

THRASS UK Launches its Amazing New Family Reading Project in Johannesburg, South Africa

THRASS UK has already earned a reputation for producing highly successful innovative resources for helping children to read and spell as part of its widely-acclaimed THRASS phonics programme. Today it is launching its amazing new THRASS SING-A-LONG Family Reading Project which uses 44 songs that parents and others can sing with children to explain the 44 sounds and 120 main spelling choices of English, while at the same time having an enormous amount of fun.

Everyone knows just how important it is for children to develop sound literacy skills from an early age and it is widely accepted that parents can play a very important role in helping them to do this. However, many parents, and also teachers and teaching assistants, are not confident with identifying the one-, two- and three-letter spelling choices in English words and saying the sounds that they represent. It is also widely accepted that music, and in particular singing, can have a wide range of benefits for children, the most important of which, in the context of teaching literacy, is that it can accelerate learning and improve the memory. In addition, when combined with movement, it can also help to combat obesity and increase general physical fitness.

With this in mind, British educational psychologist, Alan Davies, an expert in synthetic phonics who has pioneered the extremely successful THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) phonics programme, has been working with a truly international team – a music specialist in South Africa, an artist in Australia, and a computer programmer and Alan's wife, an experienced teacher and teacher-trainer, in the UK - to develop the resources that make up the THRASS SING-A-LONG Family Reading Project.

The Project revolves around 44 songs that teachers and parents can sing with children to explain and help them understand the 44 sounds and 120 main spelling choices of English, with each song focusing on one of the 44 sounds and its main spelling choices. The songs have been written so that they will be real fun for both children and adults to sing. They all have wonderful imaginative titles such as "The moon fell out of the sky", "A great big gorilla" and "You don't get pandas in Africa", and they also have really memorable tunes.

But the THRASS SING-A-LONG Family Reading Project doesn't only encourage parents and teachers to sing with children, it also encourages them to move to music with them. The 44 SING-A-LONG songs are ideal for this as they are all written in different musical styles and dance rhythms from around the world such as African Round, blues, Charleston, Hawaiian, Irish Dance, jazz, ragtime, reggae, twist and waltz.

The songs are featured throughout all the THRASS SING-A-LONG Family Reading Resources, which comprise a 96-page hard-back book, an interactive book and audio CD, each with vocal and instrumental tracks, and a colouring book. The Resources are all really easy to use and parents, grandparents, pre-school staff and teachers can use them to teach speaking, listening, reading and spelling skills. Older children can also use them to teach their younger brothers and sisters. The SING-A-LONG Interactive Book is an amazing piece of software featuring interactive page-turning and text highlighted in time with the vocal or instrumental soundtrack. Teachers and parents are encouraged to sing-a-long with the tracks until children are so familiar with the songs that they are able to point underneath the words and read them, and also name the spelling choices for each of the 44 English sounds.

Later in the year a sheet music book and a MOVE-A-LONG WITH SING-A-LONG DVD will be available. There will also be THRASS MOVE-A-LONG WITH SING-A-LONG workshops to give parents and teachers group experience of singing, dancing and performing actions to the 44 songs in South Africa, the UK and the Caribbean, as well as SING-A-LONG concerts.

Everyone who has heard the SING-A-LONG songs has been really impressed and THRASS UK has been inundated with requests for the SING-A-LONG theme song. Reactions to a pilot MOVE-A-LONG WITH SING-A-LONG Workshop held recently in Johannesburg were extremely positive and the children taking part in tonight's launch have all enjoyed rehearsing the songs and movements so much that their parents have reported that all they have been hearing at home is the SING-A-LONG songs!

In South Africa, Absa Bank, part of the Barclays Group, and Pritt are the founding principal sponsors of the THRASS SING-A-LONG Family Reading Project, and major construction company, Murray & Roberts, is to become an associate sponsor of the Project in early childhood development centres in Soweto and elsewhere.

The THRASS SING-A-LONG Family Reading Project will be launched later today at Holy Rosary School, Johannesburg, where children from 12 schools will give the world premiere of the SING-A-LONG songs. The event will be attended by VIPs and all the international delegates to the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Conference currently being hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand. Together with parents, teachers and children from schools in the area, they will have the chance to see the tremendous potential of the THRASS SING-A-LONG Family Reading Project and Resources for helping children to develop their literacy skills, while at the same time experiencing the benefits of group singing and having an enormous amount of fun.

The THRASS extensive picture-based training website for schools and parents with easy access to a wide range of resources and support materials and extensive evidence of the widespread success of THRASS is at www.thrass.co.uk

For information about the SING-A-LONG resources, visit www.thrass.co.uk/list2008.htm

For more information about the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Project, visit www.talktogether.co.za and www.thrass.co.uk/talktogether.htm

For details of THRASS Professional Development Courses that are held regularly in the UK, Europe, West and Southern Africa and elsewhere, visit www.thrass.co.uk/courses.htm

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