

Web Enhanced Education

# Helena High graduate writes book for dyslexic youth

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Laura Sargent is hoping to open doors for young readers struggling with the English language.

Sargent, a 1977 Helena High School graduate, recently partnered with artist Patti Williams and wrote an e-book using a simple, structured approach aimed at helping young students overcome dyslexia and other reading hurdles.

The “Hop on Reading” series became available as an e-book about a month ago and Sargent said it’s just the first in a string of seven series.

Sargent, who now lives about 30 minutes outside Boston, was recently interviewed for a story in the Boston Globe and said she’s getting “a lot of local attention.”

“People are happy,” Sargent said. “We’re getting rave reviews and a lot of encouragement.”

Melissa Munson, Sargent’s niece, lives in Helena and has a daughter in first grade at Central-Linc Elementary. Munson attends her class about once a week to read to students, and she has a good idea of all their reading levels.

One young girl was lagging behind. She struggled with reading and Munson could tell she was frustrated.

When her aunt’s book came out, Munson thought she would try reading it to the girl. “Hop on Reading” uses simple sentences that have repetitive sounds, allowing a reader to anticipate words, Munson said.

After one session of reading through the series, Munson said she could tell the student was already more optimistic about reading.

“Seeing this little girl struggle with the books that she was reading at school and then to have her look at (“Hop on Reading”) and really have some success, I think it really changed her attitude a little bit about reading,” Munson said.

Sargent and her family spent their early childhood in the upper Rattlesnake outside Missoula before moving around and eventually settling in Helena when she was 12 years old. She graduated from Helena High and went on to earn a bachelor’s degree at the University of Montana.

In 1982 she left Montana and began sailing to countries around the world, later meeting her husband on a boat and raising her two boys at sea.

Each new place she stopped, Sargent said she would visit the local schools to see the area’s true culture. Her family eventually settled on the small private island of Mustique in the Caribbean. Soon, Sargent was asked to start a reading program at the local school.

To familiarize herself with the latest reading and dyslexia education, she took a year to earn her master's at Harvard. But when she returned to the Caribbean, Sargent couldn't find the educational resources she was looking for.

Every English book she thought might help included cultural references to the United States or the United Kingdom.

"These kids just couldn't relate to that," Sargent said. "So I thought, you know we all really need something that's based on the structural literacy and really culturally open ended."

Using a model known as the Orton-Gillingham approach, Sargent began writing the "Hop on Reading" books. Orton-Gillingham is a method in use since the 1930s that teaches word formation before word meaning.

For four years Sargent and the artist, Patti O'Hare Williams, developed the first set of books. The set also includes a practice book which students are supposed to fill out after finishing the reading.

Sargent still tries to make it back to Montana about once a year and said she's hopeful about the books' potential. The publisher thinks the books could also help students learning English as a second language, and may have a market in China.

"The bottom line is to help readers, and I feel confident that it's a good product," Sargent said.

*This article erroneously stated Sargent graduated from Capital High School. She is a 1977 graduate of Helena High School.*



Photo provided

Laura Sargent and her students on Mustique Island in the Caribbean are shown in this provided photo. Sargent wrote a set of books called 'Hop on Reading' to help young dyslexic and struggling readers.

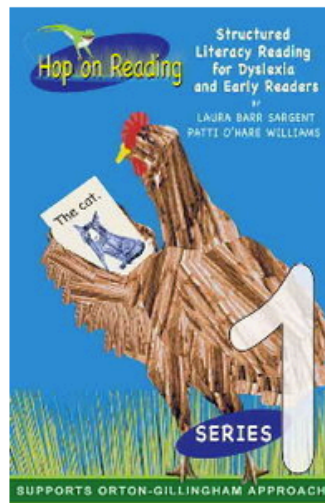


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The cover of 'Hop on Reading Series 1'

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