

FIT FALCON TRIBUNE

Reading helps build connections

Take it from Mrs. Karen Mitchell, head of children’s services at Norristown Public Library: Reading does good things for you.

It helps you relax and tunes up your brain, she said in a recent interview. And more: By reading, you can build connections, learn new ideas, and get help with daily activities, she explained.

It also allows you to take some time and space for yourself. “When I read, I can sit in a comfy chair and forget about things happening in the world,” says Mrs. Mitchell.

As a child, Mrs. Mitchell loved books and reading. She majored in creative writing at Susquehanna University. She was also a competitive Irish dancer, so when she had an opportunity to study dance



Illustration by Paul Buccì

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Telling jokes can improve your mood

Fourth-grade *Fit Falcon Tribune* reporters conducted an experiment. They compared their moods before telling jokes and sharing funny stories and then afterwards.

Beforehand, Paul said he was feeling “burned out and really tired.” Victoria felt “tired, but OK,” and Rickendra was looking forward to getting home and playing with her sister.

Students then spent some time sharing things that they found funny. They told jokes, watched some funny animal videos, and told funny stories.

“The thing that really made us laugh was looking at various animals and pets doing silly things,” said Andy. “Even thinking about it now makes me laugh.”

“Even common knock-knock jokes made us smile,” said Ailin.

Ailin and Andy both agreed that their younger siblings make them laugh.

“My little sister makes silly sounds that make me smile. She’s only 1,” said Ailin.

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Reading has many healthy benefits

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at a university in Ireland, she packed her bags and headed across the ocean.

After a knee injury, Mrs. Mitchell reconsidered her career options and refocused on her love of all things literary. She traded her dance shoes for books and headed back to the Norristown area to look for a job that would let her be around books as much as possible.

She's now been at the Norristown Public Library for six years, including four years in her current role as head of children's services. Mrs. Mitchell picks out all the materials kids can check out and decides which programs the library can run for them, including clubs and story time.

Mrs. Mitchell's ideas are also echoed on healthline.com, a digital health and wellness website. It says that reading can help your mental health, improve learning skills, and build empathy with other people. It can expose you to new ideas, help you learn new words, and strengthen your problem-solving skills, according to healthline.

How does reading help you make connections? It does that in a variety of ways, says Mrs. Mitchell and the website. "When you read books about different kinds of people, you read about people you might not already know," Mrs. Mitchell says, adding that reading can show you how different people live and can help you to understand them.

Connections can also be made through book clubs and by sharing books with people, she says. Health-



Karen Mitchell says reading helps keep your brain healthy.

line.com adds that when parents read with their children, it can build family bonds.

"It can help keep your brain up and running and healthy," Mrs. Mitchell says.

Reading also has real-life impact. For example, Mrs. Mitchell says that when she and her husband brought home their baby, the first thing they did was turn to each other and say, "Now what do we do?" Books helped them learn how to take care of a baby.

"Reading has made me more interested in people," says Mrs. Mitchell. "Everybody is very different and that's such a good thing. We should celebrate our differences and the things that make us unique."

—By *Fit Falcon Tribune* staff

Librarian offers tips to build reading habits

In a recent interview with *Fit Falcon Tribune* reporters, Mrs. Karen Mitchell, head of children's services at the Norristown library, offers some tips for students who might not think they like to read.

- Think of a topic you like—video games or sports—and find a book on that topic.
- Make sure you have a comfortable spot to read.

- Always keep an open mind. Don't decide that you know what a book is going to say before you read it.
- Give yourself a goal: Commit to reading the first 10 percent of the book before you quit. (So, if the book is 100 pages, read the first 10.)

Reporters reflect on favorite books

Reading a book with a parent or another person can help create bonds and help reading skills, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. Fourth-grade reporters shared books that created bonds and helped with reading skills.

Father Christmas and Me by Matt Haig is about a girl named Amelia who is adopted by Father Christmas and Mary Christmas. The Easter Bunny gets jealous and tries to ruin Christmas.

This book helped me learn how to read long books and helped me connect with my mom. We talk about our books with each other. I felt like I was in the story and it helped me learn new words. It was the first chapter book that I was interested in. The way he describes the setting is great and it helped me imagine what the story looked like just by reading it.

—Henry Rosen

When it was Covid and I could not go to school, I was home sad. I don't remember the title of the book, but reading it made me feel confident. It's about a puppy lost in the snow who finds his way home.

—Rickendra Barker

Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin Jr. is a kid's book that teaches all about colors and animals. It was a special book that my mom read to me. It talks about what each individual animal sees.

—Ailin Gomez Ramirez

Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type by Doreen Cronin is about Farmer Brown's cows who find a typewriter and start typing notes to the farmer, demanding better conditions on the farm. This book helped me connect to my mom. Doctor George gave it to me and my mom read it to me all the time when I was going to sleep. It was a big part of my childhood.

—Mia Ayala

Love That Dog by Sharon Creech is story told through poems. It is the story of a boy named Jack who doesn't like poetry. With the help of his teacher and his dog, Jack learns to love poem. The book introduced me to an amazing teacher and made me love poetry.

—Victoria Stangler

How stories can connect people

Planting Stories

Written by Anika Aldamuy Denise

Illustrated by Paola Escobar

Planting Stories is the true story of Pura Belpré, an author, storyteller, and librarian who came to the United States from Puerto Rico. She first came to New York for her sister's wedding and decided to stay. She got a job at the New York Public Library and planted her story seeds by telling stories from her home back in San Juan. First, she used puppets to tell her stories, and then she wrote and had her stories published.

The stories had all been told to her by her abuela (grandmother). Because of her stories, which were written in Spanish, Spanish-speaking immigrants came to the library. They felt more connected to the library and more at home there.

"The story was pretty and the illustrations were pretty," said Mia Ayala.



"It was inspiring because Pura was telling stories to small groups and then more people were able to read them," said Victoria Stangler.

"I think the story was welcoming to other people. Because she wrote books in other languages, people came to the library," said Henry Rosen.

Fourth-grade reporters recommend this book for first grade and up because it could be read in less than a class period. It teaches you about a real person and still feels like a fun story. It would be good for Spanish speakers and for people who want to learn some Spanish words. —By Mia Ayala, Victoria Stangler, and Henry Rosen

Cole Manor Fit Falcon Tribune

The *Fit Falcon Tribune* is a publication of the Norristown Area School District in Norristown, PA. Fourth-grade staff members include Mia Ayala, Rickendra Barker, Paul Bucci, Ailin Gomez Ramirez, Jax Hunt, Andy Lex, Henry Rosen, Victoria Stangler, and Brighton Thompkins. The *Fit Falcon Tribune's* faculty advisor is Ms. Armour and the school principal is Dr. Poncheri.

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Testing how laughter makes us feel

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Andy said his younger sister “tries to pronounce words and gets them wrong and that’s pretty cute.”

After sharing all of their favorite funny things, students reflected on how they felt.

I’m feeling great – better than before. I have two words: Calm. Happy.
—Victoria Stangler

I feel more happy, more awake, but still burned out. I do have more energy and it changed my mood a bit. It made my troubles feel farther away.
—Paul Bucci

I’m feeling happy and want to do more funny things when I get home. I laughed a lot when I was younger, so it brought back good memories and made me feel relaxed.
—Andy Lex Salizar

I feel happy because I laughed and smiled. It felt like my whole body was laughing.
—Ailin Gomez Ramirez

I’m feeling amazing! Laughing made me feel positive.
—Rickendra Barker

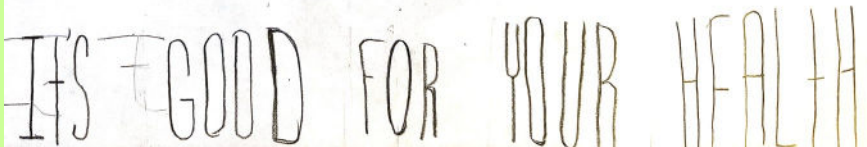


Illustration by Paul Bucci

I’m feeling really relaxed. I’m happy, joyful, hyper, and more exciting. I want to run and be outside, and I feel like I want to keep laughing. It made me feel very nice.

—Henry Rosen

Spreading happiness

You may have heard the expression *laughter is the best medicine*. It’s not actually medicine, but research shows that laughter can help your mental and physical health.

Laughter can also bring people together and build positive connections. People tend to like someone who finds the same things fun, and it can be enjoyable spending time around with them.

Sharing a sense of humor can help you get to know someone new or can be a way to work through a tough time with a friend.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina studied how people form relationships and found that “shared laughter signals that they see the world the same way, and it momentarily boosts their sense of connection.”

—By Healthy NewsWorks editors



Illustration by Victoria Stangler