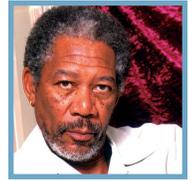


A TALE OF TWO SCHOOLS

narrated by
Morgan Freeman



Teachers' Discussion Guide

For 85 to 90 percent of poor readers, prevention and early intervention programs that combine instruction in phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies, provided by well-trained teachers, can increase reading skills to average reading levels.

G. Reid Lyon, Ph.D., NIH, 1997



Like a lot of people, Bearden Elementary teacher Jill Todd underestimated the complexity of teaching reading, and the reality of a classroom was overwhelming to her. She had a group of 23 children with a wide range of reading levels, and she had no training in handling such a challenge.

Teachers are charged with discovering the proper balance of instructional methods that work for each individual student. They also must find successful ways to coordinate literacy efforts, since successful reading instruction involves others in the school, community, and home. And because good teachers continually hone their expertise, teachers must attend to their own professional development. As an educational professional, the teacher is responsible for the enormously challenging task of finding the magical mix that works for each child.

Teaching at Bearden is nothing like I expected. I don't feel 100 percent prepared to go in a classroom and teach reading.

Jill Todd, Second Grade Teacher

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. Jill Todd had just completed a degree in elementary education, yet she didn't know how to teach reading. Who is responsible for making sure teachers are ready to teach?
2. At Walton Elementary, lead teacher Vanessa Kemp was devoted to making sure each teacher had everything they needed to teach every child to read. When a school isn't lucky enough to have a Vanessa Kemp, what can teachers do to get what they need to do their jobs well? What could Jill Todd have done differently?
3. Both Walton and Bearden used packaged reading programs that they purchased from an outside vendor. But a lot of schools across the country create their own reading programs, using a combination of materials from different sources. What are the pros and cons of using packaged reading curriculums?
4. Even though Bearden had purchased a comprehensive, research-based reading curriculum, the children there weren't reading well. What are other elements that go into creating a successful reading program? What could your school do to improve its reading program?
5. Ms. Todd's kids got a lot of reading instruction but very little writing instruction. What can teachers do to incorporate more writing into daily lesson plans?
6. Ms. Todd experienced great improvement in her teaching skills over the course of the year, but she felt bad about not being better trained for the first part of the school year. What yardsticks can teachers use to gauge their own success?
7. Both Ms. Morgan and Ms. Jackson at Walton and Ms. Todd at Bearden struggled with involving parents in their students' education. What's the best way for schools to elicit support from the parents and greater community?