

When I first heard of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, which was several years before my book was selected, I was delighted. For someone in her position and with her resources to do something like that for children was so good and so important. Of course, when my book was chosen I was doubly delighted. What author wouldn't be?

When I say important I think mainly of three things. The first is, what a treat for a child to get a new book to look at, to listen to and/or read - a present a month special for her or him. The second is how it helps children learn to read, which is best and easiest if it starts well before entering school. Early exposure to books shows children how books work: covers, pages that turn etc. And hearing the language that comes out of the books and seeing wonderful illustrations builds a background of knowledge that will come into play later. AND books help build attention spans. The story doesn't come out all at once. It comes page by page.

But there is something else. Snuggling together at bedtime to read a story can be a moment of calm and togetherness that is harder to find these days when even children's lives have become busier. Being able to shut out the rest of the day in bed together with a book - what a valuable time. And maybe, just maybe, it will even help the child be more relaxed and ready to learn the next day in school.

As for my book, "Shh! Bears Sleeping," this is the back story. At around Christmas time an illustrator friend sends out paintings of all sorts in his picture book style. Some years ago one came showing a young bear shoveling off a frozen pond. It was lovely to look at but when I saw it, I thought, really bears are sleeping in the winter. Out of that came, "Ssh! Bears", my only nonfiction picture book.

Sincerely,
David Martin