

Interactive Read-Alouds with Young Children

As every teacher knows, the benefits of reading aloud are numerous. Read-alouds motivate children, expose them to a variety of literature, and extend their knowledge about the world around them (Hoffman, Roser, and Battle, 1993). The Commission on Reading states, “The single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985).

Why Read-Aloud with Children?

Many researchers agree that reading aloud with a great deal of teacher-child and child-child interaction is an effective way to introduce children to the joy of reading and the art of listening (Morrow, 2003). A joint position statement of the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) also claims that the single most important activity for building understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children. According to the Family Literacy Foundation (2002), reading aloud with children regularly is an extremely effective medium to build relationships and communicate with children while helping them understand features of written language and grow in appreciation of a variety of genres.



There are many benefits to reading aloud:

- Helps children associate reading with warm and pleasant feelings.
- Increases communications with the person reading.
- Introduces new concepts in a fun and engaging way.
- Builds listening skills, vocabulary, memory, and language skills.
- Develops imagination and creativity.
- Helps children gain information about the world and relate characters, setting, and plot to their own lives.
- Helps develop personal interests.
- Teaches positive behavior patterns, social values, and positive attitudes toward self and others.
- Teaches about print concepts. (Family Literacy Foundation, 2002; Trelease, 2001; Schickedanz, 1999)

Helpful Hints for Reading Aloud

It is important to talk about what you are reading before, during, and after reading. “It is that talk that surrounds the storybook reading that gives it power, helping children to bridge what is in the story and their own lives” (IRA and NAEYC, 1998). There are certain components that are widely practiced by expert teachers (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, and Frey, 2004).

Before Reading

- Preview and read the book to yourself before reading aloud to children. Note places you may wish to pause and ask questions. Plan enough time to read aloud, enjoy, and discuss what you are reading.
- Set a clear purpose for the read aloud.
- Introduce the book—read the title, author, and illustrator. Talk about the cover art. Predict what the book is about and set a purpose for reading.

During Reading

- Invite active participation during reading. Sit close to children so they can experience and interact with you and the book.
- Use puppets and other props related to the story.
- Model fluent reading. Track the print as you read.
- Watch children’s expressions as you read and be sensitive to signs of boredom and confusion.
- Vary your expression and tone of voice, using a different voice for each character. Pause to create suspense. Repeat important information text. Use eye contact as you read.
- Talk about the book and how it relates to children’s experiences.
- Ask children to look at illustrations to help them understand the story and make predictions about what happens next.
- Talk about photographs or illustrations in informational text to support children’s interest and curiosity about the natural and social world (Reese and Harris, 1997; Yopp and Yopp, 2000).
- Make connections to what children already know or have learned during the day.
- Ask questions that require reading between the lines and thinking ahead: Why do you think...? Have you ever...? Does this remind you of...? What does the author mean by...? What if...?



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After Reading

- Follow up after reading using art projects, dramatic play, or activities that build on what you have read.
- Be a role model to help children learn that reading can be fun and engaging.

Tips for Rereading a Familiar Story

- Have children repeat interesting words, rhymes, or dialogue of a character.
- Pause and let children say a word that ends a predictable or repetitive phrase.
- Invite children to fill in words in a rhyming text.

Selecting the Best Books for Young Children

In selecting books for your preschool-age children, keep the following criteria in mind (Strickland and Morrow, 1989).

- Themes that are appropriate to children's developmental, emotional, and social level
- Rhythmic language and interesting vocabulary
- Language that sounds natural
- Books that you will enjoy sharing
- A variety of narrative and informational texts

Choose books that reflect what preschoolers like and know, such as these suggestions:

- **Feeling good about self, their growing skills, and accomplishments**

Ira Sleeps Over by Bernard Waber
William's Doll by Charlotte Zolotow
I Can—Can You? by Peggy Parish

- **Families and friends**

Corduroy by Don Freeman
Little Bear by Else Holmelund Minarik
Max's Toys by Rosemary Wells
Noisy Nora by Rosemary Wells

- **Vivid imaginations**

Stone Soup by Marcia Brown
The Three Little Pigs by Paul Galdone
Curious George Series by H.A. Rey

- **Confidence in “reading” privately (wordless books)**

The Snowman by Raymond Briggs
 Rosie’s Walk by Pat Hutchins
 Pancakes for Breakfast by Tomie dePaola

- **Enjoyment of rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and alliteration**

The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss
 Millions of Cats by Wanda Gag
 Read Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young compiled by Jack Prelutsky

- **A love of and interest in animals**

The Very Busy Spider by Eric Carle
 The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
 Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin, Jr.

- **New concepts—alphabet, colors, numbers**

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault
 Color Farm by Lois Ehlert
 Count by Denise Fleming

- **Fantasy stories that help children face their fears**

Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak
 Go Away, Big Green Monster by Ed Emberly
 Are You My Mother? by P.D. Eastman

- **Multicultural themes**

Peter’s Chair by Ezra Jack Keats
 Siesta by Ginger Foglesong Guy
 Yum Yum Dim Sum by Amy Wilson Sanger
 Jambo Means Hello: Swahili Alphabet by Muriel Feelings

- **Love of curiosity and new information**

Dinosaurs, Dinosaurs by Byron Barton
 Big Book of Trucks by Caroline Bingham
 Wonderful Worms by Linda Glaser
 Dogs by Gail Gibbons

(Recommendations from Cohen, Belgay, and Fisher, 1998; Trelease, 2001; Strickland and Morrow, 1989; Yopp and Yopp, 2000)

The more children get to practice behaviors connected with talking, listening, reading, and writing, the easier it becomes for them to become successful and enthusiastic readers. Remember that the art of listening is an acquired one. It must be taught and cultivated gradually—it doesn't happen overnight (Trelease, 2001). When your children see the joy you experience from reading aloud to them, chances are they will pick up books on their own. The more children are exposed to quality books and the joy of reading, the more they learn the value of the experience.

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