



Parents' Pages

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World Read Aloud Day

World Read Aloud Day is celebrated each year on the first Wednesday of February. This year it falls on February 4. This is a time to reflect on the importance of sharing stories, fostering a love of reading and building meaningful connections through the spoken word.

Reading aloud to children from birth creates the foundation for lifelong learning. It increases vocabulary, sparks imagination and strengthens the bond between a child and their caregiver. Studies have shown that children who read regularly are more likely to succeed academically, but the benefits go beyond school performance. Reading aloud nurtures empathy, boosts self-confidence and cultivates a deeper understanding of the world.

World Read Aloud Day is a great time to start or strengthen a daily reading habit. It's also a wonderful chance to introduce children to the books you loved growing up. Whether it's 10 minutes of reading before bedtime, a story during breakfast or a chapter after school, these simple routines make a lasting impact. If your child is old enough, encourage them to take a turn reading aloud, too. Listening to your child read helps build their confidence and gives you a window into how they're progressing.

Reading aloud doesn't always have to involve a printed book and a quiet room. Audiobooks are a fantastic way to enjoy stories when life gets busy. Whether you're driving, cooking dinner or folding laundry, you can still immerse yourself and your kids in a great story. Audiobooks also offer a valuable opportunity for children to learn new words and hear fluent reading modeled by professional narrators, enhancing their listening skills and comprehension.

Share a favorite book or revisit a classic on this day. Let them see you enjoying books, whether it's reading a novel or listening to an audiobook. Whether you're a parent, teacher or friend, reading aloud or listening to stories can inspire a lifelong love of reading. Here are some suggested books to discover with your child.

Picture Books

Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day
by Judith Viorst

Corduroy by Don Freeman

The Berenstain Bears
by Stan & Jan Berenstain

Clifford the Big Red Dog
by Norman Bridwell

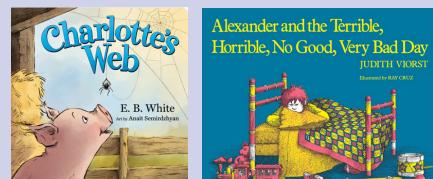
Chapter Books

Charlotte's Web
by E.B. White

Flat Stanley
by Jeff Brown

The Boxcar Children
by Gertrude Chandler Warner

Amelia Bedelia
by Peggy Parish



VPK 20th Birthday!

Celebrating 20 Years of Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Education Program

This year marks a significant milestone in Florida's commitment to early childhood education: the 20th birthday of the Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) Education Program. Since its inception in 2005, the VPK program has served more than 3.1 million children, offering free, high-quality prekindergarten education to all four-year-olds in the state.

A Vision Realized

Florida voters passed a constitutional amendment in 2002 mandating the creation of a free prekindergarten program for every 4-year-old child in the state. In 2005, the program launched statewide, making Florida one of the first states to offer universal prekindergarten access without income restrictions.

Over the past two decades, the program has grown to include school year and summer options, as well as specialized instructional services for children with disabilities. Parents can choose from a variety of public and private providers, giving families flexibility and choice in their child's early education.

Research consistently shows that children who attend VPK are better prepared for kindergarten, perform better on standardized tests in later grades and are more likely to graduate from high school. The program emphasizes foundational skills in literacy, math and development, setting children on a path for lifelong success.

To honor this milestone, the Florida Department of Education's Division of Early Learning (DEL) launched a statewide celebration campaign, complete with a [VPK 20th Birthday Toolkit](#). The toolkit includes banners, certificates, children's book recommendations and a time capsule activity to help families and educators commemorate the occasion. Families are encouraged to participate at home through a Family Celebration Guide, which includes 20 fun and educational activities themed around the number 20.

Happy 20th Birthday, VPK! Here's to many more years of learning, growing and thriving.

Bright Futures Happen Here!

Read about a successful team who helped launch a VPK program 20 years ago and is still working hard today.



"We had the honor of having Governor Bush visit our school during the inaugural Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program 20 years ago. Since then, we have had the privilege of helping countless children begin their educational journey with a strong foundation. Providing VPK has allowed us to nurture a love for learning, build confidence, and prepare children for lifelong success. It's truly rewarding to see how those bright preschoolers have grown into accomplished young men and women—many now graduating from college. Even more inspiring, some of our former VPK students have returned as teachers, continuing the cycle of learning that began right here. Their success is a testament to the lasting impact of early childhood education."

~ Roy & Jennifer Keister, Owners of Scottdale Academy



Photo of Roy & Jennifer Keister with Governor Jeb Bush in 2005

Help celebrate VPK's 20th birthday! If you have a student who participated in the 2005-2006 VPK program or know of teachers, directors or programs that have been supporting the VPK program for the past 20 years, share pictures and details with the Division of Early Learning (DEL) at VPKQuestions@del.fl doe.org.

Celebrate Black History Month with Books, Music

Ideas for Recognizing Great Floridians

Florida is committed to teaching students, including our youngest learners, about African American history and the role African Americans have played in Florida's success.

As we celebrate Black History Month, held every February, take time to reflect with your child on the important contributions that African Americans have made to shape our great state.

Some examples of notable Floridians are:

- **John Davis** – As former secretary of the Florida Lottery, he was responsible for contributing more than \$49 billion to enhance education and sending more than one million students to college through the Bright Futures Scholarship Program. He now serves as Vice President and Director of Athletics at Florida A&M University.



- **Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune** – Founder of Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona Beach, she was a prominent civil rights advocate and accomplished author.



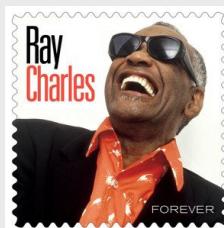
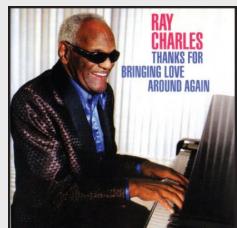
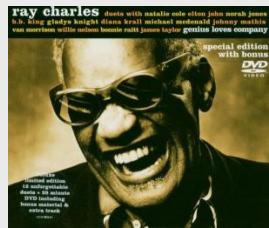
- **Ray Charles** – An American singer, songwriter and pianist, he launched his successful career after attending the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind.



- **Representative Kiyan Michael** – The Jacksonville native has served in the Florida State House of Representatives for District 16 since 2022. She serves on several committees, including as vice chair of the Health Care Facilities and Systems Subcommittee.



Talk to your child about Black History Month and the important and various ways these and other African Americans have paved the way for a bright future for all Floridians. Encourage your child to dream big about their future. Then, put on a Ray Charles tune to dance and celebrate the month.



Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST):

Enhancing Early Learning Through Assessment Using Star Early Literacy

Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program is designed to give 4-year-olds a strong start in reading and math before they enter kindergarten. To track progress, children take the Star Early Literacy assessment three times during the school year—at the beginning, middle and end.

The assessment is tailored for emerging readers and uses audio narration to ensure accessibility for non-readers. It adapts in real time to each student's responses, adjusting the difficulty of questions accordingly. Most students complete the assessment in under 15 minutes, and results are mapped to help educators identify what each child is ready to learn next. This data-driven approach empowers educators to tailor instruction and ensure that every child receives the support necessary to thrive.

By integrating the Star Early Literacy assessment into the VPK framework, Florida continues to prioritize evidence-based strategies preparing children for academic achievement in kindergarten and beyond.



Healthy Habits for a Bright Smile

February is Children's Dental Health Month! Tiny habits make big, bright smiles—teach your child to brush twice a day and floss daily, and provide water over sugary drinks. Healthy teeth and gums will help your child speak, eat and focus on their lessons. Schedule regular checkups and make dental care a family routine. A healthy smile is a vital part of school readiness.



Children's Week Florida 2026: Building the Future for Every Child

Florida's Capitol will come alive with the voices, creativity and energy of children and advocates from across the state as Children's Week Florida 2026 kicks off from Sunday, February 22, to Friday, February 27. This annual celebration, now in its 31st year, is the state's largest event dedicated to honoring and advocating for the well-being of Florida's children and youth. This year's theme is Building Blocks for Every Child.

Family Math Activities to Enjoy Together

When spending time with your toddler have you ever counted snacks or lined up their toy cars to see which one is the longest? These simple, everyday activities do more than just keep your child entertained; they also help build a strong foundation for important math skills. Your child actively absorbs valuable concepts—from recognizing numbers and counting, to understanding size and order—often without even realizing it. In fact, math literacy begins in infancy through the everyday moments you share together. Want to make learning even more enjoyable? Try these easy, everyday activities that encourage math skills while keeping your little one engaged and curious:

- Count the steps as you climb stairs together, turning movement into a fun number game.
- Explore different shapes by pointing them out on signs, toys or household items during your daily routine.
- Sort toys by size, color or type during playtime to build early classification skills.
- Play matching or grouping games, like pairing socks or organizing blocks, to develop sorting and pattern recognition.
- Count marshmallows as you add them to hot cocoa, turning snack time into a delightful math moment.

These moments spark curiosity and build confidence, turning the world around your child into a rich learning environment.

For more math ideas, read the components included in the Mathematical Thinking domain in the [Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards](#).

Kindness on Display

When it comes to learned behaviors, you are your child's best model. Displaying kindness can shape how your child interacts with others and helps build positive relationships. Showing kindness helps your child understand and share the feelings of others. Parents, educators and caregivers play a vital role in modeling and fostering kindness through everyday behavior.

Random Acts of Kindness Day occurs each February. Take the time to encourage your child to practice kindness by engaging in the following fun and simple activities.

- Role play with puppets or dolls exchanging polite language that express kindness (e.g., Thank you for helping me. I hope you feel better. I will be your friend.).
- When you are in public, recognize and discuss kind interactions observed between others.
- Encourage your child to share and be kind to his friends and family.
- When driving, ask your child to share how his friends and teachers demonstrated kindness at school today.

Promoting kindness with your child will enhance social connections, promote cooperation and boost happiness and self-esteem. Teaching kindness early is key to laying a solid foundation.

There are many ways to display and teach kindness to your child. You can search for ideas online to further illustrate the meaningful concept of kindness with your child.

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