The Importance of Sharing Family Stories

One of the most important things you can do for your child is to share your family’s story. “The more children knew about their family’s history, the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, and the more successfully they believed their families functioned.” (Feiler, 2013) Children need to feel they are part of something bigger than themselves—a strong family narrative that talks about how your family has lived through the good times and overcome the difficult ones. Children who have a strong sense of family history have been shown to be more resilient in the face of hardship and better able to handle stress. Family stories are also a great way of helping your child learn more about where he comes from and about the family members who may live far away.

Reading quality children’s literature together with your child can provide a springboard for the sharing of family stories. Here are some recently published children’s books that speak to themes of family history, culture, identity, and resilience.

*Where Are You From?/¿De dónde eres?* by Yamile Saied Méndez: A young girl seeks help from her grandfather in answering a question posed by her classmates, “...but where are you really from?” With beautiful imagery, the grandfather shares the story of her family’s heritage, explaining that she really comes from the love of all the family members who came before her.

*Fry Bread* by Kevin Noble Maillard: This is a Native American story of families making something wonderful from the little they had during difficult times and celebrating their resilience from generation to generation. Fry Bread represents much more than food—it is time, art, history, place, nation, and so much more...it is everything.

*Alma and How She Got Her Name/Alma y cómo obtuvo su nombre* by Juana Martínez-Neal: In this story, little Alma Sofia Esperanza José Pura Candela fears her name is too long and never fits. In response, her father tells her the story of her name and all the family members who inspired it, and Alma comes to understand just how well her name fits her after all.

*Saturday* by Oge Mora: Life can be measured by its most ordinary moments, like a joyful routine shared between mother and daughter on Saturdays. On this particular Saturday they meet one disappointment after another, yet in the end they rise above each and every setback and realize that no matter what happens, their Saturdays together are special, splendid, and wonderful.

As parents we need to make time for sharing our family’s history with our children. Research has found that communicating family information across generations often occurs during family dinners, yearly vacations, holiday celebrations and the like, but it can also take place during the ordinary moments of life. “These gatherings—short or long—are at the heart of the process by which the intergenerational stories can be told and learned and through which children can grow stronger and healthier...coming from a family in which the opportunities to learn family history and to create a family narrative are regular, multiple, predictable and inviolable.” (Duke, 2013)
