

MAYA *Smart*

**EMPOWERING  
FAMILIES AND  
ACTIVATING  
COMMUNITIES  
FOR READING  
SUCCESS!**



Ready to ignite a reading revolution? In her book *Reading for Our Lives*, award-winning journalist and literacy advocate Maya Smart equips parents, educators, and all who care about the next generation with practical tools to help kids thrive. Now, she's bringing these transformative ideas to audiences everywhere—live and online.

Through keynotes and workshops, Maya delivers engaging presentations that inspire action and equip audiences to boost kids' reading success. Every topic is fully customizable for any event format or timeframe, whether in-person or virtual.

## ABOUT MAYA

Maya Smart is a dynamic education and business speaker dedicated to empowering families and communities to achieve reading success. Her signature keynotes and workshops have inspired thousands at state and national conferences, equipping caregivers, educators, and librarians with practical tools to foster early language and literacy skills. She also makes a compelling business case for early literacy, motivating corporate leaders and entrepreneurs to actively support improved educational outcomes and community development.

Smart's research-backed frameworks equip audiences to create literacy-rich environments in homes, childcare settings, classrooms, and public spaces. Her expertise has been featured on CBS Mornings, TIME, PBS, and more. She is also the author of *Reading for Our Lives: A Literacy Action Plan from Birth to Six* (Avery/Penguin Random House), a must-read guide for raising thriving readers.

She holds a bachelor's in social studies with honors from Harvard University and a master's degree in journalism from the Medill School at Northwestern University. She serves as affiliated faculty in Educational Policy and Leadership in the College of Education at Marquette University.



# How to Give Your Child a Smart Start

## An Early Literacy Action Plan

### FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Study after study shows that the brain architecture for reading develops rapidly during infancy, and early language experiences are critical to building it. Yet parents, who are children's primary "teachers" in those pivotal first years, often don't know what to do, when, or how. In this presentation, Maya describes how reading unfolds from birth through the early elementary years and outlines what caregivers can do to nurture it at each stage. Audiences leave armed with information about six parent levers for literacy success, plus a toolkit of easy and research-based ways to nurture their children's language and literacy development from the start.

### Takeaways

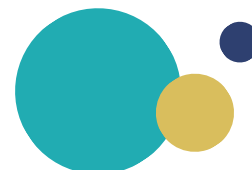
- Understand how reading develops from birth and the key milestones in a child's literacy journey, from first words to confident reading.
- Learn research-backed, simple strategies to introduce letters, sounds, and print awareness without pressure or extra materials.
- Discover how to turn everyday moments into literacy opportunities, nurturing language skills through meals, play, and routines.
- Tailor your support to your child's growth, adapting strategies as they progress from coos and babbles to fluent reading.
- Weave reading seamlessly into family life, creating meaningful rituals and fostering a culture of learning.
- Celebrate literacy milestones with confidence, recognizing and supporting your child's unique development.



“Maya's book talk for the Parents League of New York was wonderful! Sharing an excerpt from *Reading for Our Lives*, Maya provided families with six practical tools for nurturing their children's reading success. Relatable, warm and generous of spirit, Maya imparted helpful frameworks for building kids' oral language skills and navigating developmental milestones. Our families were engaged, excited and appreciated her actionable advice, making Maya Smart, a speaker not to be missed!”

**BARBARA SCOTT**

***Executive Director  
Parents League of New York***





# Inside America's Reading Crisis

## How You Can Help and Why You Should

### FOR CIVIC LEADERS AND CONCERNED CITIZENS

The pandemic hurt the reading prospects of an entire generation—and of the society that will share their future. Many school-age children face lasting learning setbacks, as supplemental educational programs haven't made up for lost classroom time. Plus, Covid-era infants, toddlers, and preschoolers show lower verbal, motor, and cognitive performance, compared to pre-pandemic levels. On top of that, many had their access to developmental screenings and early intervention services delayed or denied. But there's hope: us. We all have a role to play in turning the tide, and this session presents five high-impact ways that communities can champion literacy for all—inside and outside of schools.

### Takeaways

- Learn how the pandemic impacted children's literacy development.
- Gain insight into five community levers for literacy success.
- Explore actionable ways to address literacy gaps in your local context.
- See how everyday people have successfully championed literacy efforts and inspired meaningful change.
- What really matters to drive literacy improvement in your family, school, or community.



“Maya delivered an excellent, customized message that resonated with our audience and won a standing ovation. I love how she researched our mission, history, and impact and weaved familiar United Way quotes, themes, and ideas into her presentation. Plus, she's a pleasure to work with behind the scenes and inspires with her work and her words.”

**DAN HERDA**

**Director of Communications at  
United Way of Greater Milwaukee**





# Beyond Storytime:

## How to Help Parents Nurture Reading from Birth

### FOR EDUCATORS, LIBRARIANS, AND OTHER FAMILY-FACING PROFESSIONALS

Teachers, librarians, and other professionals are trusted community members, who parents often look to for information and advice. Parents may turn to these experts for book recommendations, tips on raising readers, answers to child development questions, and referrals to critical local resources. Yet these professionals usually aren't reading specialists and may not be familiar with specific literacy milestones and needs at different stages—or best practices parents should follow at home. In this keynote presentation, Maya walks audiences through how reading unfolds from birth, what caregivers should do to nurture it at each age, and how professionals can support families to raise successful readers. Her signature pairing of cutting-edge research findings with practical recommendations meaningfully equips professionals to engage more intentionally and interactively with young children and their families. It also underscores why any serious effort to address reading achievement disparities must start at birth.

#### Takeaways

- Explore how back-and-forth exchanges, even with babies, supercharge vocabulary and cognitive development.
- Understand the key building blocks of early literacy—oral language, print awareness, and phonological skills—and why they matter.
- Gain tools to help families weave literacy moments into daily life, from mealtime chats to playful errands.
- Discover strategies to meet parents where they are, earning their trust and sparking action.
- Unlock the secret to helping families own their role in raising curious, resilient, and capable readers.
- Tie early literacy strategies to broader educational standards, creating a clear path to measurable success.



“Maya led a dynamic, impactful half-day workshop for 60 of our youth services librarians and library assistants. She described early reading development and highlighted pertinent library materials for various ages and stages. Our staff left with newfound confidence in communicating with parents and directing them to truly helpful resources, thanks to Maya’s insights and exercises.”

**ALICE RICHARD**  
*Children’s Services & Family  
Engagement Librarian  
Chicago Public Library*

# Empathy in Action:

## Strengthening Family Partnerships for Student Success

### FOR EDUCATORS, LIBRARIANS, AND FAMILY-FACING PROFESSIONALS



Strong family-school-community partnerships are critical for unlocking a child's full potential, but how do we move from surface-level interactions with families to deep, impactful relationships? This hands-on workshop equips educators and librarians with practical strategies to shift from transactional communication with parents and families to meaningful collaboration. Through reflective exercises, real-world examples, and practical tools, audiences will learn to engage productively with diverse caregivers, build trust, and ultimately empower families as partners in their children's development. Participants will leave with a clear, four-step framework for strengthening their relationships within the communities they serve, fostering engagement, and making an immediate and lasting impact.

#### Takeaways

- Techniques for active listening and reflecting to understand families' stated and unstated needs.
- Practical tools to frame communication as a two-way dialogue (not one-way directives) and respond effectively to family concerns.
- Skills to create inclusive, strengths-based relationships with families that drive better outcomes for children.
- Reflection exercises to enhance self-awareness and professional growth in family interactions.
- Approaches to bridge families to community resources and additional support networks.



“Maya presented a wonderful family literacy workshop for a diverse audience of caregivers, reading champions, and librarians in our community. Attendees loved the way she presented rigorous reading research in a warm, encouraging style that made insights immediately useful. Her ability to weave in personal stories from her own parenting journey made the presentation even more moving and memorable. I highly recommend her workshops for both parents or professionals looking for a better understanding of how we can nurture, teach, and encourage young readers.”

**JENNY BOGONI**

*Executive Director*

*Read by 4th, The Free Library of Philadelphia*

# Advancing Literacy Nationwide

Maya's speaking engagements span an impressive range of sectors, showcasing her ability to connect with professionals from all corners of education and literacy advocacy. In 2024 alone, she captivated thousands of early childhood educators, K-12 teachers, librarians, interventionists, and parent educators in a diverse array of in-person and online settings, reaching audiences from Wisconsin to Louisiana, Iowa to Maryland, and beyond.

## Select Appearances by Sector

### Libraries

Maya's expertise has been featured on national stages and in community-focused forums, helping library professionals elevate their early literacy programming:

- American Library Association
- Association of Small and Rural Libraries
- Chicago Public Library
- Johnson County Library
- King County Library
- Milwaukee Public Library
- Richmond Public Library
- Southern Maryland Regional Library/Eastern Shore Regional Library
- State Library of Iowa (Pop YS Conference)

### Early Education

From keynote speeches to interactive workshops, Maya has inspired early childhood educators to build foundational literacy skills through everyday moments and show parents how to do the same:

- Idaho Early Years Conference
- KinderCare Learning Centers
- Maryland State Child Care Association
- Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children
- St. Francis Children's Center

### Nonprofit

As a trusted voice in nonprofit spaces, Maya has collaborated with leading organizations to champion literacy equity:

- Learn to Earn Dayton
- LENA Foundation
- Literacy First
- Make Way for Books
- National Black Child Development Institute - Wisconsin
- Parents League of New York
- Philadelphia Read By 4th
- Planet Word Museum DC
- United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County

### K12

In K-12 spaces, Maya equips teachers and administrators with actionable strategies to close literacy gaps, empower students, and spark parent engagement as a key driver for success:

- Literacy is Life Conference
- Milwaukee Public Schools
- Plain Talk Literacy Conference
- Seton Catholic Schools
- St. Marcus Lutheran School
- Wisconsin Education Conference
- Wisconsin State Reading Association



## Featured In



TIME

[What Babies and Toddlers Need to Become Good Readers – TIME](#)



[Author Maya Payne Smart on literacy guide for parents – CBS Mornings](#)



[How America's literacy problems start at an early age - Wisconsin Public Radio](#)

Forbes



Los Angeles Times

Today's  
Parent

Brené Brown

# LET'S WORK TOGETHER!

Whether you're hosting a conference, workshop, or community event, Maya's message will leave your attendees energized, informed, and ready to make a difference.

They'll receive the tools and strategies they need to:

- ✓ Understand what kids need to thrive as readers—and how to guide them through today's complex educational landscape.
- ✓ Build strong, collaborative partnerships with parents to unlock every child's full potential.
- ✓ Make literacy—and brighter futures—attainable for all.

Complete the form at [mayasmart.com/speaking](https://mayasmart.com/speaking) or email [hello@mayasmart.com](mailto:hello@mayasmart.com) today to book Maya for your event!

