

Reading One Million— A Heyday for Bookworms

Because one million is a BIG number, “million mania” can lead to some BIG reading projects. What better way to link reading and math than a reading incentive program based on the number 1,000,000—in pursuit of a collective goal such as one million pages or one million minutes of reading.

Since students must quantify and record their reading totals, an abundance of data flows into the school on a daily basis. Visitors to schools that are undertaking a “million” reading incentive may be greeted by large “thermometer” graphs. In other schools, bar graphs or pictographs lining the corridors communicate the progress of each grade or class. Here is nothing less than the essence of what elementary education should be: great quantities of reading, and equal doses of mathematics used as a tool for communicating real information.

Many “million” reading programs involve parents and siblings, and some even reach out to the greater community. Most “million” reading-incentive programs have involved an entire school, but you can easily adapt them to a single class by cutting the goal from one million to a lower (but still impressive) number.

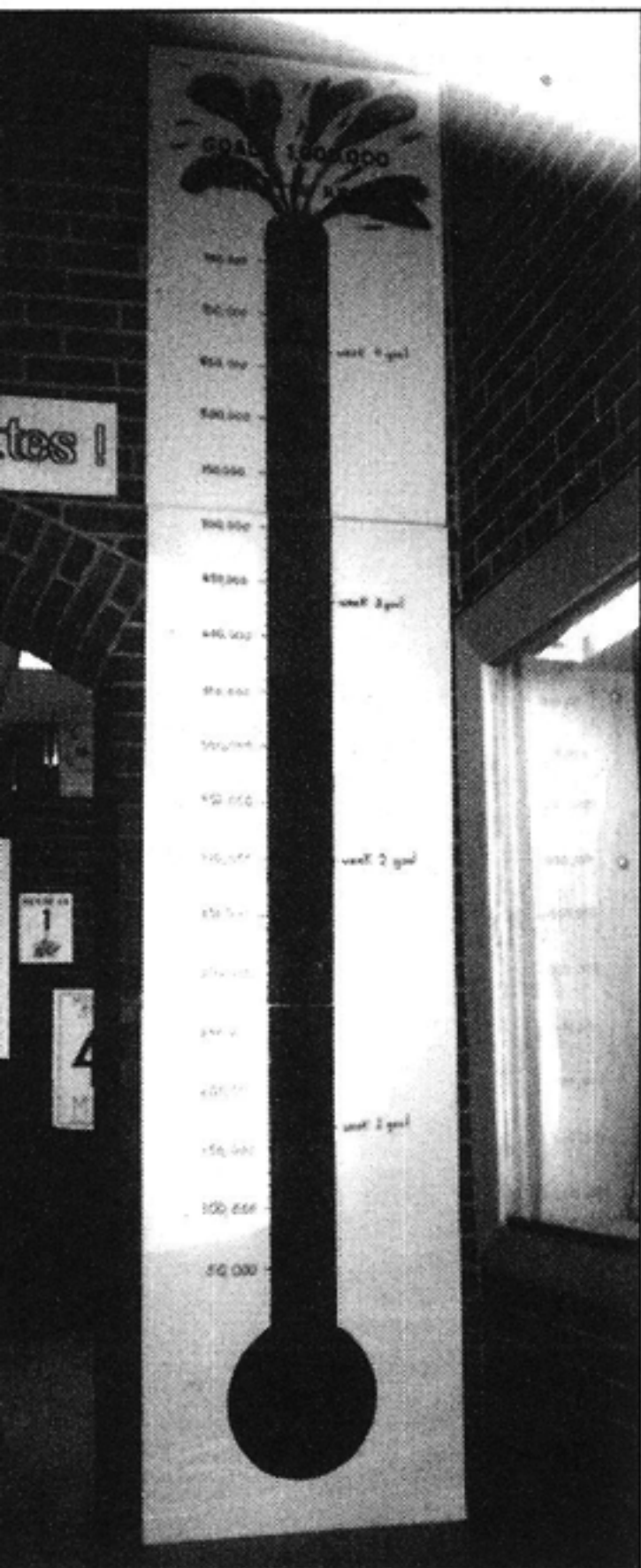
Reading Goal—40 Minutes Per Day

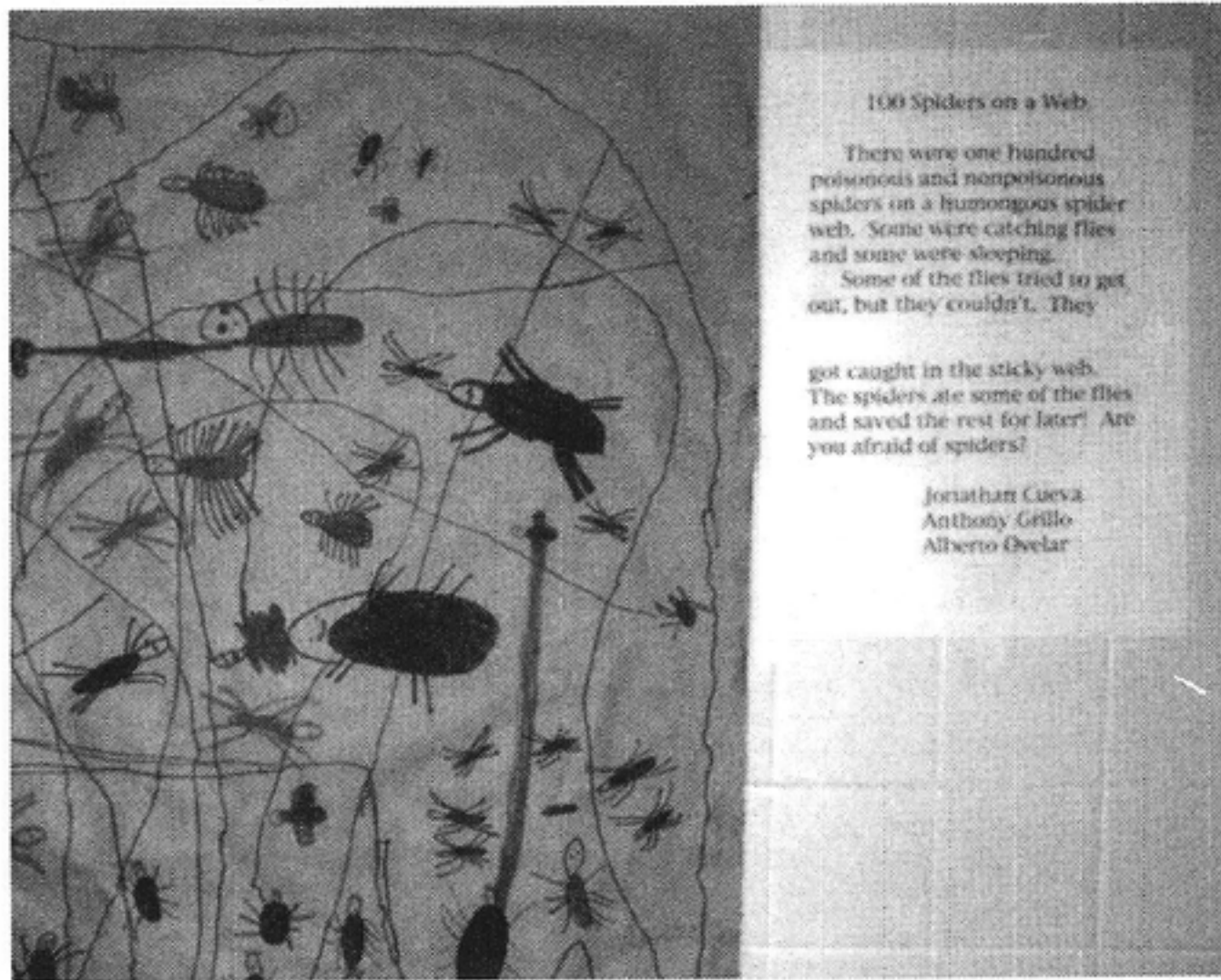
**John Pettibone School
New Milford, Connecticut**

Anyone visiting John Pettibone School in March, 1995, would have known immediately that something special was going on. Corridors were ablaze with signs, charts, graphs, and artwork—all attesting to a student body that had turned off the televisions and turned on to books. “SPEED LIMIT 40 M.P.D.” shouted signs designed to resemble highway speed signs. But in this case the speed was not a maximum traveling pace but a minimum reading pace: 40 minutes per day. Each morning students were abuzz with talk—not about sit-coms they had seen but about minutes of reading they had done!

Outside classrooms, bulletin boards displayed the titles and covers of books the children had just completed. Taped to the wall outside each room, large envelopes were stuffed with “reading coupons” on which readers had recorded their daily totals. Fourth and fifth graders collected the coupons each day, tallied the amounts, and graphed the data.

John Pettibone’s “March to a Million” was launched March 1st. On the 25th of March, the school principal beat a drum over the P.A. system to announce the school’s achievement of its goal.





“Hall of Hundreds”

**Rolling Valley Elementary School
Springfield, Virginia**

Some schools have encouraged writing activities along with their millions theme. At Rolling Valley Elementary School, students started with a more manageable number—100—and created a “Hall of Hundreds.” On display were illustrations of 100 of a given object or category, along with stories and poetry about those things. Math, reading, and writing rolled into one fun project!

Flying Higher

**Bradford Elementary School
Pueblo, Colorado**

In one of the most impressive collective reading projects we know, fourth grade teacher Elaine Madrid enlisted the school principal, her teaching colleagues, and eventually the entire community, challenging them to join the “Bradford Is Worth a Million Community Reading Challenge.” As a novel way of inviting people to join the project, students held a balloon launch. Invitations were tied to helium balloons (illegal in some communities), encouraging community members to come to Bradford to read aloud to small groups of students. Principal Carmen Peralta declared that

15 minutes of every school day would be devoted to reading, and students read outside school as well. A large graph was set up, and students colored in a book-stack graph to show their progress toward reading a million pages.

Once the goal was achieved, some students wondered how high 1,000,000 pages would stack if piled on top of one another. After taking measurements and making computations, Mrs. Madrid’s class estimated the stack of one million pages would reach 290 feet in the air.

To help students understand such a height, a real estate company came to the rescue with its own balloon—a hot-air balloon. On the day David Schwartz visited Bradford, the Remax balloon also arrived. Its mission: to fly 290 feet above the school grounds. The fourth grade students had measured a ribbon 290 feet long. They attached one end to the balloon’s basket, and as the balloon headed skyward, the ribbon unfurled to mark the height of one million pages of reading.

Several weeks later, Mrs. Madrid’s class was invited to the Colorado State House and recognized on the floor of the state Senate for their reading achievement. Bradford had truly risen to new heights!



Reading and Math Do Mix

Visitacion Valley Middle School
San Francisco, California

After hearing David Schwartz speak at a math conference, one middle school math teacher started a million-minute reading incentive at her school. Reading teachers found themselves doing mathematics in their classrooms, while math teachers found themselves stressing the importance of reading. Of course, the math teachers found ways to incorporate the reading project into their own curriculum. Students computed average minutes read per week, average cumulative minutes read by the different grades, percent of projected goals achieved, and percent of the final goal. Data were entered into computers and used to draw line graphs whose slopes were analyzed to determine reading rates. Strips of adding machine tape, one millimeter for every minute read, were mounted in the hallway. The school even set up a web site for interested parties to track their progress!

Read to Rise

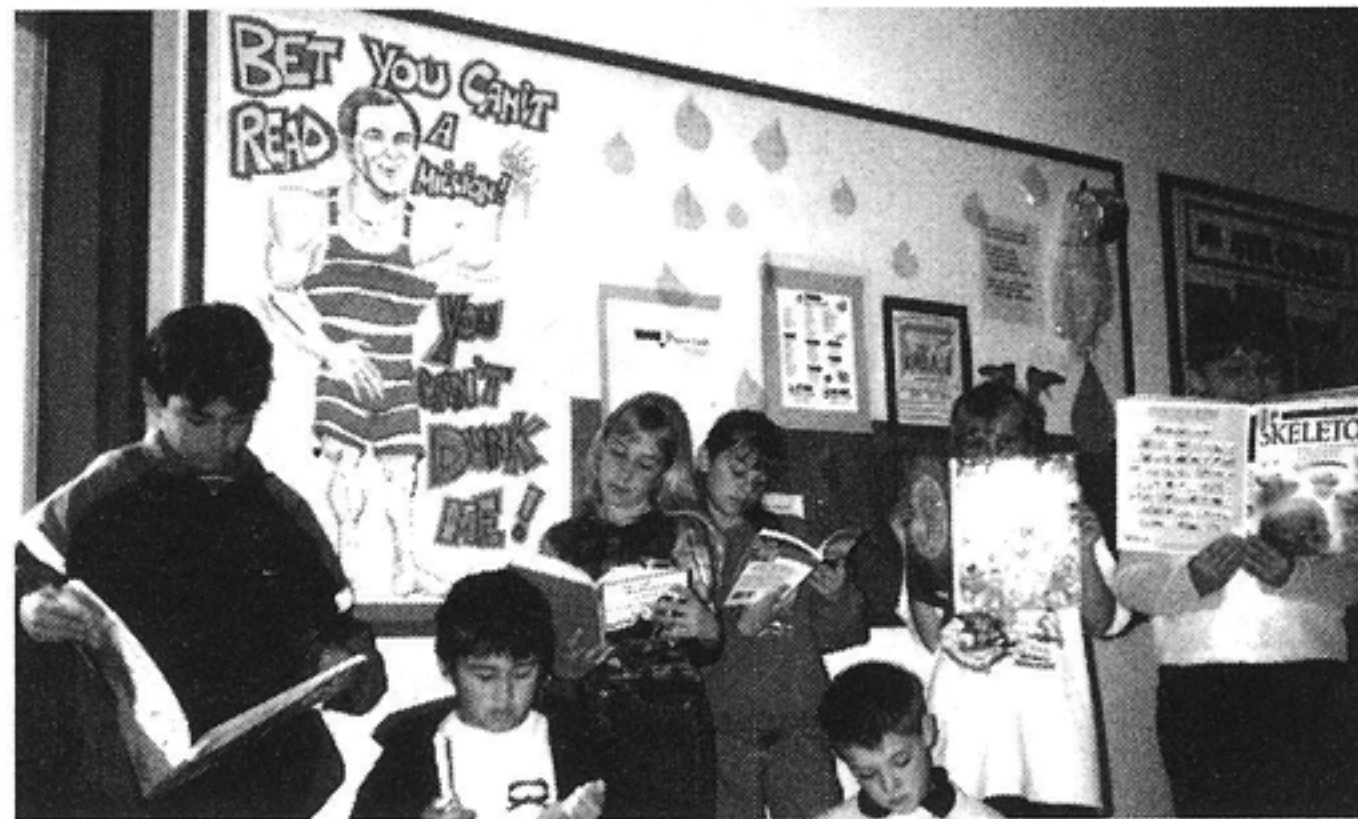
E. R. Taylor School
San Francisco, California

San Francisco businessman Bruce McKinney offered this school an unusual incentive to read: \$10,000 to buy books for the school library if the 350 students would read, collectively, 1,000,000 pages. The school accepted the challenge, and a giant bookworm was constructed to document the reading progress. As completion neared, McKinney

upped the stakes: \$25,000 if students could read 2.5 million pages. By the end of one school year they had reached one million, and students voted to keep reading. As Mr. McKinney said, students who read will "rise in life, rise in their expectations, and rise to become college bound."

See Us Dunk Mr. See

Arroyo Seco Elementary School
Livermore, California



Here was an unusual reading incentive project—at least for school principal Mr. See. Each student was encouraged to read 1,000 pages to gain admission into the 1,000 Pages Club. For each page read, students "earned" two drops of water toward a future dunk tank. The 500 students in the school would thereby generate 1,000,000 drops of water. Students graphed their progress, and eventually they got to dunk Mr. See. Their poem tells the story:

*You add water by the drop
'Till the tank is at its top.
You can add two drops for every page you read.
We will mark it on our gauge—
Keeping track at every stage
'Till we've counted up the million drops we need.
When the tank has reached its limit,
He'll be ready then to swim it.
We'll be watching as we soak our Mr. See.
But the knowledge that we gain—
Reading will expand the brain
And we'll get a googol fun—and all for free!*

