

Exclusive | Rohini Nilekani's Tips To Raise A Reader

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVi1hyWxPtA>

SUMMARY

The discussion centers around the importance of instilling a love for reading in children from an early age. The guest, a seasoned author and philanthropist, emphasizes the transformative power of books in shaping a child's vocabulary, imagination, and understanding of the world. She shares practical advice for parents on how to encourage reading habits and the significance of storytelling in a child's development.

- Early exposure to books significantly enhances a child's vocabulary and understanding, with research indicating a difference of up to 300,000 words compared to those not exposed to books.*
- Parents should start reading to children even before birth and continue to introduce them to a variety of colorful and engaging books.*
- It's essential to create a joyful reading environment without performance anxiety, allowing children to explore books at their own pace.*
- Encouraging children to gift books annually can foster a sense of sharing and appreciation for literature.*
- While screens are prevalent, maintaining a balance between physical books and digital reading can still nurture a love for reading.*
- The diversity of contemporary Indian literature offers a wealth of stories that can resonate with children, enhancing their reading experience.*
- Observing children's natural curiosity and questions can inspire authors and parents alike to engage with them meaningfully.*
- Audiobooks and oral storytelling complement traditional reading, creating a rich ecosystem for developing literacy skills.*

i learned about life through books i learned about possibilities through books and that's what you want children to have plus vocabulary there is so much research to show it's astounding that even if a child is exposed to one book if you come one book and if you compare that child to someone who has not been exposed to any books in just that delta there are some 300 000 words

hey everyone we are talking about raising readers today and i am very very excited to share our guest because she's a mom she's a grandmom she is an author philanthropist um i i am just she's really the really a woman that i really really look up to and i'm sure a lot of you guys really look up to her and i'm so glad that he's chatting exclusively with us today hey rohini namaste i think it's my first instagram

live thing yeah i'm very very excited that it is with kidstop press thank you so much for having me likewise it is an absolute pleasure i'm a little nervous so just just handle it i've never interviewed somebody i admire uh except

andre agassi i love him i've seen whom you've interviewed so that's why you say that to everyone no no no but really it is an absolute honor and i'm very very excited

um like is it very common that people tell you this that they're overwhelmed or intimidated if they're interviewing you not in the least because uh uh i'm not at all intimidating unless i really want you know the work that you do can be

intimidating to people right i hope not i hope you can discover that is not at all intimidating and circumstances do matter but if peop so many people have achieved so much we just have to keep at things that's all right you're a writer founder of the person of the iranian foundation um that of a non-profit that focuses on water and sanitation issues london and i for the first time working together

co-founded extra foundation five years ago so that's become a big part of our lives now it's it's 24 access to 200 million children of india for learning amazing at the outset how did you come up with uh come up with the idea of the book and why children so this is my latest book it's called a hungry little sky monster and it's a poster it's my 13th or 14th book for children all the others were done for pratham books yeah this my

first one with juggernaut i'm very excited because it's my first commercial commercial book and of course it was inspired like so many other children's books my little person my grandson and for him and me we used to always look at the moon so i really wanted to create a new fable for little children about why the moon waxes and veins and had great fun doing it with my marvelous editor and publisher chiki sarkar who helped a lot to improve it it was great

fun and mainly i want little children in india especially but around the world to love the story you've always been very vocal about getting kids to read and you know setting those practices up early um what do you think are the first few foundation steps that one should look at in getting kids to really really read so um there are many things and they're all common sense but the biggest and most important one is start early okay so

parents when you are pregnant when the mother is pregnant that's a great time to start because at that time you you don't have to change nappies yet so you have time to think of other things go to a bookstore i mean before the pandemic or after the pandemic and find books that you love colorful books little books story books bring them home and read them while your baby is still in the womb and then continue to introduce books as

early as possible it is as simple as that because you will love those books and then your child will love them too no doubt in my mind first of all i'd say congratulations even though you are not a reader you want your child to read so you have already appreciated the importance of reading and the lot of research which

shows the impact good reading can have on a child's future so you're already done something right now just of course get books the first thing is find good books like your site like your club there are many others as well which are really encouraging young parents so join some of these things find out what are the good books the

children should read buy them if you can if not there are many free resources available like story

weaver and a few others go to those doesn't matter there is no obstacle left now for indian parents to get books for children they get they are also free and they are also available so if you can buy them please buy them other authors will say what is she saying so please buy them if you can afford them but otherwise there are free resources so get books that's how you and secondly and thirdly do not be anxious about this

this is not a performance test for parents who is your child or reader okay because if you are in performance anxiety the child will you will not be able to have a joyful engagement with books with the child so don't be anxious most children will read if you present them with good books some won't but they may do it later some may suddenly catch up when they're six or eight so don't be anxious it's a joyful exercise we have

to democratize the joy of reading it's not an exam so get books read with them and my last advice is to sustain the habit and the magic get your child to gift a book every year yeah the child himself or herself should gift forward a book then you become part of making the magic no which is so integral that you say that because you know i think we're such borders that we want to constantly hold and we

uh getting more and more and more and i think we somewhere forget that just like what you said right the magic of giving can start so small i mean when you were raising your kids there were very few distractions how is that change between now you see you're a four-year-old grandchild yeah no i all my sympathy goes out to young parents okay i really had it easier and i admire you for what you all are doing

especially in 2020 where you have to be some i don't know some super circus ring masters or something so first of all hats off to all young parents who are juggling 100 things especially this year secondly yes our children didn't have screens we had tv which was also remember every generation has to deal with a new technology which they think is the end of the world but it never is the end of the world so right now people are

worried about children's obsessions with screens and how much screen time you should allow so for for parents or anxious i would say of course you all have to have your own rules on screen time but remember if you have already introduced your children to physical books then some new and good research is showing that to sustain a good reading habit it doesn't matter if they are continuing the reading on the screen just make sure it's not mindless stuff

that they can read good books on the screen keep some physical books for sure and some stories on screen is fine once they have learned how to read to inculcate and sustain the habit screens are okay so again don't be over anxious we used to say that about television too but tell me um we've spoken about how to get our kids to read screens no screens all of that in hindsight when your kids are older and now that you're raising your

grandchild give me the why of reading and the importance of reading that you think will play out for archer yeah oh how much time do you have okay so look i i spent my childhood in the pages of books okay they

transported me to all kinds of adventures all kinds of i learned about life through books i learned about possibilities through books and that's what you want children to have plus vocabulary there is so much

research to show it's astounding that even if a child is exposed to one book if you come one book and if you compare that child to someone who has not been exposed to any books in just that delta there are some 300 000 words so just so that you can have a better vocabulary a better understanding of your world and are able to make better choices because as you know manasi life is not black and white okay life is a

million delicious shades of green and to be a books allow you to understand those nuances and occupy them so you become a thinking adult when you grow so books are very important stories are very important letting your imagination fly is extraordinarily important for children to retain their curiosity and their creativity later in life you said that you're an extremely you know you were a voracious reader have you continued to find the time to read even

now when you're doing so many things because that's the first thing most parents seem to drop we ask them what are you reading and she's like that i i've been only reading this book and you know the rest of my reading has dropped does that have did that happen with you and how do you continue to juggle between your reading and your work and all the other roles that you play no i love reading too much to let

anything else come in the way so i will compromise something so we will in my family everyone reads although the children read only on the screen now and tinier and tiniest means it makes me wonder how they do it but uh we all read and we make time in the day to read so usually at night or sometimes around lunch or just sometime in that you scar out a space because we love to read and we know that we have to continue our

learning journey no matter how old we get and that is best done with books so no we make time no matter what to read and i read time several books simultaneously so so you read multiple books at the same time i thought i was the only one and people ask me how do you manage to read two or three books at a time and i said i don't know but it just works well because i can't be in the same

frame of mind each time that i'm reading and especially because i read a lot of non-fiction i get the question very often well when i was very young uh no matter how it seems today when we were very young brendan blyton book shaped us a lot and now when we look at her politics and we say oh she's a racist etc we didn't know that when we were children and the reason i mentioned her is because her

characters the children seem to have a lot of agency in their lives they could do things that seemed adult and which we couldn't do like solve mysteries you know so i think the idea of a child's agency uh influenced me when i read the typical books of uh anna blyton i think to kill the mockingbird when i was young really embedded me questions about justice that to this day i'll go back to that book often and really enjoy it equally each

time very strangely when i was and of course we read all the same stuff roald dahl we need william um nancy drew just just everything that was very common louisa may alcott um everything i remember when i was very timely i read hans christian anderson book called the little match girl and i cried for days because it was such a pathetic story but since i still remember it something must have happened and very strangely when i was 12 i went

through some kind of spiritual phase and i started believe it or not memorizing some uh moises of the bhagavad-gita and started to go deeper into philosophical questions and then it was very nice to meet tokyo after that so so many books it's impossible for me to i even let khalid give iran because i enjoyed the prophet and so many other things so much so a million kinds of books i don't like to be pinned down to

two or three i gave you my earlier influences and then of course as you grow you read so many other things a lot of autobiographies start to come in by the time you're 14 15. so too many to name right what are you reading right now i just finished reading two lovely books by uh autobiographies by tisha and she just passed away but uh aloo alia and what are trail blazer a a wonderful economist a trailblazer she

just passed away and managed to finish her book even when she had cancer it was so wonderful and we miss her so much i just read out a feminist theorist david ki jen's book right now i'm reading vikram sampath's book and i'm also reading this book called indica on on the so these are the things i'm reading and on the side i'm waiting to read the ferrante books which i've been saving for a long time and they are on my

kindle beckoning me every minute it's interesting that you mentioned so many indie authors right um and what i feel missing at least when you know my kids are a little younger and that was perhaps the reason that why i started

what would you like to change or um you know better about india to publishing an indian author well first of all the fantastic news is that there's so much more indian writing it's falling out of our years and so much talent and so much diversity of that book from things that were never written about before of all kinds whether it is political issues economic issues social issues you name it or just fantasy magic every genre is thriving right so that is

really marvelous for young readers today so that's the first thing and um the second thing is uh for indian public so that's a marvelous news about indian publishing we do wish there was more see i found we set up pratham books in 2004 for children to to to sort of have an impact on the whole children's publishing industry and today we are seeing dramatic innovation but i wish adult publishers or children's publishers would be more innovative in

their distribution networks we need to find new ways to crack the distribution model others how are we going to improve access and price and their follow on each other if you improve distribution more people will buy books hopefully and then you can produce them at a cheaper price so more people will buy them so it's a positive cycle so that's the thing there are some wonderful examples in america um especially first book usa but

they've created a platform where

many publishers join in to give discounted books for especially impoverished children and you could do that for adults as well so innovation is the need of the hour right um i can't uh obviously leave without asking you a very um you know because you've written so many books has motherhood changed as a writer in any way motherhood was a long time ago but um yes of course motherhood always changes

you because you want to you know it's no longer only about you and motherhood changes a lot as we all know and i don't need to tell you that but grandmotherhood now that's more fun okay to talk about and my little four-year-old grandson is not just the apple but the whole fruit salad of my eye and uh you know watching him think literally because how you know children think almost you can hear them think so watching his

mental processes and the questions he asks are really very inspirational for me and i do that with all children i always observe what are children asking and that's what inspires me a little and as i'm sure it does all authors right um you know something when we when we posted it we're going to be chatting with you somebody asked a question i have a story but i don't know if i have the audience your heart will tell you this is a story

that needs to be told yeah you're going to write a story which needs to be told you're not going to start writing a story which doesn't need to be stored so your story is the story which needs to be told and luckily for you new authors today there are so many publishers so many platforms don't be afraid even to self-publish because through social media you just don't know who will like what and remember diversity in our country is

our great strength because there's a long tail different people like different things tell your story in the most authentic voice you can find and bank on that i i want to ask you this when you share with people about your latest book any any um anecdotal incidents or comments that children gave you about the book so uh the hungry little sky monk says the latest but it's not yet been out yet it just got launched on

november 14th so that feedback will come but the children who have read it have loved it and are looking for the sky monster in the clouds uh so let's see if they find one uh it's too early for that but the earlier books the stranger series that i did uh starting with annual haircut day for some reason the character shinger shinima silly caught on and sometimes i heard a mother say that my son said he's not going to cut his hair at all and she

asked why and he said because i'm clingy clinic so i can't cut i'd have to have long hair so things like that and a child once i gave her a book of mine and she asked me and i was just giving it to her and she asked me and she came from a very low economic background she said do i have to return this you know somehow it was heartbreaking that she couldn't even think that somebody would she could

actually own a book so those are the kind of things that stay with you you know parents think that their kids have the abundance of everything how do you inculcate the value of giving or the value of a of a materialistic thing in your child um that it's you know you need to take care of what you have because you have a lot of

paradox of choice parents have that as well which causes a lot of problems how did you manage to go

about doing that so there are some things that i believe in giving in abundance right and books is one of them so don't hold back on giving books but at the same time remember especially young children need to go back to the same book again and again so even if you give a child 50 books don't worry if out of those 50 it is only 200 times okay because that's how they absolutely internalize some things so

just if you give 500 books it won't do the trick but books must be in abundance as long as the child is finding joy in them but other things see if we have over satiated desires then we forget to explore right we forget to explore so i know moms will do very ingenious things so say okay you want the next toy then you have to give some old toys away or we have to give some things back in

anything nobody has so much space to have all go down full of things so um so make these trade-offs uh in a creative way or ask your child what he or she wants to do because how many toys can you keep what would you like to do with the other ones and they'll come up with magical answers because remember if we have too much then we we find it much harder to appreciate what we have so we have to

find that balance we have to find that balance and sometimes children can help you find that creative balance themselves right but i think there was an opportunity to spread use it as an opportunity to share and the joy that comes back to you from that will reinforce your strategy yeah of course it's okay to get books ahead of your age to all parents i would say of course not for eight months old

but just be a little aware to make sure that your children your child is actually able to read properly to read text properly is to be able to decode it properly right so help them to become a little fluent in reading then actually it doesn't matter what books you give them because if you can read a paragraph really fluently in any language then you can decode more and more complex stories right so my father would now can read

pretty much fairly almost like those tiny chapter books because he has understood how to decode language so be with them till that space stage exposing them to the books they like don't worry what book it is once they are independent readers they will be driving what they should read and you should quickly get to that stage if you can luckily for you there's so much choice and diversity remember one child may hate reading the kind of books i write

and they love reading the kind of books from other authors likes some children may prefer manga comics it doesn't matter gets them to appreciate language and decode make meaning of what they are reading and diversity will if you put diversity in front of them they will choose what to do right yeah absolutely now that you say that you speak so many languages and you you are a mumbaiker so i must ask you the importance of reading to

kids in multiple languages you know i wish i wish see my mother we i got a lot of oral stories my grandmother

used to make us cry every night telling us really heart-wrenching stories of santa naneshwar which even today i can cry if i say them to my grandson get them get bilingual books and expose your child to as many languages as possible it's a real advantage for the future right and what do you think of audiobook

audiobooks are marvelous we are a country of oral storytellers right they see all these are complementary things physical books digital books audio books your grandmother's stories falling on your ear your mother's stories falling on your ear these are all complimentary things that create an ecosystem to sustain a reading life right so um all of them are complimentary and you need all of them last but not the least um

is for the tiny toddler in all of us okay so here's this little boy um about the age of my grandson who says mama look at the moon shining bright in the sky i want to go to the moon how i wish i could fly why does the moon grow big and then get so small and on some nights why is there no moon at all why can't i become tall and then sudden it's how why

can't i become small and then suddenly tall i don't understand this moon at all and then the mother goes on to say mama laughs and hugs me tired sleep now i'll tell you why another night but then i begin to think and think and i cannot sleep not one little week and here's where the story takes off maybe a hungry little sky monster wouldn't find anything to eat and the full moon so shiny and sonja looked like a yummy

treat so it is a little faithful to uh engage children in the backseat and beginning of the moon which is such a universal question little children ask and then once there's a problem then you can lead them into the science of it as well so that was my hope which is incredible thank you so much thank you so much for your time and it's an absolute pleasure chatting with you and i'm sure everybody trying to see your viewers

but to all your viewers i would say thank you and stay safe thank you thank you so much