

End day with a good book

We all know that books are good for our children. Everyone tells us. Posters of strapping athletes line our library walls these days. Teachers are keen to get our kids reading early and often. We know the right thing to do is to bundle them up before they can walk and head down to the library to baby storytime.

But picture books can also offer a slightly guilty pleasure to the parents of those little darlings too. Beautiful pictures. Eloquent stories that are short and sweet. I realized I was hooked when I began vying with my own toddler for what we would read together.

"I want that great book about the giant woman Mangaboom who can fend off suitors with her bad cooking skills," I say.

"No," said my daughter who pushed for another night of her favourite book-of-the-week.

"Okay. How about the irreverent grandmother who tours the world without guilt sending postcards from exotic locations."

I wouldn't always win but I'd put up a good fight and I would make sure half the books in the library basket were mine. There have to be some privileges to reading dozens of books a day, right? And for me, quick-witted, well-written children's books full of astonishingly beauti-

ful illustrations rank up there with any kind of literature around. When I was a child, these kind of books didn't exist even if my busy parents ever thought to drag me out of my treehouse and down to the library to take a look. I am making up for lost time.

I love to curl up at the end of the day with one of these perfect little masterpieces and pour over the words and pictures — preferably snuggled in beside someone who enjoys them equally as well. It is the one ritual our family continues to keep. My kids still throw a half-dozen picture books in our basket when we head

to the library. We sometimes even manage to agree on our favourites.

This month marks Family Literacy Day which has been established to encourage this kind of snuggle-by-reading. Locally, the day will be celebrated with the third annual Riot of Reading Solutions Jan. 27 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Mission Central Elementary School. There will be balloons and food, dancers, a magician and plenty of books.

The Fraser Valley Regional Library is also kicking off a new family reading program beginning Family Literacy Day. It's called Winter Warmup Family Reading Club. The goal is for someone in your family to read

to someone — or something — every day. Your child. Your pet. Anyone. Families are encouraged to read every day and a lucky winner will win a rocking chair.

Why are the libraries going to so much trouble? These booklovers can't help themselves. They know that reading is one of the most important ways to encourage your child's growth at an early age — as recognized and supported by the UBC Human Early Learning Project initiative and the local Early Childhood Development Committee. The whole point is to celebrate reading.

Forget those age-appropriate labels. Pick the prettiest. The funniest. The one that will encourage some young family member onto your lap ready to snuggle.

The message is simple. Have fun. For me that means picture books, and I am beginning to believe that I may be hooked for life on these books aimed at an audience four decades younger than me. And that's fine with me — I'm having a Riot. See you Saturday at Mission Central.

• There's yet another chance this month to find

out more about the impact of reading and other strategies to support our children's early years. The Early Childhood Development Committee and the Understanding the Early Years project will host a free community information session 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Jan. 25 (tonight) Joanne Schroeder from UBC's Human Early Learning Project and Mission researcher Roberta O'Brien will discuss the Understanding the Early Years research and local resources for young children and their families. Childcare and a light dinner will be provided.

For the Love of Reading



Lynn

Easton