

Real Men Read

*Wythe Elementary School
Hampton, Virginia*

Book enthusiasts from across the community got students psyched about reading during Wythe Elementary School's Real Men Read event last November.

The school began the Real Men Read program five years ago to help Wythe become fully accredited. Because of its popularity, the reading activity continued, even after the school received accreditation two years ago. Last year the event drew more than 50 parents and community leaders to the school to share their favorite books.

The school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) began planning the event months in advance. Real Men Read is held each November on *National Young Readers' Day*, sponsored by Pizza Hut. At the start of the school year, the ATP sent out letters, e-mails, and made phone calls to members of the community asking them to volunteer. Two weeks before the event administrators sent fliers home with students, reminding them about the event.

Meanwhile, the parent involvement facilitator ordered any books requested and researched lesson plans and biographies associated with them. Teachers received the supplemental information about a week before the event, so they could plan classroom events around the reader's presentation.

On November 13, 2007, the volunteer readers split their time between an early morning session and one immediately after lunch. Each guest read a book to his assigned class. For example, the fire chief from Hampton University read *Fire Storm* for fifth-graders; one reader from the Virginia Living Museum, read her own book, *To Smell Like a Snake*, for third-graders. After each presentation, students had a chance to ask their guests more about the books they read and about the role of reading in their everyday lives. At the end of the session, teachers presented readers with thank-you cards from the students.

Many readers are eager to repeat—one volunteer has read all five years. Some public service departments, such as the sheriff and firefighters, send readers every year, as do the Boy Scouts. Readers from local museums and parks often dress in costume to enhance their reading.

Although there were female readers, the emphasis, as it always has been, was on men as readers and role models, and the important role men play in their children's education. The staff and administration of Wythe is particularly aware of this because many of its students live in homes where the mother or grandmother is the main caretaker.

The readers' influence extended beyond the November event as teachers used the books as springboards into classroom discussions and writing assignments. Classes would post these assignments on bulletin boards in the hallways after they completed them. The organizers reported that students are often more enthusiastic about reading and checking books out of the library after the event.

Real Men Read is a win-win practice, as everyone benefits. "Thank you for the opportunity to get to know students and share a book," said one reader.

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