



# PRIME TIME FAMILY READING TIME

## *What is Prime Time?*

*Prime Time Family Reading Time*® is an innovative family reading program designed for low-income families in communities where student reading scores do not meet Nebraska state standards. The six-week program is led by a storyteller and a humanities scholar. The storyteller begins each week by reading aloud from award-winning children's books. Storytelling is followed by a discussion among parents and children led by the humanities scholar with questions that encourage critical thinking and develop connections between storybooks and real-life situations. *Prime Time* is offered in two formats: monolingual for English-speaking and bilingual for Spanish-speaking families. In the bilingual format, all books are presented and discussed in both Spanish and English.

## *What are the goals of Prime Time?*

The goal of *Prime Time* is to encourage parents and children to bond around the activity of reading rather than passively watching television during prime time hours. It teaches parents and children to read and discuss important topics such as fairness, greed, and honor. It helps parents and children learn how to select books and become active users of their libraries, encouraging families to view reading and education as a fun and important part of their lives. *Prime Time* fosters high academic expectations and achievement for children in low-literacy, low-income families. It also encourages parents to continue their own education, which subsequently enhances their employment opportunities.

## *What is the history of Prime Time?*

*Prime Time Family Reading Time*® was created by the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities in 1991 and, since then, has reached nearly 29,500 participants nationally. In 2001, *Prime Time* gained national sponsorship from the American Library Association.

In April of 2002, the **Nebraska Humanities Council (NHC)** and Lincoln City Libraries co-sponsored Nebraska's first *Prime Time* series. In 2004, the NHC developed a Spanish/English bilingual series based on Louisiana's English-only model. Thanks to generous funding from the **State of Nebraska** and local organizations, bilingual *Prime Time* programs have been offered in Columbus, Crete, Gering, Gibbon, Grand Island, Hastings, Lexington, Lincoln, Norfolk, Schuyler, Scottsbluff, South Omaha, and South Sioux City. In 2007, the NHC began sponsoring English-only *Prime Time* programs.

For more information please contact Erika Hamilton, state coordinator of *Prime Time Family Reading Time*®, at (402) 474-2131 ext. 104 or [erika@nebraskahumanities.org](mailto:erika@nebraskahumanities.org).

## ***Why is a bilingual Prime Time needed in Nebraska?***

The Nebraska Humanities Council provides the bilingual version of *Prime Time Family Reading Time*® to the many communities throughout Nebraska that have seen an influx of Spanish-speaking workers in the past decade. Studies show that Hispanic students in Nebraska are less likely to graduate from high school than other ethnic groups, and are far less likely to go to college than their Anglo counterparts. The need for *Prime Time* is critical for these communities.

Recent studies have shown that:

- 1) The high school dropout rate for Mexican-Americans is almost 31 percent and rises to 61 percent for Mexican immigrants;
- 2) One of the most important predictors of success for Hispanic immigrant children is the ability to read, write, and speak English;
- 3) Children who cannot read proficiently by age 9 are likely to struggle academically for the rest of their lives;
- 4) Children who grow up in a family where reading is a daily activity are more likely to succeed in school and graduate from high school; and
- 5) Nebraska is classified as one of 19 “new growth” states in terms of immigrant populations, particularly due to the increase in the Hispanic population over the past decade.

In a 2007 survey conducted by a University of Nebraska at Omaha research team, 100 percent of the Spanish-speaking parents indicated that *Prime Time* changed the way they read and discussed books with their children. Of those parents, 92 percent said they participated in reading activities more often with their children and 83 percent agreed that the program enhanced relationships within their family. When asked to elaborate, they said *Prime Time* encouraged them to spend more time reading together as a family, to discuss books more often, and to spend more time together doing other fun activities.

Evaluations of more than a decade of *Prime Time* in Louisiana show a 99 percent retention rate for attendance at the final program session compared to the initial session. 100 percent of the families who attend programs at libraries have library cards by *Prime Time's* conclusion. In the 90-day, follow-up evaluation of the program, 74 percent of respondents could name the title of the last book they read with their children, and 88 percent of those were able to name a title not on the *Prime Time* reading list, an indication that these families have found new books to read together and are using their library as a continuing educational resource.

The Nebraska Humanities Council is collaborating with the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, Nebraska Library Commission, local public libraries and schools, and other local organizations that serve Hispanics to successfully implement bilingual *Prime Time*. The program begins in the early evening so families can come to the library directly after work. To remove primary barriers to the consistent participation of low-income families, we also provide a nutritious dinner for the families and preschool reading activities for children ages 3 to 5.