



Volunteer Perspective: Lisa Turner



Reading Saturday was my very first volunteer experience and I will treasure it forever. I remember the first Saturday, walking into Park Street Elementary School, unsure of what to expect and with many questions running through my mind. How will the kids feel about being at school on a Saturday? Will they want to read?

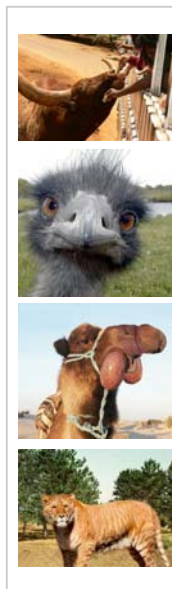
It wasn't long before my questions were answered. I had the opportunity to work with a sweet girl who always tried really hard! What had I been worried about? This student was excited about reading. Not only did she think it was fun, she was happy to be at school for the *Reading Saturday* program! I learned that English was her second language, and I was amazed at how well she was adjusting. Each week she warmed up to me more and more, and in no time, we were friends. She seemed to take comfort in the encouragement I gave when she stumbled across an unfamiliar word. It was such a pleasure to witness her improvement in reading and spelling and watch her self-confidence blossom. I was able to work with her through December. Sadly, when I returned in January, I found out that she and her family had moved. She will never know the impact she had on my life in such a short amount of time. It is comforting to know that I had the same impact on hers.

Wild Animal Safari: A Meet and Greet Affair

Imagine riding in a zebra-striped bus, when all of a sudden, a steer (yes, the big animal with long horns!) climbs up the stairs of the bus to be hand fed! Well, this and more happened when Omosaze students took a ride through the *Wild Animal Safari* in Pine Mountain, Georgia. This was my first trip to the park, and it turned into the trip of a lifetime.

Our trip to and from the park was smooth and uneventful. That was necessary, since we had more than enough excitement when we arrived. Our visit was full of unexpected and "close encounters of an unusual kind" with some of our world's most amazing creatures.

After boarding the zebra bus and entering the enclosure, we were greeted by a multitude of animals with feathers, long legs, pointed horns, and very large LIPS! As we proceeded through the park, we fed the animals with food provided by the park. The emus and ostrich were so eager to eat that we had to place the food pellets onto the window ledge for fear of getting our fingers chomped on. The giraffes and camels, on the other hand, ate right out of our hands. The walk through the petting zoo was memorable, since we were able to see animals from far away lands. We even saw a Liger (a cross between a Lion and a Tiger)! Have you?



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Our Purpose

The mission of Omosaze, Inc. is to empower low-income early-elementary children to succeed by providing structured instruction in reading and comprehension in a supportive environment that reinforces positive attitudes about learning.



Wild Animal Safari: A Meet and Greet Affair (continued)



A selection of Omosaze students gather at Wild Animal Safari Park in Pine Mountain, GA

Above all, the looks on our children's faces were "pictures worth thousands of words!" By the way, I think the adults might have been more excited than the kids! All shared in the laughter and shouts of glee. At one point, everyone was on one side of the bus, trying to feed the approaching animals, unaware of the large steer climbing the steps of the bus behind us. This definitely won the prize for the most unexpected occurrence.

Many thanks go to our sponsors. The children, staff, and volunteers had a wonderful time sharing and experiencing what our glorious world has to offer. Perhaps, you can join us on our next adventure!

 By Julia Burns, *Reading Saturday* Teacher

Note: Field trips such as the one to Wild Animal Safari Park complement *Reading Saturday* instruction by providing students with experiences that build vocabulary and promote positive attitudes toward learning.

Director's Note: Making a Difference

As Director, I often read reports about the academic struggles so many of our youth face, and I wonder what we can do to help turn the situation around. But then we finish another year like 2006-2007 when we helped 108 students, and we find in the feedback offered by parents, administrators, volunteers, and teachers that the situation is changing for the better for students engaged in *Reading Saturday*.

The year-end academic data we compile is instructive, but the information I look forward to most is the observations of parents and school personnel. What changes do they see? Is *Reading Saturday* making a difference? Though we are just one factor in the progress of our students, it is encouraging when parents and school staff conclude that *Reading Saturday* has had a significant impact on student performance.

The comments as well as our assessment data once again confirm that *Reading Saturday* is aiding student development by encouraging a strong love of learning, improving reading skills, and increasing both self-confidence and all-around academic success.

As we look to next year, we hope to increase our final enrollment to 150 and introduce a new theatrical reading component for second and third grade students, created in collaboration with TellTale Theater. We are also working with Communities in Schools of Marietta/Cobb to add a parenting support program designed to enhance student skills through parent involvement. Additionally, we will welcome students from Clay Elementary for the first time,

expanding our service in Cobb County.

Of course, each of these changes is contingent on an infusion of appropriate funding. We are delighted to announce continued funding through the Cobb County Development Block Grant Office (\$26,000), Weber Family Foundation (\$12,000), and Target Stores (\$6,000) for 2007-2008. New sources of support include the Marietta City Community Development Block Grant Office (\$21,000).

Our campaign is on-going. Since October 2006, we have partnered with Merocuné Marketing & Public Relations (merocune.com) to pursue new and continued avenues of funding. Merocuné Marketing has also worked with us to introduce a new graphic identity for Omosaze, launch a wholly revised web site (omosaze.org), and publish a new brochure and other supportive marketing, donor, and volunteer materials. These and other steps being taken by our Board of Directors will help prepare Omosaze for the next phase of growth and development.

On page 3 you will find a few of the many comments we received from parents of *Reading Saturday* students. Each reflection inspires us to continue providing effective and enjoyable after-school help to students who are at risk of academic failure. The success stories are a tribute to Omosaze's incredibly dedicated staff and volunteers, the commitment from participating schools, and the steady support of our community friends and partners. Thank you for making a difference for us so that we can empower more youth to succeed through reading.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Len Scott".

Teacher's Perspective: Julia Burns, Dunleith Elementary

I never realized how much I would look forward to the sounds of joyous children early on Saturday mornings. But that is what I experienced at *Reading Saturday* this past October through May. Each session, students from A.L. Burruss and Dunleith Elementary descended on the Dunleith campus to begin a three hour intensive, yet delightful and positive reading experience. Students were placed by grade level (1st-3rd) to develop research-based reading strategies and word building skills. The first grade students benefited from 'buddy' reading with the *Reading Saturday* volunteers, as well.


I was very fortunate to see many first grade students I taught during the week participate in the program. It gave me a firsthand look at their progress. Not only did they improve their reading skills, they progressed as problem solvers. They became assertive learners, ready and confident to face any academic challenge. This was truly spellbinding to see!


The entire *Reading Saturday* experience empowered me as a teacher as much as it empowered the students as learners. I hope to see many more students benefit from this program next year and in years to come. The Omosaze *Reading Saturday* program is an investment worthy of support. As a teacher for *Reading Saturday*, I am grateful for the opportunity to help develop and share in our students' anticipation of learning.


Note: School administrators or teachers who are interested in learning more about offering *Reading Saturday* to students at their school should contact Executive Director Leon Scott at 770-739-6786 for more information.

Parent Comments

"*Reading Saturday* helped my child improve her reading and made her more interested in doing so. She now enjoys reading and attempts to write stories."

 Kirsten James

"My daughter now loves reading because she is more confident. She enjoys reading for leisure, not just for homework."  Noelle Thomas

"My child can read better now. It is very encouraging. [I would love to see *Reading Saturday*] expanded to all schools in Cobb County."  Alex Bissah

From Principal Tiffany Pollack

"... the organization has surpassed our expectations in helping our students become strong readers. The assessment data for students participating in this program has shown great gains in the area of reading and writing. It is an understatement to say that the Omosaze *Reading Saturday* program has made a positive impact on our students. The program has been instrumental in ensuring the academic success of student participants."

The goals of *Reading Saturday* are to increase the number of low-income first, second, and third grade students that are passing grade-level reading and vocabulary tests, passing the Georgia CRCT, participating confidently in school activities, and demonstrating a love of reading.

Special Thanks to Our 2006-2007 Supporters

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