



Mississippi Public Broadcasting

*Educating Entertaining Enlightening*

## News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Mississippi Public Broadcasting, Entergy, and Public Libraries Boosting Literacy with *Between the Lions***

(Jackson, Miss.)— Mississippi's largest energy company, Entergy, is teaming up with the Foundation for Public Broadcasting in Mississippi (Foundation), Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB), and Mississippi's public libraries to power up literacy in pre-kindergarten children statewide. The ***Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Library Project** places the scientifically-based reading research curriculum of the seven-time Emmy® Award-winning PBS KIDS series into 17 public libraries this fall, making these libraries a key community tool in teaching pre-kindergarten children ages three to five years old.

“This project helps put into action a commitment made last year by Entergy to increase support of education in Mississippi through private partnerships,” said Carolyn Shanks, president of Entergy Mississippi. “Now, more than ever before, Mississippians must come together in developing solutions that improve our state’s educational system. It is clear that our economic future depends on it.”

Entergy awarded the Foundation with a \$50,000 *Destination Education* grant to help introduce three-, four- and five-year-old children to the concepts of print, language and communication with the help of video segments from *Between the Lions*, along with books, poems, songs and activities. Mississippi libraries will use these tools in special story and activity hours.

“Entergy’s financial commitment to this literacy project combined with the commitment from several organizations will expand this project into an additional 17 public libraries by the end of the year,” said Ty Warren, Foundation Executive Director. “We look forward to expanding this program statewide with the support of Entergy and others who value education opportunities for all Mississippians.”

The goal is to bring these literacy building tools to as many of the state’s 240 public libraries as possible over the next three years.

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“Public libraries have always taken their role in the education of Mississippi’s children very seriously,” said Sharman Smith, executive director of the Mississippi Library Commission. “This partnership provides the perfect vehicle for strengthening the reading/learning skills of young children. *Between the Lions* will add a new dimension to public library programming for pre-kindergarten children.”

The ***Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Library Project** is an expansion to the already proven successful ***Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Initiative**. This child care program, over two years strong, began soon after MPB partnered in 2004 with WGBH of Boston and Sirius Thinking, Ltd. of New York to produce the *Between the Lions* children’s television series in MPB’s Jackson studios.

“Both the child care and library programs are our way of being a part of the solution in creating statewide literacy opportunities for Mississippi’s earliest learner,” said Marie Antoon, executive director of MPB. “We are most appreciative of our partners and their shared vision in coming together to reach more children in each of the communities across the state.”

MPB’s early childhood initiatives and commitment to education were recently recognized by PBS and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). MPB was one of the first five public broadcasting stations nationwide to be awarded a five-year grant totaling \$200,000 as part of the PBS KIDS Ready to Learn® national literacy initiative.

“Mississippi Public Broadcasting has consistently broken ground in innovative ways to take our proven children’s television literacy program, *Between the Lions*, and make it accessible to teachers, parents, caregivers, and children,” said Jayne W. James, Ed.D., executive director of CPB Ready to Learn®. “We were excited to award MPB with one of the first five national Ready to Learn® grants, and are thrilled with the real reading skills development Mississippi children are receiving as a result.”

Research findings for the 2005-2006 school year concluded that the literacy environment of the *Between the Lions* participating classrooms improved dramatically as a result of their involvement in the project – as much as 58% to 100% – including significant gains in letter knowledge, the conventions of reading (left to right, top to bottom, front to back), comprehension that builds their vocabulary, and improvements in the classroom that promote learning as fun and exciting. The findings are stated in the University of Mississippi Study using the Early Language Literacy and Classroom Observation (ELLCO) measurement.

Through the ***Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Initiative**, MPB provides resources, expertise, and encouragement to 51 child care centers in the Jackson area affecting 1,114 children with the help of its partners – WGBH, Sirius Thinking Ltd, Mississippi Public Broadcasting, Corporation for Public Broadcasting, U. S. Department of Education, and Barksdale Reading Institute.

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Serving as mentors, MPB learning specialists model teaching methods and provide books, materials, and an early reading skills curriculum of the *Between the Lions* series to the child care center directors and teachers.

While the initial phase of this project includes 17 public libraries, the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs (MFWC) is helping spread the word about this valuable program. MFWC members are serving as volunteers to assist public library staff with special *Between the Lions* story hours and activities, and have created an *Adopt-A-Library* project aimed at raising additional funds to bring the proven literacy tool to more of the state's public libraries.

"The MFWC has always supported proven literacy programs and we were convinced through the research that our state's communities will strengthen as our earliest learners develop their reading skills," said Judy Martin, state president of the MFWC. "Part of MPB's value is its wealth of early childhood education initiatives and studies show this early reading skills program produces results."

The ***Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Library Project** is a partnership between the Foundation, MPB, the Mississippi Library Commission, the Mississippi Federation of Women's Clubs, the national PBS KIDS Ready to Learn® literacy initiative, and Entergy, the primary sponsor of this project through its *Destination Education* initiative.

The following are the 17 library branches piloting the ***Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Library Project** this fall: Corinth Library in Alcorn County, Hickory Flat Public Library in Benton County, Harriette Person Memorial Library in Claiborne County, Carnegie Public Library in Coahoma County, Seminary Public Library in Covington County, M.R. Davis Library in DeSoto County, Hattiesburg Library in Forrest County, Eudora Welty Library in Hinds County, Pascagoula Public Library in Jackson County, Lee County Library in Lee County, Columbus Public Library in Lowndes County, Margaret Reed Crosby Memorial Library in Pearl River County, Pontotoc County Library in Pontotoc County, G. Chastaine Flynt Memorial Library in Rankin County, Sharkey-Issaquena County Library in Sharkey County, Henry Seymour Library in Sunflower County, and Wayne County Library in Wayne County.

Visit [www.mpbonline.org](http://www.mpbonline.org) for more information regarding the ***Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Library Project** and the *Between the Lions* children's television series that airs weekdays on Mississippi Public Broadcasting television at 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. and on Saturdays at 11 a.m.

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### **Note to Editor:**

Photos from the ***Between the Lions* Preschool Literacy Library Project** announcement are available at [www.mpbonline.org](http://www.mpbonline.org).