

## For the adult reader - Tips for reading with children

What follows is some information on reading with children and some hopefully helpful hints for resources and techniques. This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor is it a set of instructions or homework for adults! It is only intended to be a guide and to help out if you are looking for tips or advice.

### **The benefits of reading aloud**

Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success. It provides children with a demonstration of phrased, fluent reading. It reveals the rewards of reading, and develops the listener's interest in books and desire to be a reader.

Listening to others read develops key understanding and skills, such as an appreciation for how a story is written and familiarity with book conventions, such as "once upon a time" and "happily ever after". Reading aloud demonstrates the relationship between the printed word and meaning – children understand that print tells a story or conveys information – and invites the listener into a conversation with the author.

Children can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently. It exposes less able readers to the same rich and engaging books that fluent readers read on their own, and entices them to become better readers. Students of any age benefit from hearing an experienced reading of a wonderful book.

### **Choosing good books**

Children need to be exposed to a wide range of stories and books. They need to see themselves as well as other people, cultures, communities, and issues in the books we read to them. They need to see how characters in books handle the same fears, interests, and concerns that they experience. Selecting a wide range of culturally diverse books will help all children find and make connections to their own life experiences, other books they have read, and universal concepts.

Children use real life to help them understand books, and books help children understand real life. So you might want to try to choose books that invite children to respond with enthusiasm and understanding. In this case, look for books with rich language, meaningful plots, compelling characters, and engaging illustrations.

Keep two simple questions in mind: Is it a good story? Is it worth sharing with a child?

Other ideas to consider when selecting good books include:

- Is the book worthy of a reader's and listener's time?
- Does the story sound good to the ear when read aloud?
- Will the child find the book relevant to their life?
- Will the book spark conversation?
- Will the book motivate deeper topical understanding?

- Does the book inspire children to find or listen to another book on the same topic? By the same author? Written in the same genre?
- Is the story memorable?

At this time, many publishers and websites are making ebooks available, some good places to start are:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/libraries-leisure-culture/libraries/library-online>

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/>

[https://stories.audible.com/discovery?ref=adbl\\_ent\\_anon\\_ds\\_ds\\_vn](https://stories.audible.com/discovery?ref=adbl_ent_anon_ds_ds_vn)

<https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/search/?query=children%27s+books>

<https://manybooks.net/>

<http://www.freeclassicebooks.com/>

<https://www.worldbookonline.com/>

<https://www.researchify.co.uk/audiobooks.html>

<https://www.worldbookday.com/world-of-stories/>

<https://librivox.org/>

<http://www.openculture.com/freeaudiobooks>

### Looking at the page

Several researchers have published work that helps us understand that very simple, small actions during reading can have a big impact on what a child takes away from sharing a book with an adult.

Children being read to almost always focus on illustrations or looking up at the adult reader. The child's eyes almost never look at the print on the page, yet that's where children can learn the most about letters, sounds, and words. To get the most out of a shared reading, guide their attention to printed words. Doing so may help the child's reading, spelling, and comprehension skills down the road.

To help direct their attention to the print in a book, you can focus on specific parts of it, including:

- The meaning of the print. This includes pointing out specific words within a book and drawing the child's attention to the print. For example, "*Here are Matilda's words. She says, 'thank you'.*"
- The organisation of the book and print, which includes understanding the way pages are read, the role of the author, and print direction. For example, "*I am going to read this section, see where the section is marked by this large gap?*"
- The letters. Struggling readers may need help remembering that letters come in uppercase and lowercase, and help learning the names of each letter. For example, "*This M in the red block is an uppercase letter. See how this uppercase letter is bigger than these lowercase letters?*"
- The words, which includes helping them recognise some written words, and the match between spoken words and written words. For example, "*Let's point to each word as I read it. Ready?*"

## 'PEER' reading

The best story times are very interactive: You are talking about and reading the story, the child is talking, and there is conversation taking place between the two of you. Because of all the talking, this type of shared reading is often called **dialogic reading**. Adults can use the **PEER method** to help them remember a few important ways to read in this interactive way:

**P: Prompt** the child with a question about the story. Prompting them focuses their attention, engages them in the story, and helps them understand the book.

*Example: Point out something in the book, for example, a character trait, "What do you think of Miss Trunchbull? Is she a nice person?"*

**E: Evaluate** the child's response.

*Example: "That's right! I think she's pretty horrible too."*

**E: Expand** on what the child said, using specific instances (evidence) from the book

*Example: "In fact, it was very mean of her to make him eat all that cake."*

**R: Repeat or revisit** the prompt you started with, encouraging them to use the new information you've provided and, if there is an opportunity, relate it to something else that has happened in the text, or ask them to.

*Example: "Can you think of another time Miss Trunchbull was mean?"*

Don't feel obligated to use the PEER procedure on every page, with every book. Keep it fun! Use PEER when it fits and when the child is engaged with the story.

## Visualisation

One way to help a child comprehend what they are reading is to encourage them to visualise parts of the story in their mind. These "mind movies" help clarify information and increase understanding, and can be done with fiction or nonfiction texts. The images can include any of the five senses.

Some of the books you read with the child may already contain beautiful illustrations, so try this visualisation practice with the longer books you use as your read aloud. Or, sit facing them and read a few pages without having them look at the pictures. Then follow these few simple steps to provide your child with practice developing their mental images:

- Begin reading. Pause after a few sentences or paragraphs that contain good descriptive information.
- Share the image you've created in your mind, and talk about which words from the book helped you "draw" your picture. Your picture can relate to the setting, the characters, or the actions. By doing this, you are modelling the kind of picture making you want them to do.
- Talk about how these pictures help you understand what's happening in the story.
- Continue reading. Pause again and share the new image you created. Then ask them to share what they see, hear, taste, smell and feel. Ask what words helped them create the mental image and emotions.
- Are your images identical? Probably not! This is a great time to talk about why your images might be different. Perhaps the child went on a school trip or had a school assembly that changed the way they created the picture in their mind.

Perhaps experiences you've had as an adult influenced what you "drew." These differences are important to understand and respect.

- Read a longer portion of text and continue the sharing process.

Once this is a familiar skill, encourage them to use mental imagery when they are reading by themselves.

### **"Think aloud" to model how to make connections**

By modelling how fluent readers think about the text and problem solve as they read, we make the invisible act of reading visible. Modelling encourages children to develop the "habits of mind" proficient readers employ.

Helping children find and make connections to stories and books requires them to relate the unfamiliar text to their relevant prior knowledge. There are several comprehension strategies that help children become knowledgeable readers. Three are:

- Connecting the book to their own life experience
- Connecting the book to other literature they have read
- Connecting what they are reading to universal concepts

Adults can point out connections between prior experiences and the story, similarities between books, and any relationship between the books and a larger concept.

Here are some examples of "think-alouds":

*To make connections between the book and your own life, think aloud as you share.*

- When you read the beginning of *A River Dream* by Allen Say, for example, you can comment, "This book reminds me of the time my father took me fishing. *Have you ever been fishing?*"
- To make connections between related books with the same author or similar settings, characters, and concepts, say "*Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by John Steptoe is an African tale that is similar to the tale of Cinderella. Both stories are about sisters – one kind and the other spiteful. Do you know any stories about nice and mean sisters or brothers? Let's continue reading to find out other ways the stories are similar."
- To connect a book to a larger world or universal concept, you could say to them, "*Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon helps me understand that we are all the same in many ways, but it's our differences that make us special."

While fluent readers make these types of connections with ease, many readers do not. Children need to be shown this type of thinking and then asked to join in and participate in book conversations. This active involvement gives you a glimpse into their thinking and their understanding.