pbsparents.org](http://pbsparents.org)

[readytolearn.org](http://readytolearn.org)

[pbs.org/literacy](http://pbs.org/literacy)

[readingrockets.org](http://readingrockets.org)

[pbs.org/lions](http://pbs.org/lions)



**Comments or Questions? Email [Crystal\\_Butler@wpbs.pbs.org](mailto:Crystal_Butler@wpbs.pbs.org)**  
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