



Deborah Branch, MA, is the K-8 reading specialist and a Shared Reading Project coordinator at the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB). She also coordinates the Family Literacy Pack Project and is involved in video production at CSDB. Branch welcomes questions and comments about the literacy packs at dbranch@csdb.org.

Right: Families find fun interactive activities in every Family Learning Pack.

literacy in a bag

colorado school for the deaf sends reading home

By Deborah Branch

“**M**y son is so excited every time a new pack arrives—it’s like Christmas morning!” one mom exclaimed. Families have found that the Family Literacy Packs are an effective way to become directly involved in their child’s learning and improve sign language skills. This involvement is essential because families play a vital role in promoting positive attitudes toward reading, which may in turn boost reading achievement.

To assist parents with deaf or hard of hearing children who may need help supporting their child’s learning, the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind developed Family Literacy Packs. These literacy packs, available to families within the state of Colorado, provide fun, interactive activities that help parents support their children’s literacy while also helping to build family connections.

Each literacy pack is a kid-friendly backpack filled with a collection of children’s books and a variety of other literacy materials, including a DVD on which a deaf storyteller

presents the material in American Sign Language, addresses vocabulary, asks questions about the story, and encourages further learning on related topics. Each literacy pack centers on a theme. There are 24 themes and four literacy packs devoted to each theme in circulation. One copy of each theme has been adapted for children who are deaf-blind, blind, or visually impaired. Spanish translations are in development.



Photo courtesy of Jeanette Mares

Families use their literacy packs in a variety of ways. Some families use them independently. Others use the literacy packs to supplement and extend the Shared Reading Project, a program sponsored by the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University that promotes literacy through providing reading materials and tutors for deaf children and their families. The literacy packs have multiple benefits, including:

- Reaching families who are not able to attend school-based activities
- Providing materials for use when the time is convenient
- Supplying materials appropriate for a wide range of children's age levels
- Assuring access to high-quality literature
- Offering literacy activities that can be enjoyed by all family members
- Demonstrating sign language translation of stories
- Promoting daily interaction through books between parents and children
- Enabling families to become directly involved in their child's learning
- Reinforcing the role of the parent as the child's teacher
- Facilitating sign language acquisition by all family members

"It really gave our hearing family a wonderful perspective of deaf culture and the Deaf community," commented one respondent in the evaluation form users are asked to complete. "I liked the projects and the added interaction I get to have with my son," wrote another satisfied respondent. "I liked how everything worked together," reported a third respondent.

Literacy packs give parents the tools and structure to support their children's literacy and language development and the opportunity to share quality time with their children. They provide high-quality books and DVDs to make the stories accessible to all, encourage families to improve their sign language skills while having fun, and empower parents to teach their children.



Photo courtesy of Deborah Branch

A Closer Look: What's in a Family Literacy Pack?

One of the themes of the literacy packs is that of family. Books and materials in this pack center on the importance of family in our lives.

Books include:

- *What Grandmas Do Best/What Grandpas Do Best* by Laura Numeroff
- *What Mommies Do Best/What Daddies Do Best* by Laura Numeroff
- *Emma's Yucky Brother* by Jean Little
- *When I am Old with You* by Angela Johnson
- *I Love You the Purplest* by Barbara Joosse

Selected literacy materials include:

- Family Photo Album (including a disposable camera)
- Family brochure
- Family Sign Language Bingo Cards
- Family Tree worksheet
- Peek-a-boo House

