

Justice Graves speaks to International Reading Association

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The common experience among young people sentenced to prison is that they dropped out of school, Mississippi Supreme Court Justice James E. Graves Jr. told thousands of teachers, librarians and parents at the 50th Annual International Reading Association Conference in San Antonio, Texas, on Wednesday.

Justice Graves, keynote speaker for day three of the four-day conference, told participants that during his 10 years as a circuit judge in Hinds County, it was common for him to take guilty pleas from 20 or more people in a morning on the bench. The common thread among many of those who went to prison was that they had dropped out of school, he said.

Graves' story is one he has told many times to audiences in schools and civic groups. He believes education is the solution.

"I wanted to encourage them to continue to be involved in the lives of children, in encouraging children to read, and to learn to love to learn," Justice Graves said after the conference.

Other speakers during the conference included actress Julie Andrews, newspaper columnist Dave Barry and renowned educator Erin Gruwell, among others.

The International Reading Association is a professional organization dedicated to promoting literacy by improving the quality of reading instruction, disseminating research and information about reading, and encouraging the lifetime reading habit.

Justice Graves, who has served on the Supreme Court since November 2001, spends much of his time reading records of cases on appeal. He is an avid reader beyond the job duties, enjoying a wide range of subjects.

He didn't have access to the public library as a child growing up in Clinton, he said. He hungered for reading material, and read the dictionary and comic books and his mother's *Ladies' Home Journal*.

"Growing up in a little segregated corner of Clinton, Mississippi, didn't give you a window to the world, but reading books did," Justice Graves said. "It expands your mind far beyond your geographical boundaries and that's very important for your intellectual growth," he said.

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