

# Dolly Parton's Gift: 100 Million Books

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Most people know Dolly Parton as a country music legend, actress, and businesswoman. She also happens to be a philanthropist and champion for early childhood literacy. In fact, her literacy program, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, is part of the Dollywood Foundation, an organization that helps people in need and from all walks of life. Imagination Library mails one book per month to each enrolled child—from his or her birth until he or she enters kindergarten. More than 1,600 communities offer Imagination Library to almost 850,000 children across the U.S., Canada, the UK, and Australia. Recently, Parton was invited to the Library of Congress to celebrate a major milestone in the Imagination Library's history: the delivery of its 100 millionth book!

Parton never dreamed Imagination Library would grow so large. She founded it more than twenty years ago as a way to assist children in her native Sevier County, Tennessee. Parton's inspiration was her father, Robert Lee Parton. Because he had to start working at a young age, Robert didn't have the opportunity to go to school. As a result, he never learned to read or write. Robert, who was smart and had good common sense, found his illiteracy to be a great hardship.

Remembering her father's struggles, Parton decided to give the children of Sevier County the chance he never had. She wanted to give them early and frequent access to books, so she started doing just that in 1995. Parton made sure to involve her father in the process, so he was able to see Imagination Library take off before he passed away in 2000. Robert was proud to have taken part in such a special undertaking. Most of all, he loved hearing children call Parton "The Book Lady." He thought that was pretty amazing.

The program is available in communities in which a local partner teams up with Imagination Library. Those partners are typically nonprofits, state agencies, or public libraries. Any child from birth to five years old can take part. The partners pay about \$25 per child per year, an amount that covers the cost of the books and shipping. And you can be sure those books are great quality literature, too. That's because a panel of educators and reading specialists chooses developmentally appropriate selections for each year of a child's life.

Parton has no intention of slowing down Imagination Library—at least not anytime soon. She wants to send out one billion books in her lifetime. Why? "I think it's important for kids to be encouraged to read, to dream, and to plan for a better life and better future," she says.

## Teacher Resources – Vocabulary

*Potential Words for Further Study:* These words not only help with comprehension of the passage, they also appear more frequently in a wide spectrum of reading, especially in academic text. Therefore, further study of the meaning of these words may be beneficial. The words on this list can be incorporated into subsequent lessons.

access (n) a way or means of approaching, getting, using, etc.

foundation (n) an organization established to maintain, assist, or finance institutions or projects of a social, educational, charitable, religious, etc. nature, as by the making of grants

undertaking (n) something undertaken; task; charge; enterprise

*Words for Quick Discussion:* Consider discussing these words as they are encountered to help students comprehend the passage. A quick discussion in student-friendly language while reading the text is best.

hardship (n) a thing hard to bear; specific cause of discomfort or suffering, such as poverty, pain, etc.

inspiration (n) an inspiring influence; any stimulus to creative thought or action

milestone (n) an important event in the history or development of something or someone

philanthropist (n) someone who freely gives money and help to people who need it

**Definition Source:** Collins English Dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english>

**Text Easability:****Text Easability Scores**

If you would like to measure the text easability scores of this passage, please follow the directions below.

1. Visit the Coh-Metrix Text Easability Assessor website at <http://tea.cohmetrix.com/>. If you do not already have a login and password, create one. It is free and easy to sign up for access to the website.
2. Once you have created an account and sign in, you will be taken to a page with an empty, white text box. Copy and paste the text from this passage into the empty, white text box. Make sure you are only copying and pasting the body of the passage. Do not include the title, date, or any of the resources present in the passage.
3. When you have pasted the passage into the text box, click on the red button beneath the text box that says "Analyze." There will be a short delay and after a few seconds, you will see a bar graph appear to the right of the screen.
4. The bar graph will give you the percentages for several text characteristics including: narrativity, syntactic simplicity, word concreteness, referential cohesion, and deep cohesion.
5. Below the bar graph, the Flesch Kincaid Grade Level is also included for your benefit.
6. Lastly, a paragraph is provided that explains the meaning of the measurements of the text characteristics for your particular passage.
7. Once you have completed measuring your passage, you can click on the "Clear" button below the text box and measure another passage, if you wish.

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