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A Spoon Full of Sugar Helps the Medicine Go Down

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An ironic fact has developed in the area of reading over the past several decades. We are producing more and more proficient readers who do not read! That's right...students who are quite capable of reading but never take the opportunity to read for pleasure. While schools certainly cannot take all of the blame, we had better stand up and accept a portion of it. What has happened to the fun of reading when audible groans accompany the statement, "Now children, take out your readers?"

There should be a time during the all too serious business of the school day to read just for the fun of it!!! Set aside the developmental reading skills at this time and read to enjoy. Certainly the schools that are using a current program referred to as "Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading" have recognized this need. This is a program where everyone, including the teacher, reads anything he or she desires for a designated portion of the school day.

Certainly one of the finest ways to help children develop this love of books and reading is the special time when the teacher reads to the class as a whole. This is a time when we share our love for a particular book.

Some years ago the writer was given a new book by the school librarian to read aloud to his class. The writer had no idea what this book was about but the librarian highly recommended it. Since we had just finished our last read-aloud book we were in need of another; and the next day our class began the extremely sensitive book, **Sounder** by William Armstrong. Within approximately a week and a half the book was being read to its conclusion in our hushed classroom. Tears were trickling down many faces while the writer found the words more and more difficult to verbalize. Finally, the last page was read...then utter silence. The twenty-eight persons in our class

were as one...all feeling the boy's loss. Then the silence was broken by Barbara Ann's words. "Oh, Mr. Mallett," she said, "I wish that book had twenty thousand more words."

Yes, good books, read by interested teachers just for the fun of it, can and do stimulate children's interest in reading. While all good children's books are fine to read aloud, as in the case of **Sounder**, the writer has found that one type that is most FUN to share is the humorous story. After all, laughter is contagious and enjoyed most in company and so is the enjoyment of good books.

Probably the humorous books that children enjoy most are those with situations with which they are capable of identifying. This is certainly what Ellen Raskin had in mind when she wrote **Nothing Ever Happens On My Block**. What child hasn't said dozens of times... "There's nothing to do!" This is Chester's problem as he sits on the curb of his street feeling terribly sorry for himself. As he wishes for things to do, a whole variety of fantastic things are taking place. A building catches on fire, a bank robber is apprehended, and an emergency landing of a parachutist takes place, just to name a few. Young children can easily see the absurdity of Chester's melancholy and delight in it.

They can also see the absurdity in Mary Christian's **Nothing Much Happened Today**. When mother comes rushing home from the market she is startled to find billions of soap bubbles billowing out of the bathroom window. When she greets her three children with the logical question of "What's happened?", she receives the all too typical reply from her oldest son, "Nothing much, really!" Not one to give up easily, she continues, "But the bubbles..." she yells. "Look at those bubbles!" Stephen explains that they must have used too much soap when they bathed their dog. "But why did you bathe the dog?" she asks. Alan

points out that it was the only way to get all the sugar off his fur. Naturally she asks how the sugar got on the dog's fur in the first place and they explain that he knocked over the sugar sack while chasing the cat. Further questioning brings out the facts that they do not own a cat, that the cat came in through the window, and that the window had been opened in order to let out the SMOKE! Children will soon be laughing at all of the things that really happened on their "do-nothing" day.

Equally funny and perfect for classroom use is **How To Lose Your Lunch Money** by Florence M. White. In this story a small boy quite methodically describes a step-by-step plan for not losing your lunch money. For example, "You arrange your books neatly in your desk... At lunch time you walk quietly to the cafeteria." Unfortunately, for the small boy, but fortunately for the reader, the illustrations hilariously depict the scenes as they more normally happen.

Mercer Mayer dispenses with words entirely in another of his marvelously funny frog books. Possibly his funniest to date, **One Frog Too Many**, will have readers of all ages giggling at big frogs' jealous antics when a new little frog arrives and receives a wave of attention.

Lack of attention also creates the background for a very funny book about little Emily. Not only does Emily feel the brunt of a too-busy-to-play mother, but she is also told to take care of her baby brother. Well... this is just too much for Emily to handle and she decides to run away from home. Unfortunately, she is saddled with "that klunky baby" which she is pulling on a sled. It seems that everytime she begins to make headway in leaving home, the klunky baby falls off and the next-door dog climbs on. Joan Lexau in **Emily And The Klunky Baby And The Next-Door Dog** has created both a humorous and touching account of a small girl caught in the aftermath of a divorce.

Bedtime is often a war-of-nerves in many households and therefore children are especially tickled with Marjorie Sharmat's **Goodnight Andrew, Goodnight Craig**. It seems that Andrew can't sleep...and when Andrew can't sleep, nobody sleeps! This is especially true of Craig, Andrew's older brother and roommate. Andrew is beginning to run out of excuses to keep Craig awake when he thinks of a whopper. "There's something in my bed," he says. "I think it's a sheep." Craig grudgingly explains that it simply can't be a sheep but finally gets up to go investigate. "Here's the sheep," Andrew points out. "Some sheep," says Craig. "It's your underwear all in a bunch." And so continues a very funny goodnight story.

One of the funniest picture books for the intermediate levels was written by Judith Viorst. The problem with **Alexander And The Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day** is that one reading is never enough. Children want to listen and laugh at Alexander's unbelievably bad day over and over again. After all, what child doesn't have a bad day every now and then. But to the delight of the reader Alexander's bad day puts all others to shame. From the minute he gets out of bed he discovers that he went to sleep with gum in his mouth and now there's gum in his hair. While he's worrying about this he trips on the skateboard and by mistake he drops his sweater in the sink while the water is running. Unfortunately his day doesn't get any better but continues downhill right through to bedtime when he finds his bath too hot, he gets soap in his eyes, his marble disappears down the drain, and he is made to wear his railroad-train pajamas, which he hates.

Equally funny is Beverly Cleary's **Ramona The Pest**. This book, which is a story to last over several settings, finds Ramona entering kindergarten. Poor Ramona has only the best of intentions but somehow things seem to continually backfire until she is finally classified as a "kindergarten dropout!"

Take, for instance, her very first day at kindergarten. Miss Binney, the prettiest teacher in the world, tells the class that "the person who rests on their mats most quietly will get to be the wake-up fairy." Ramona is determined to be the wake-up fairy and so she lies flat on

her back with her hands tight to her sides. But she tries a little too hard and she begins to snore. This brings giggles and a host of competing kindergarten snores with which Miss Binney then must contend. Third and fourth graders seem to take special delight in Ramona's antics probably because kindergarten is still close enough to remember, but far enough removed to be terribly funny.

Another hilarious book for these particular grade levels is **Tales Of A Fourth Grade Know Nothing** by Judy Blume. Incident after incident finds nine-year-old Peter baffled, shocked, indignant, and chagrined by his two-year-old brother, Fudge. For example, at Fudge's birthday party Peter is told to entertain the group of two and three-year olds. In desperation, he shows them his pet turtle named Dribble. Little Jennie immediately asks if Dribble can make! "Make what?" he asks. "Make a tinkle!" she answers and to his horror a puddle begins to form on the floor in his bedroom as Jennie proceeds to show the group how she can tinkle.

All intermediate youngsters who are discovering the multitude of do's and don'ts at the dinner table will howl at Arthur's predicaments. "He won't close his mouth when he chews," complains Arthur's sister. "Don't play with the saltshaker," instructs his mother. "Don't talk when your mouth is full," orders his father. "Little bits of ravioli are landing on your sister!" Yes...Russell Hoban, in his book **Dinner At Alberta's**, has indeed given us a book worth sharing with your students.

The escapades in which Rob and Soup find themselves will have your class near tears from laughter. In one of the funniest episodes of Robert Peck's **Soup and Me**, the two boys decide to go swimming in the nude in Putt's Pond. Unfortunately for the boys one of their most hated classmates, Janet Riker, happens along. While Rob and Soup are forced, through modesty, to hide themselves in the near freezing water, after all it is only May, she proceeds to throw all their clothes into the pond. How the boys manage to get home will be a sheer delight to your students.

Good Old Ernie by Marian R. Barch and Jerry J. Mallett takes Ernie through some very eventful and

embarrassing moments in her life. It all begins when her mother and father decide to swap jobs for a year. Her mother is to manage the family hardware store, and her father is to stay home and manage the house. Ernie not only has to put up with her father's inefficiencies in the kitchen, laundry room, and sewing room, but she must also endure the burden of having to look after her little sister Bitsey, most of the time. Mr. Tubbs "little mistakes," as he calls them, cause Ernie much trouble and humiliation. The only bright spot in her life is knowing that this family arrangement is only temporary. One catastrophe after another occurs, resulting in Ernie's very odd appearance on Halloween, a live-in turkey for Thanksgiving, the toppling Christmas tree, an ill-fated sledding excursion, achieving notoriety in the local newspaper and other incidents. But worst of all, "Megaphonemouth", John Murphy, a classmate of Ernie's at school, always appears on the scene when Ernie is caught in the middle of an awkward episode. Ernie's sense of humor helps her to determinedly keep on going, but the reader wonders if anything ever will turn out right for her.

For real belly-laughs you must read to your class Barbara Robinson's **The Best Christmas Pageant Ever**. You won't soon forget the Herdman clan and their hilarious reign of terror at Sunday school. Oh yes...and don't miss **Jennifer, Hecate, Macbeth, William McKinley, and Me, Elizabeth** by E.L. Konigsburg. Your students will love Jennifer, who proclaims herself a witch, and Elizabeth who is forced to endure some very funny initiation ceremonies as the witch's apprentice. And then there's Sonia Levitin's **The Mark of Conte** for the older students. Oh...there are just so many good books to share with children.

The next time you want to "just read for the fun of it" let Chester, the Frog, Stephen, Emily, Andrew and Craig plus the many other marvelous children's book characters help you.

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IRA SEEKS ENTRIES FOR BROADCAST MEDIA AWARDS

The International Reading Association annually presents Broadcast Media Awards for outstanding television and radio programming relating to reading, literacy or promotion of the lifetime reading habit. The 1982 IRA Broadcast Media Awards for Radio and Television will be presented during IRA's Twenty-eighth Annual Convention, May 2-6, 1983 in Anaheim, California, USA. Only programs broadcast during the 1982 calendar year are eligible for this year's awards.

Entries must be directed towards the general public rather than professional educators, and must be informational rather than instructional. Topics may include, but are not limited to: journalism on reading in the schools, home and community, including accounts of research and educational practices; daily coverage of reading activities and appraisal of school reading programs; interview programs on reading or reading education; and public service or entertainment programs which inform about reading, promote literacy or seek to install the love of reading.

Required for entry is a 3/4-inch video cassette tape (for television) or monaural cassette tape (for radio), and a program transcript. Supporting information such as estimated size of audience and indication of impact may also be included. Television entries should be sent to Dr. Will L. Nicklas, College of Education, North Texas State University, Denton, Texas 76203, USA. Radio entries should be directed to Dr. J. Estill Alexander, 7914 Gleason Road, No. 1143, Knoxville, Tennessee 37919, USA. Entries must be received by February 20, 1983.