

Pandemic, home-schooling, and dragons

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A personal reflection on homeschooling during the pandemic and the joy of reading, featuring a 6-year-old's journey through the 'How to Train Your Dragon' series and other beloved children's books.



M., posing in front of the stack of the books she read in 2020.

When the pandemic hit the US in early 2020, we decided that it would be the best to home-school our 6-year old. What made it particularly hard was that we needed to teach her to read/write in English, which is not our native language. We have been reading together practically since the day she was born, but hadn't attempted at all to teach her how to read or write.

We purchased a curriculum to guide our efforts. Although we didn't stick to it all the time, it was useful for adding structure to our efforts. Mainly thanks to my lovely wife, she figured it out in the middle of the year! She stopped asking us to read to her and went solo. It was the "How to Train Your Dragon" series that hooked her. She had read it with her mom once, and read it all over again alone. And then she decided that I must read that too, so we read it together one more time. To this day, she will still pull a random book from the series and read it for a couple of hours.

Since mid 2020, she has been reading literally like there is no tomorrow. Every night, she bargains for some extra time to finish the chapter she is on. I guess that's a good problem to have as a parent.

The reason for this post is to give some words of advice to fellow parents who might be struggling with homeschooling or maybe with getting their kids to read. I guess the best strategy is to be a good example yourself. My wife and I read books regularly. We went through tens of parenting books starting from the day we found out that she was pregnant. We always read to our daughter for an hour or so before she slept. It has always been a part of our life. Another thing, which might seem a bit too radical to some, is that we don't have a TV at home. We almost never watched TV anyways, and got rid of it completely almost 10 years ago. She has no screen time; not TV, no phone, no tablet whatsoever. It is really hard to compete against TV with books. So, I am glad we totally eliminated TV from our lives. One last thing worth mentioning is the family tradition we have: taking a photo in the first days of the new year with the books we read in the previous one, just like the photo you see above. She was targeting to read enough so that they become taller than her when stacked. She did it!

It is not always easy to find books that kids will enjoy reading. Below I will list the books she read within 2020, as seen in the image:

- How to Train your Dragon, Cressida Cowell
- Time Twisters, Steve Sheinkin
- The Wishing-Chair Collection, Enid Blyton
- The Spiderwick Chronicles, Tony DiTerlizzi
- The Greetings from Somewhere Collection, Harper Paris & Marcos Calo
- Magic Tree House, Mary Pope Osborne
- Magic Tree House, Merlin Missions, Mary Pope Osborne
- The Faraway Tree series, Enid Blyton
- The Kingdom of Wrenly, Jordan Quinn
- The Trumpet of the Swan, E. B. White

- Charlotte's Web, E. B. White
- The Wizard of Oz (The first five novels), Frank Baum