

# The 30 Million Word Gap

## Words Heard Per Hour

**Children in poverty hear 615**  
**Children in the middle class hear 1,251**  
**Children of professionals hear 2,153**

**Result: By age 3, children from wealthier families typically have heard 30 million more words than have children from low-income families.**

**The vast gap in the amount of words and language heard by poor children and their wealthier peers from birth until age three leads to developmental delays that then predict a tougher climb to literacy. (Hart & Risley, Annie E. Casey Foundation 1995)**

### **Words are the Fuel that Runs the Brain.**

Children of **mothers who read to them** frequently have larger vocabularies than kids who are not read to.

A typical middle-class child enters 1<sup>st</sup> grade with 1,000 – 1,700 hours of **one-on-one picture book reading**, compared with an average of just 25 hours for a child from a low-income family

**Higher SES (socio-economic status)** mothers, compared with lower SES mothers talk more, provide more object labels, sustain conversational topics longer, respond more contingently to their children's speech and draw out more talk from their children.

**Features of the home learning environment** (parents' interactions with their young children, their beliefs about learning and their children's capabilities, family organization) account for sizable differences in the learning opportunities that children are exposed to prior to school entry.

The more positive home learning environments of high-income children account for as much as half of the gap in test scores of preschool children.

The most powerful predictor of later achievement is **a student's approach to learning**, something that is shaped by early childhood programs that develop social-emotional skills.

**High School Graduation:** Children with the lowest reading scores account for 33% of all students, yet they account for 63% of all children who do not graduate from high school

### **Reading by Third Grade: The Path to School Success**

Third grade is a kind of pivot point. We teach reading for the first 3 grades and then after that children are not so much learning to read as they are using their reading skills to learn other topics. If you haven't succeeded in reading by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, it's more difficult to remediate than it would have been if you started before then.

Students who struggled with reading in early elementary school grew up to comprise 88% of those who did not graduate from High School. That made low reading skills an even stronger predictor than spending at least a year in poverty, which affected 70% of the students who didn't graduate. In fact, 89% of students in poverty who did read on level by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade graduated on time, statistically no different from the students who never experienced poverty but did struggle with reading early on. (Hernandez, (2011) Annie E. Casey Foundation)

See: [www.gradelevelreading.net](http://www.gradelevelreading.net)