

YOUR WEEKLY READER

Rescuing Reading Project

Thomas Nelson Community College
December 7, 2006

Spring 2006 Book Circles & The Big Read

In partnership with the Newport News Public Library System and the newly-formed Virginia Peninsula Literary Consortium, in a community reading program called [The Big Read](#), Thomas Nelson Community College's **Spring 2007 Book Circles on Friday, April 13 from 1:00-3:00 p.m.** will include **Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.**

In addition, faculty from the Foreign Language Department have chosen North African author **Mariama Bâ's** novel in French, ***Une si longue lettre*** (translated into English as *So Long a Letter*) and Costa Rican author **Uriel Quesada's** story collection, ***Lejos, tan lejos*** in Spanish. Plans are underway for Dr. Quesada to visit the campus for the Book Circles.

Administered by the Rescuing Reading Project, the College's Book Circles are a student book club held once each semester during the regular academic year. The Big Read is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Public high school students and language arts teachers on the Virginia Peninsula will be invited to the College for the Book Circles.



What They're Reading

Jeff Cleveland, adjunct instructor of Mathematics reports: "I am reading *Virginus Dabney's Virginia* by Virginus Dabney with an introduction by Tom Wolfe. The book was published in 1986. Dabney was a Pulitzer-prize-winning editor of the Richmond *Times-Dispatch*. He was born in 1901 and died in 1995. The book is a collection of his writings from various newspapers, magazines, and other publications. It is a fascinating walk through Virginia from the 1920s to the 1980s. The introduction by Tom Wolfe is a hoot and is worth the cost of the book (very little, I picked it up at a library sale). It makes interesting reading while giving math exams."

Improve Adolescent Reading?-- Talk to Children in Infancy, Early Childhood

As if we needed more evidence about how important are early-childhood interventions for later cognitive development, academic skill, and reading abilities, come studies summarized in Paul Tough's article "What It Takes to Make a Student" in the November 26, 2006, *New York Times Magazine*.

Child psychologists Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley (University of Kansas) found in the mid-1990s that vocabulary growth and IQ differed by social class: by age 3, children whose parents were professionals had vocabularies of about 1,100 words, while those with parents on welfare had about half as many, with IQ averages of 117 for the first group, but only 79 for the latter.

What caused the difference? One significant factor: the number and kinds of words that parents spoke to their children. In professional

homes, parents employed 487 utterances (anything from a word to a monologue) per hour; in welfare homes, only 178 utterances per hour.



In addition, economic class differences accounted for the kinds of utterances that children heard, some categorized as

"encouragements" and others as "discouragements." Prohibitions and words of disapproval by age 3 accounted for 200,000 utterances in welfare homes, in contrast to only 75,000 encouragements. The ratio was reversed in professional homes, where by age 3 children heard 500,000 encouragements and only 80,000 discouragements.

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn at Teachers College documented child-rearing, concluding that children in well-off homes experience more encouraging, less intrusive, and less detached parenting, resulting in increased IQ and school readiness.

Building on the work of Brooks-Gunn, Martha Farah at the University of Pennsylvania has identified the neurological areas affected: the "parental nurturance" of middle-class parents stimulates the medial temporal lobe, which develops memory skills.

Paul Tough's article concludes that, while good nutrition and more books in a home would benefit children of poverty, "the real advantages that middle-class children gain come from more elusive processes: the language that their parents use, the attitudes toward life that they convey" (49).