

Jeff McQuillan writes an important letter to the Atlantic.

Article at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/09/love-reading-books-leisure-pleasure/598315/>

To the editor:

In Joe Pinsker's interesting overview of what's known about lifelong readers ("Why Some People Become Lifelong Readers", September, 2019), Daniel Willingham claims that children first need to be "fluent decoders" to become good readers.

While it is true that good readers are also typically good decoders (i.e. able to convert letters into sounds), research shows that the arrow runs in the opposite direction: You become a good decoder by doing a lot of reading. That's why studies of kids taught to identify "individual speech sounds" in words (thought to build "phonemic awareness") find they do better on tests of speech sounds, but not on reading comprehension.

By all means parents should follow Willingham's advice to read to their children. But there's no need for "instructional" word play or other linguistic gymnastics during storytime.

Jeff McQuillan
Senior Research Associate
Center for Educational Development
Los Angeles, CA

To repeat: **"You become a good decoder by doing a lot of reading. That's why studies of kids taught to identify 'individual speech sounds' in words (thought to build 'phonemic awareness') find they do better on tests of speech sounds, but not on reading comprehension. "**

For a look at the research, see McQuillan's "Reading Tests That Don't Measure Reading" at: <http://backseatlinguist.com/blog/reading-tests-that-dont-measure-reading-corrected/>

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