basic education
Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Address by the Minister of Basic Education, Mrs Angie Motshekga, MP, on the World Read Aloud Day held at Muntuza Primary School, KwaZulu-Natal

06 February 2024

Programme Director,

MEC for Education

Head of the Department

Ndabezitha, Inkosi…..

Local Councilor

Colleagues from the Provincial Department of Sports, Arts and Culture

CEO of National Education Collaboration Trust,

School Governing Body

School Principals

MANCOSA from the KZN branch

PASA Publishers in the province

Local business

Family members

It is with distinct honour and privilege that I address you today, on the eve of World Read Aloud Day for 2024.

This day is not merely a date on our calendar but a pivotal moment in our collective endeavour to nurture a nation of avid readers and storytellers, especially in the heart of our home languages.

The Department of Basic Education, in collaboration with esteemed partners such as the National Education Collaboration Trust and the Nal'ibali Trust, spearheads this vital initiative.

Our concerted effort underscores a shared vision: to elevate reading aloud from a simple activity to a fundamental cornerstone of childhood development and literacy.

The decision by Muntuza Primary School to host this grand celebration embodies the spirit of unity and commitment towards literacy that we aim to foster across the nation.

I am grateful to all involved, particularly the Provincial Department of Education and MEC Mbali Fraser, for their indispensable role in orchestrating today's event.

Programme director, the theme for this year, “Growing the love for stories and reading!” is a powerful affirmation of our mission to ignite a lifelong passion for reading among our youth.

This theme embodies our collective aspiration to foster an environment where stories are not just told but are deeply cherished, where reading is seen not as a chore but as a gateway to infinite worlds of imagination, knowledge, and understanding.

At the heart of this theme lies the recognition that stories are the seeds of curiosity, empathy, and intellectual growth.

By nurturing a love for stories from a young age, we are not merely teaching children to read; we are empowering them to become thinkers, dreamers, and creators.

Oh, the power of words, the magic of migrating words, offers infinite possibilities to reimagine our world.

We are opening their minds to the rich mosaic of human experience, enabling them to live countless lives, visit distant lands, and explore the vast realms of possibility that lie within the pages of a book.

In response to the enriching potential of World Read Aloud Day, I wholeheartedly endorse the proposal to extend our celebration throughout the month, making it a World Read Aloud Month.

This expansion will undoubtedly amplify our impact, bringing the joy and power of reading in our native tongues to the forefront of national consciousness.

Since its inception in 2010, World Read Aloud Day has championed the invaluable role of storytelling and reading aloud in children's literacy and development.

This year, we are particularly excited to introduce an Early Childhood Development version of the World Read Aloud Day story, ensuring our youngest learners are not left behind in our literacy crusade.

Ladies and gentlemen, we do what we do because stories matter. Reading matters. Literacy is the new gold in basic education.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, one of the most notable Nigerian writers and authors known for her novels, essays, and short stories, once said, "Stories matter. Many stories matter."

This quote, from her TED Talk titled “The Danger of a Single Story” in July 2009, discusses the importance of exposing oneself to a variety of stories from different cultures and perspectives.

Chimamanda emphasises how diverse narratives contribute significantly to our understanding of the world and foster empathy among individuals by highlighting the complexity and richness of human experiences.

Our campaign aligns seamlessly with the *Read to Lead* initiative, placing African languages at the epicentre of our literacy and reading strategies.

This deliberate focus responds to the imperative need highlighted by the latest Progress in International Reading Literacy Study results, advocating for African languages as the bedrock of literacy development in South Africa.

The collaboration among education districts, Provincial Education Departments, and National Education Collaboration Trust district agents is crucial.

Programme director, we encourage active participation through Nal’ibali’s platform, ensuring that the enchanting stories reach as many ears as possible, fostering a love for reading from an early age.

Nal’ibali’s tradition of crafting a unique story each year, available in all eleven official South African languages, plays a pivotal role in our campaign.

The 2024 remarkable story is “The Lost Kitten,” penned by Stacey Fru and illustrated by Rico. This year’s beacon of imagination is ready to be shared in classrooms, homes, and community centres.

Ladies and gentlemen, the One Million Storybook campaign launched by the National Education Collaboration Trust in 2022 further exemplifies our commitment to enriching the literary landscape with indigenous language content, ensuring every child can see themselves reflected in the stories they hear and read.

The Read to Lead Campaign, initiated in 2015, laid the groundwork for this moment, mobilising all sectors of society towards a united front for literacy development.

The campaign has not only aimed to enhance learner achievement but has also sought to embed reading as a lifestyle choice, benefiting immensely from the support of partners like Nal’ibali and the National Education Collaboration Trust.

This year, we continue to leverage World Read Aloud Day as a strategic moment to encourage the utilisation of existing reading spaces and, where necessary, to innovate new ones, ensuring every child has access to the transformative power of reading.

World Read Aloud Day stands as a beacon, illuminating the path towards a literate, informed, and inspired future. It champions the cause of literacy, advocating for storytelling and reading as pivotal to children's development.

Our ambitious goal to reach 3 million children across South Africa is more than a numerical target; it represents our commitment to changing lives through literacy. With the support of families, communities, schools, and digital platforms, we are poised to make an unprecedented impact.

Today, I have the distinct honour of discussing the transformative journey that began in 2016 with the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme that extends beyond encouraging reading in indigenous languages.

The Reading Improvement Programme was developed in collaboration with the Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority and executed by the National Education

Collaboration Trust. This program profoundly enhances the teaching of English First Additional Language across both the Foundation and Intermediate Phases.

This is significant because English serves as the language of learning and teaching in most schools, not because we are a colony of the United Kingdom but because we are part of the global community of 1.5 billion people who speak English in 96 countries.

Since its launch, the Primary School Reading Improvement Programme has engaged 422 Foundation Phase Subject Advisers, 221 Intermediate Phase Subject Advisers, and 40,887 teachers, influencing the educational journey of 2 million learners across 6,325 schools.

I am happy to report that all nine Provincial Education Departments have developed and implemented reading strategies aligned with the Integrated National Reading Sector Plan, reviewed them, and reported them to the Department of Basic Education twice annually.

Furthermore, we have embraced the Early Grade Reading Assessment across Quintiles 1-3 schools in all languages, including English First Additional Language, ensuring every child has the opportunity to thrive.

It is also important to highlight our dedication to inclusivity and accessibility in basic education, with 139,343 learners enrolled in special schools, including 61,425 females with disabilities.

As we move forward, the Department of Basic Education commits to continuously refining and enhancing our reading plans to address any emergent challenges and adapt to the evolving needs of our learners and educators alike.

I invite each of you to join us in this noble pursuit. Pledge to share “The Lost Kitten” and other stories with the children in your life, and let us together sow the seeds of a vibrant culture of reading for enjoyment.

Through such collective action, we ensure that every child in South Africa discovers the joy and boundless potential that reading brings.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication to advancing literacy in South Africa.

It is true that “Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers it to recount it,” so observed Gabriel García Márquez, the celebrated Colombian novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter, and journalist. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982. This

insight, drawn from his autobiography “Living to Tell the Tale,” captures his profound grasp of memory’s role and storytelling’s power.

Finally, together, we are laying the foundation for a brighter, more literate future for all our children, one story at a time.