

Family Focus: How Family Literacy Day is changing the way we read

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Photos by Kate Bustin



Since its creation in 1999, Family Literacy Day has brought Canadian families together on January 27 to share in a celebration of reading. Libraries across the country host activities and events, inspiring family-focused ways to learn about and appreciate literacy.

Founded by ABC Life Literacy, Family Literacy Day is a not-for-profit organization that aims to raise awareness about the importance of reading and the impact it can have on a person's life ("Family Literacy", 2013). This goal is inspired by the nearly nine million Canadians suffering from low literacy, hundreds of thousands of whom are parents to children and teens ("Family Literacy Day Engages", 2011). This is obviously a serious concern: the youth of today will not get very far in life if they have lower literacy resulting from their parents' lack of literacy skills. Although Family Literacy Day is primarily focused on families with children in elementary school and younger, teens are also highly encouraged to participate: literacy and family bonding go hand in hand even as children get older.

The reading skills children gain when they are young are essential to success in high school, university applications, and life. Due to the attention Family Literacy Day draws to these matters, literacy groups such as the Literacy Coalition of Quebec (sixteen French and English organizations from around the province such as resource centres and school boards) came to realize the importance of parental literacy and its influence in children's lives. A 2003 IALLS survey revealed that approximately 800,000 Quebecers between 16 and 65 have serious problems with literacy that they struggle with on a daily basis, and that children of parents with little formal schooling are far more likely to struggle with literacy and drop out of school themselves (Canada Newswire, 2009). To counter the low adult literacy rates the Literacy Coalition now offers a variety of programs and courses for adults, teaching them how to help their children and overcome their own literacy challenges ("Let's Break the Cycle", 2009). The programs include literacy and parenting workshops, assistance for parents when supervising homework, and family training accompaniment to encourage success in school ("Let's Break the Cycle", 2009).

By 2009, Family Literacy Day's popularity had become infectious. Over 1,500 events and activities took place across Canada, resulting in 263,000 participants ("Canada Readers Recognized", 2009). Each year, Family Literacy Day focuses on a different theme. The 2010 theme, "Singing for Literacy," brought to light new methods for families to strengthen their literacy skills while growing as a family: singing together. The premise was that singing, like reading, is a happy bonding experience that simultaneously helps to increase vocabulary, bringing attention to patterns, rhythm and rhyme (Hirschegger, 2009).

In 2011, the issues and enthusiasm surrounding Family Literacy Day caught the attention of the Honourable Diane Finley, Canada’s Minister of Human Resource and Skills Development. She announced the Government’s plans to put \$713,656 into two new family literacy programs: one intended to help parents struggling with literacy to improve their own reading skills and support their children’s, and one to bring literacy tools and support to minority language communities across Canada (“Government of Canada”, 2011).

Family Literacy Day has brought help, attention and support to families in smaller ways as well. Close to Home, a non-profit organization in Calgary, were able to provide 500 books for children and teens whose families were unable to afford them (Watson, 2013). Although it’s a small step, simply providing reading materials to those in need encourages literacy and shows support to their families.



To keep up to date on Family Literacy Day news and events, visit <http://abclifeliteracy.ca/flid/family-literacy-day>

Resources:

Family Literacy Day engages families across Canada. (2013). Retrieved from <http://abclifeliteracy.ca/family-literacy-day-engages-tens-thousands-families-across-canada>

Canadian readers recognized internationally for Family Literacy Day World Record attempt. (2009). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/455225379/fulltext?accountid=10406927>

Government of Canada celebrates Family Literacy Day. (2011). *Marketwire*. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/847452919/fulltext?accountid=10406>

Family Literacy Day – Let’s break the cycle of low literacy! (2009). *Canada NewsWire*. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/453103347/fulltext?accountid=10406>

Family Literacy Day. (2011) *MSLA Journal*, 39(1), p. 6.

Hirschegger, W. A. (2009). Family Literacy Day. *Education Forum*, 35(3), pp. 42-43. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.dal.ca/docview/204991748/fulltext?accountid=10406#>

Watson, M. (2013). Family Literacy Day 2013. Retrieved from <http://calgaryclosetohome.com/2013/02/03/family-literacy-day-2013>



Reluctant Reader? To further encourage literacy, here are some fast paced and easy-to-follow titles (organized by title and

format) that will inspire young adults to read more:

All Good Children, by Catherine Austen 2011

A CLA Young Adult Book Award Winner for 2012, *All Good Children* shows a dystopian not-so-distant future in which children are given a medical treatment that turns them into well-behaved drones. Fifteen year-old graffiti artist Maxwell Connors grows increasingly concerned about this, and goes to great lengths to escape his fate. This book is excellent for readers who thrive on tension and high-running emotion, and its ominous similarities to the present day are haunting.

Escape Velocity, by Robin Stevenson 2011

Lou's father is sick so she is forced to go live with her estranged mother, a writer who left her at birth. Lou looks for answers and understanding about their relationship, in her mother's writing. In this realistic family drama, Stevenson carefully crafts the complicated, messy relationships and hardships that teens must grapple with. Major strengths of this book come in Stevenson's solid, clear writing style and character development. Overall, this quick read provides excellent food for thought.

Night Runner, by Max Turner 2008

Night Runner is Turner's debut novel, and the first installment in a popular series. After the deaths of his parents, Zach lives in a mental institution because of his mysterious allergies. At the age of fifteen, Zach leaves the institution and begins a thrilling, fast-paced adventure, in search of answers about his past, parents, and strange allergies.

Half-Brother [Audiobook], by Kenneth Oppel; read by Daniel di Tomasso 2010

Ben Tomlin's thirteen-year reign as an only child comes to an abrupt halt when his mother brings home a baby chimpanzee and his parents instruct him to treat it as a brother. As Ben begins to view the chimp as more than just a scientific experiment, he is forced to make some difficult decisions about loyalty and family. di Tomasso's dry and slightly gravelly voice suits the story well, and listening to him read *Half Brother* is a highly enjoyable and compelling experience.