

telling tales

Kids improve their skill at reading aloud through program at Milford library

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Whether it is books about Junie B. Jones, Arthur, the Berenstain bears or the little engine that could, Grant loves to read at Milford Memorial Library.

But no matter how hard you try, Grant probably won't look at the pictures or the words himself. He would rather people read to him.

Library special programs coordinator Amy Clark tells people it is because he has bad eyesight.

But that's just an excuse. Although Grant loves to listen to stories, the real reason he doesn't read himself is because he can't.

Grant is a dog.

The leader of the library program "Tales for Tails," Grant is a registered therapy dog that listens to kids read so they can practice their skills.

"It's cute. Some of the little kids try to show him the pictures," said Clark, Grant's owner.

The 9-year-old American Staffordshire terrier was once a competitive obedience dog. Now the retired pup spends each Monday, Friday and every third Saturday behind Clark's desk.

"He is the most tolerant dog you'll ever meet," Clark said. "He loves children."

He's not a picky reader either.

"There's a rumor going around the elementary school that he doesn't like stories about cats, but that's not true,"



Colin O'Connor, 6, practices reading out loud while Grant, a 9-year-old American Staffordshire terrier, listens at Milford Memorial Library. Kids enjoy reading to the mild-mannered dog, and some even show him the pictures in their books.





Sign up

Milford Memorial Library is taking appointments for kids to come read to Grant the library dog on Mondays and Fridays when he stops by the library. If your child is having trouble reading aloud and would like to read to someone in a quiet, relaxed setting, call the library at (712) 338-4643.

When Grant spends every third Saturday at the library, the open read time is available for anyone to sit down with the pooch to tell him a tale. Even kids who don't struggle with reading aloud still love to tell Grant a story.

Clark said.

This summer Grant worked with about 20 children during 6-week sessions, and he will work with more during the school year.

Most kids that come to Grant have trouble with their reading skills.

"Kids that are having difficulty reading out loud, because they don't want to practice or they're embarrassed, it's easier to read to Grant," Clark said. "I think it's non-judgmental, unconditional acceptance."

Results are evident.

"I've seen some kids who sign up at

the beginning barely read, and by the end they're doing very well," Clark said. "I want them to become more comfortable reading and to really enjoy reading."

Since reading is such a big part of daily life, Clark said enjoying the task is a must. How better to groom a child to enjoy reading than to place them next to a furry, lovable pet like Grant?

"They really like him," Clark said. "A lot of them are pretty excited to see him."

Some sit on a chair next to the pup. Some sit right in his bed with him. Some even put the 50 pound dog right in their laps.

Kids aren't the only ones who like the dog; adult patrons pay him visits as well.

"I think they like him," Clark said. "We have a lot of adults come to see him too."

The dog is so quiet, well-behaved and sleepy that many people don't even notice him at first. Some days Clark said people will sit by her desk for hours before they realize that Grant is a real dog.

"Tales for Tails" started last summer, shortly after Clark came to work at the Milford library. She had seen library dog programs in her previous home of Portland, OR. Grant was already a certified therapy dog, but with a baby at home, Clark didn't have any time to take the dog out.

"I got to thinking, what if he came to work with me?" Clark said. "He loves children."

Library leaders decided it was a great idea, and the program has been a success so far. Clark plans to have Grant come to the library as long as he enjoys it. Judging by the contented look in the dog's dark eyes while children read to him, that will probably be for a long time to come. □