When I was six years old, my parents decided I was going to take elocution classes. Elocution is the art of learning how to speak correctly and emphasizes correct accent, grammar, pronunciation, tone, and stress, as well as how to stand and how to gesture when giving a speech. At the time, we lived in Lancashire in the United Kingdom, an area known for having a 'broad' speaking accent, or an accent not always deemed acceptable for the better jobs or better education opportunities. My parents decided, if I learned how to speak 'better', this would give me much more opportunities in life. Boy, were they right.

As someone who took elocution lessons twice a week for 13 years, I absolutely believe every child should take elocution lessons, either private lessons or as part of a school curriculum - particularly if they or their parents want them to have better opportunities, and here's why.

**History of Elocution Lessons** - Still somewhat popular in the United Kingdom, taking lessons in elocution or 'speech' is much less so in America nowadays. In both British and America in the 19th and early 20th centuries, elocution was part of the curriculum in many of the 'better' schools. Young men and women were taught how to speak with acceptable accents, how to pronounce words, how to give speeches and how to deliver Bible readings, poetry and drama.

**My Elocution Lessons** - I began taking elocution lessons with a wonderful lady called Mrs. Ruth Heyes. At the time, she was probably 70 years old and gave lessons to several children at once, who all congregated in her kitchen to recite poetry and Bible reading, while she baked cookies and bread. Eccentric in the fun British way, Mrs. Heyes was also known as one of the best elocution teachers in
England, a fact I soon learned when, at a local elocution competition, Mrs. Heyes' students took most of the prizes.

In a typical elocution lesson with Mrs. Heyes, we recited poetry to learn enunciation (speaking clearly) and pronunciation. We read passages from the Bible, acted Shakespearen plays, read passages from fiction books and much more. All aloud, and either in groups or by ourselves.

Several times a year, most of Mrs. Heyes students entered local elocution lessons in towns in the area, where we would participate in "Bible Reading" competitions, compete with other local kids on who could recite a W. H. Auden poem the best, and much more. In every elocution festival, or competition, I would compete in at least six sections.

Standing on a stage in front of hundreds of people, I soon learned confidence and how to give a really good reading. It was fun. Oh....and I eventually ended up being the girl everyone else used to dread entering the competition as, with Mrs. Heyes wonderful teaching, I won every section I entered 19 times out of 20. An incredible boost for my self-esteem.

**What Elocution Lessons Teach Children**

Elocution teaches children so many skills they can use in later life, it's unbelievable not every parent has their child in classes.

**Correct Speaking** - Of course, it's a given, taking elocution classes teaches a child to pronounce words correctly, to have a 'more acceptable accent', (meaning not a regional accent that may cause problems in later life), to stress words to create different meanings and how to give a great speech.

If your child may end up in a career where speaking is important, taking elocution or speech lessons is the best gift you can give them.

**Confidence** - The most important thing elocution lessons gave me was confidence. Learning how to stand, how to breath, how to project my voice to the back of a room, and how to speak correctly, gave me confidence I never had when I was a little kid. I've used that confidence in every job I've had and it's been amazing how much it's helped my career.
How To Stand - So many people slouch their way through life, so to be taught at a young age to stand straight, shoulders back, stomach sucked in and in a solid stance, teaches a child not only to stand with confidence, which causes other people to have confidence in you, but also is healthy for their bodies (a lot less back and neck problems that way).

A Love of the Spoken and Written Word - Great presidents like presidents Clinton and Kennedy and great prime ministers like Churchill, all had a love of the spoken and written word. Knowing the value of loving to speak and loving to read, sets a child up for a wonderful future that will always be attainable for them, simply because of what they can do with the spoken and written word. Elocution teaches children this.

If you as a parent, or as a teacher, want your children to succeed sign them up for elocution or speech classes or learn how to teach them yourselves. Being able to speak clearly, precisely and with feeling will give a child possibilities they never would have had before and a life unimaginable without it.