

# Raising a child who loves to read

**INVALUABLE.** When you instil reading habits, it enhances the child's listening and imagination skills, writes **Mathias Wandera.**

**K**enneth Wanock is a reader. He loves books. Nothing fascinates him more than a well-coined sentence, or a book with the right plot.

"A bookstore is my candy shop," Wanock is quick to reveal, citing his indecisiveness every time he walks through the doors of Aristoc Booklex, where he gets most of his books. "I love having books around me and the way a huge pile of books smells. Often I catch myself walking the aisles staring at books seated side by side on shelves. I cannot decide on which one to carry home."

One of the most memorable novels he has ever read was about a girl and her horse. "So anything works for me. It has to be a well-written book that intrigues my imagination; words that get right off the pages and walk." At 22, this final year accounting student at MUBS believes he has read more than 140 books. He reads to relax his mind; thus he always carries a book in his laptop bag.

## Benefits of the practice

Wanock is eloquent with spot-on English command. Beyond his colourful vocabulary lies an admirable pool of knowledge, something demonstrated through his insightful ideas and opinions on almost every topic. He has a certain eagerness to engage you from politics, to soccer, the wines in Italy, to West African traditions often quoting his favourite authors to drive his argument home. "I read books, magazines, newspapers and blogs. I think that is how I have come to cement my opinion and ideas on various aspects."

And Bernard Matovu, a life coach at Kula Uganda, cannot agree more. "People who read a lot tend to garner more knowledge than those that do not. And expectedly, their vocabulary expands."

In Matovu's view, reading plays a bigger role in people's lives which is why he considers it wise for parents to instil a love for reading in their children.

"Children who exhibit a love for reading often have their parents reading to them. This builds on the child's listening and imagination skills. Basic speech is also developed, and the youngster gets to attain

mastery of language and a higher aptitude of learning in general," Matovu explains.

Such benefits are not strange to Margaret Hasahya, a mother of three. She is a reader. "I admire people who love to read. I believe they get to live a thousand lives in one because with every book or novel read, you get to live life with the book's characters, to experience their journey with them. That way you are exposed to various situations. You learn a lot, and in case such situations arise at some point in your life, you are equipped to traverse them."

Hasahya wants her children to grow up to love books. But like many parents, she has no definite plan of how to instil the love for reading in her children. "I always remind them that reading is important."

## Expert take

Gloria Nansikombi, a child literacy expert, says contrary to popular opinion, the love for reading is not always random. Children, as she believes, cannot only be taught to read, they can also be taught to love reading, and to carry on this passion into adulthood. "Parents can influence their children to treasure reading."

**Read to them.** Nansikombi advises parents read to their children right from a very young age. "From the tender age of about two years, children can take interest in stories. You can start by reading to them bed-time stories. Then make it more of a routine leisure activity."

She emphasises the need to make the read-aloud sessions as interesting for the child as possible. Pick the right book, read in dramatic voices and make appropriate faces to add fun. This makes children more intrigued and interested.

**Bring them along to the bookstore.** As a way of initiating children into the culture of reading, Nansikombi says it is important to bring your children along when visiting the bookstore. Allow your nine-year-old to walk around and flip through the available book collection himself. This will help you notice the kind of books they are interested in and help you put them on the right path. Better still, the children will know that books matter.

"You can even have a small home book library. It does not have to be something big, just a shelf or two of mainly children's books, novels, magazines and newspapers.

## rule of the thumb

In the event that you buy the child a book and after flipping through pages they toss it away, do not push them to read it. That is a common mistake parents make.

"Even when they have stopped reading all the other material, do not push or start putting ultimatums to get them to read. This will only make the children look at reading more as a chore; another undesirable thing mummy wants them to do. You should just back off, and perhaps keep bringing them new material they may connect better with," Gloria Nansikombi, a child literacy expert

The aim is to bring children closer to reading material and to send a message that this is what we value in this family. Such envi-

ronments create an important gesture," Nansikombi highlights.

**Capitalise on their interest.** Parents should be able to notice the kind of things their children take interest in and capitalise on those. If your child likes adventure cartoon on TV, find children books that give the same thrill. This, Nansikombi says is a sure way to catch the child's attention and get them reading.

**Demonstrate your love for books.** From Nansikombi's perspective, it is only right that you demonstrate your own love for books. "When children often see you reading, they get to appreciate and treasure the same. After all, children have a tendency of attaching similar value to the things their parents hold dear."



Encourage children to read to improve their imagination skills. NET PHOTO