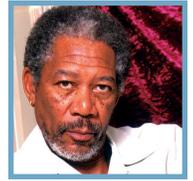


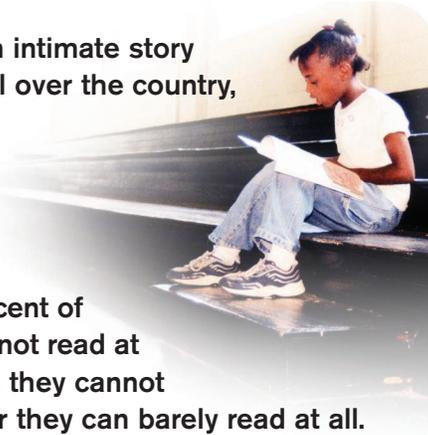
A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

narrated by
Morgan Freeman



Community Discussion Guide

A Tale of Two Schools is an intimate story about a national problem. All over the country, across all ethnic lines and socioeconomic levels, schools are struggling with their most basic job – teaching kids to read. Research shows that 36 percent of American fourth graders do not read at a “basic” level, which means they cannot understand a simple story or they can barely read at all.



At Walton Elementary in Fort Worth, Texas, and at Bearden Elementary in Sumner, Mississippi, we watch as well-intentioned educators – like teachers and principals and administrators nationwide – work to overcome multiple obstacles in their quest to teach kids like Tavares Gross and Kathleena Lee to read.



What can we learn from them about what works – and what doesn't?

These kids deserve better. And if these kids don't get an adequate education, they will not do better.

Reggie Barnes, Superintendent, Sumner, Mississippi

This is a national problem. Forty-four million Americans are functionally illiterate. That's 22 percent of our adult population. That is a sin in a country that's this rich.

Jim Barksdale, Former CEO of Netscape

For more information about A Tale of Two Schools, please visit www.pbs.org/twoschools.

And to find out everything you ever wanted to know about reading, please visit www.ReadingRockets.org.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Tavares Gross seems like a bright, energetic kid. Why is learning to read such a challenge for him? Why do some children seem to be able to just pick up a book and read?

2. Jill Todd seems to struggle with teaching reading until she receives training from the Project Read team. Louisa Moats, former National Institutes of Health reading researcher, tells us that teaching reading is rocket science. What makes teaching reading such a challenge?

3. The community surrounding Bearden Elementary closed three libraries during the school year. How does a lack of community support affect kids learning to read? What can communities do to make sure their schools are successful?

4. Tavares and Kathleena are not the first kids to struggle with reading; many kids don't catch on. What are the ramifications of continuing to allow kids to slide through without learning to read? Whose responsibility is it to make a change?

5. What are the differences between Walton Elementary and Bearden Elementary? Does Bearden face greater challenges? What are they doing that schools in similar situations could model?

6. At Walton, 80% of kids passed the state reading assessment – not excelling, simply passing. And 20% failed. What can schools do to make sure all of their students read well? What seem to be the weaknesses in Walton's current program?

7. State reform efforts played a key role in Walton's success and in Bearden's accelerated efforts to improve. What can communities do to advocate state support for improving reading instruction in their schools?

