



Hal's Reading Diary ? July 2008

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Hal's Diary and Baby Diary

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Roger Mills is thrilled that Hal has read a whole book by himself.

Hal is nearly seven and a half and has read a whole book by himself! Reading now seems fun and bribery is a further incentive. Hal's father, psychodynamic counsellor, **Roger Mills**, explains.

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It is 6.30 on a lovely sunny May evening and I am in the garden watching something that is quite new in our family life ? Hal sitting on a rug reading to himself. Since I am not reading with him I can't be sure that he is getting it all right, and I expect there is a fair bit of guesswork at times, but what seems important is the simple fact of him doing it at all. A couple of months ago this would have been unthinkable. Hal's attitude to reading has always been that it is a chore, hard work, not fun. What's more he wouldn't have had the confidence to think that he could read something on his own. His attitude has often been defeatist. 'I'll never be able to read' was a lament we seemed to be hearing almost weekly.

But now all this seems to have changed. This new development started off a couple of weeks back. I was away on a work trip, but I heard about it from Hal in a phone conversation one evening. 'I was sitting downstairs with nothing to do,' he told me clearly brimming with pride, 'and I was feeling bored so I thought I would read a book. And do you know what Dad it was really fun. I read the whole book all by myself.'

Jo's version of events was slightly different. That morning she had been getting very irritated with Hal ? serial failure to get dressed despite repeated asking being the main offence. In the end Jo snapped. Hal got dressed in a hurry and then slunk off downstairs. Knowing that we are always trying to get him to read, and being a canny little fellow, Hal then worked out that a spell of unsolicited solo reading might win Mum back and so he settled down to **Percy and the Pirates** and, rather to his own surprise, was able to polish off the whole book in about 25 minutes. Jo, who had been feeling guilty about blowing up with Hal in the first place, was delighted when Hal announced what he had done and her guilt-pride combi resulted in a trip to the toy shop after school.

The outcome of all this is that Hal has become much more enthusiastic about reading. Partly, probably mostly, this is because he knows there are now rewards to be had for reading. In order to encourage his budding bibliophilia we have set up a point system ? read x number of pages and you earn points, 25 points gets you a small toy. This has clearly got him going and he demands outrageously generous point allocations after each reading session.

But reading isn't a purely mercenary operation for Hal. Hal is quite definitely not a person who will do something that he doesn't get fun out of, and whatever the rewards he wouldn't be reading if he didn't also enjoy it. And we aren't complaining about this. Reading driven by fun and rewards? If it gets Hal reaching for a book every day we can live with that. And Hal does love stories. Perhaps it's not too naïve to hope that before too long the pleasure of the book will be the only reward he needs.

Percy and the Pirates by Russell Punter, ill. Kate Sheppard, is published by Usborne (978 0 7460 7766 5, £4.99 hbk).



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