

Calls for children's TV to turn on the subtitles in a bid to raise literacy levels among youngsters missing school due to coronavirus quarantine

- The campaign to add subtitles to children's TV hopes to raise the reading age
- Research shows 94 per cent of children engage with subtitles if they are shown
- Presenter Stephen Fry has joined author Cressida Cowell calling for the change
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By MILLY VINCENT FOR MAILONLINE

Broadcasters of children's television are being urged to turn on the subtitles in a bid to raise literacy levels among the young, who are currently stuck at home during the **coronavirus** pandemic.

Presenter Stephen Fry joined author Cressida Cowell, businesswoman Martha Lane Fox and former children's television presenter Floella Benjamin as signatories in an open letter, in today's **Observer**, which calls for TV channels to run subtitles at the bottom of popular children's programmes.

Supporters of the subtitling argue that the mere presence of the words at the bottom of the screen will encourage children to read and would automatically improve reading levels and enhance spelling, grammar and vocabulary across the English speaking world.



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Former President Bill Clinton has also backed the campaign by Tots (Turn On The Subtitles) stating: 'Same-language subtitling doubles the number of functional readers among primary school children. It's a small thing that has a staggering impact on people's lives', reports **The Observer**.

The Tots campaign group, founded by UK education entrepreneurs Henry Warren and Oli Barrett, is hoped to put pressure on platforms such as Sky, Netflix, Amazon Prime, YouTube Kids, ITV and the BBC to make the educational tweak to their broadcasts for children.

In the letter Mr Warren urges: 'This needs to be done as a matter of urgency. This simple change will make the world of difference to millions of young people at this extremely challenging time.'



Presenter Stephen Fry (right) joined author Cressida Cowell (left) as signatories in an open letter which calls for channels to run subtitles at the bottom of popular children's programmes

He explains how seeing the words can help young children 'decode basic phonemes', adding that it will mostly benefit children who are competitive readers who read along with the subtitles subconsciously.

Although children may be expected to ignore subtitles researchers from literacy charity PlanetRead proved that around 94 per cent of children do engage with the subtitles, reports The Observer.

The study which used eye tracking technology to monitor the children's viewing habits found that while action packed cartoon such as Popeye did distract from the subtitles, children were often reading subtitles during shows with lots of speech.

Campaigners eventually hope to see subtitles on every children's programme to supplement home learning, but said broadcasters who had showed interest were taking longer to get editorial approval for the idea.