Why I Don't Read to My Children

March **1.4,** 1994 by Phyllis Schlafly

For the past several years, there has been a highly-publicized campaign to promote the notion that all parents should read to their children. This campaign has involved a lot of prominent people, and even the *Wall Street Journal* featured an editorial by a teacher called "Why I Read to My Child."

But there was one big problem with that editorial - the child was eight years old! Why wasn't the child reading by himself? Why did the eight year old need his father to read to him?

Why hadn't the child been taught how to read so he could be progressing to more and more difficult books? In the time this father spent reading to his child, he could have made his son a good reader!

It is splendid to read to two- and three- and four-year-old children in order to tell them good stories and introduce them to books. But no matter how many hours and years you spend reading to your child, that will never turn him into a reader.

If you want your child to be a ball player, you don't sit your child down and read him stories about football or baseball players, you go out in the back yard and teach him how to throw and catch the ball. If you want your child to play the piano, you teach her the skill of playing simple melodies, so she can progress on her own.

Reading to your child will give you warm feelings, but you can get those same warm feelings by teaching him HOW to read before he starts school, and then your child will have a skill he can use by himself.

Teaching your children or grandchildren to read will set them on the track to a good education, so they can read well enough to get a good job and then progress in a career . . . be able to read for enjoyment and entertainment . . . read the great and inspiring works of literature written in the English language . . . and have horizons of opportunity expanded by reading about the noble deeds of great Americans of achievement.

When people ask me, what is the most fulfilling thing I've done in my whole life, I answer - teaching my six children to read before they entered school. Our family got a bigger return for the time I spent on that activity than anything else I ever did.

The school is the wrong place to learn how to read, anyway, because reading is a solitary, not a group, activity. Reading is not something you do with other people, like playing ball; reading is something you do with a book, and other people in the room are a distraction.

Reading is a skill you have to learn to do by yourself (with the help of an

adult), like learning how to walk, or ride a bike, or play the piano. Did you ever hear of anyone lining up a bunch of children at pianos and saying, Now we are all going to learn how to play "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" at the same time?

When reading is taught in a classroom, most of the children spend most of their time doing "busy work" to fill up the hours. The days are so long, the repetition is so boring, the books are so stupid, the progress is so slow that many children, who were eager to learn at the start of the first grade, become bored and disorderly by the end of the first year in school.

You should not think that your children are good readers just because they get good report cards. It's now the fashion to give all schoolchildren happy report cards in order to build their self-esteem.

Under Outcome-Based Education - which eliminates traditional grading on report cards, as well as all kinds of competition such as honor rolls and spelling bees - you will never know what your child is really learning or not learning.

I teased a reporter recently that she is working for a "dying profession." She replied, "Yes, I know. Our newspaper surveys show that the average age of our readers has risen from 27 to 42."

Teaching your child to read is so easy that any parent, or grandparent, or person who cares about a child can do it in a few months. It's not difficult or complicated or mysterious if it is taught in an orderly fashion. You don't have to have a teacher's certificate, any special training, or a college degree.

You will be surprised - maybe even flabbergasted - at how little time it takes to teach a child to read IF you have the right tools. You'll never regret the time you spent on this project.

Teaching children to read at home can be a blessing for you and the youngsters in your family - but it's also an urgent necessity for our whole nation. According to government statistics, nearly half of our adult population is only semi literate, and two-thirds of school children are not meeting average literacy goals.

The consequences for our nation of this illiteracy are enormous. Our American constitutional republic, under a process of self-government, cannot survive as a democracy of illiterate people.

America needs an "Each one, teach one" campaign to give us a literate nation again, as we once were. Only this will enable us to fulfill the our nation's number one Education Goal: "Every child should start school ready to learn."