



A Parent's Guide to Reading Aloud with Early Learners

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By now, you likely already know that reading aloud to children is one of the most important activities in regard to early learning and literacy acquisition. Last month we wrote about how [reading bedtime stories isn't enough](#) to foster your child's early reading skills, and we discussed ways to supplement your child's nightly routine.



Enhancing a child's reading sessions is a great idea, but parents must know the tools and techniques to use during everyday reading. Let's take a closer look at the value behind reading aloud to kids from an early age, how to choose the right books, and most importantly, the most effective techniques to use during your child's daily reading.

The Value of Reading Aloud to Kids

Studies have long shown that when parents read aloud to children, kids benefit in a plethora of ways. Preschoolers make significant gains in vocabulary, as well as expressive language. What's more, is that kids indirectly learn linguistic structure,

including the organization of narrative and informational texts. Even if this process is not entirely conscious, kids observe and absorb information like sponges.

Studies have also shown that read-alouds are even more effective when kids are actively engaged. Passively listening to a parent can be helpful at first for vocabulary acquisition, but when it comes to story structure comprehension, kids need to be involved in the reading by making predictions, and asking or answering questions about the text. Merely talking about the book isn't enough, either, because kids need to develop inference skills that allow children to form the building blocks to critical and analytical thinking. As kids grow older and away from toddler-hood, they need think about the read-aloud text more deeply.

This is where the quality of read-aloud sessions come into play. Parents have the opportunity to model reading strategies and analytical thinking for their children by making reading an interactive experience while providing ample guidance.

The first step a parent can take in process of facilitating truly helpful read-alouds is simply to know which books to choose.



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Interactive Read-Alouds: Choosing the Right Books

With so many options out there, how can a parent tell which kids' books make the best read aloud texts? Follow the suggestions below to select the perfect titles for your child's daily reading routine:

Choose YOUR childhood favorite titles

Your child is more likely to be excited about the book if you are! Think back to your childhood: what books do you remember loving the most? Some book titles are timeless classics, and what could be better than sharing your favorites with your own children? Excitement is contagious, so get excited about sharing your favorite childhood books with your child, and he or she will surely look forward to reading those books over and over again!

Harness your child's own interests

When you were a kid, you may have loved dinosaurs, while your child is more interested in cars and trucks. Most public libraries group children's books by interest or character, so don't forget to head to the section that holds your child's attention. For example, if your child loves princesses, latch on to that interest and get your child excited for reading! Read alouds should be enjoyable and entertaining for kids. If your child just isn't interested in a certain category or topic, just find all the books you can based upon their own interests, no matter how many truck or princess books you end up reading!

Wordless books have value too!

While perusing the library or bookstore, you might have wondered why wordless books even exist, and what value they can hold for a beginning reader. Believe it or not, wordless picture books are great for interactive read-aloud sessions.



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Because the books do not have words, you can create your own, or inspire your child to make words to go along with the pictures. Your child will interpret the story based upon

the illustrations provided, and can use that analysis to create a storyline for the book. Here, the possibilities are endless, and this experience provides kids with the engagement they need to develop deep thinking skills.

Take full advantage of the public library

Speaking of the library, don't forget that this free resource is available to you, and is way more cost effective than hitting up your local bookstore. Many parents might assume that libraries are filled with older books, when many libraries fill their shelves with newer award-winning titles all the time! Check out your library's catalogue and order books that may not be available at your branch.

Ask your librarian about new titles that will hit the shelves soon, and find many more resources, like audio books and read aloud programs available for kids.

Look for books a bit harder than your child's current reading level

When looking for the perfect books, take your child's current level into consideration, and then stay one step ahead them. For preschoolers working on sight words, stick to books with simple sentence and story structure. As your child grows, continually up the ante by choosing books with more complex sentences and situations, always encouraging your little reader to think deeper.

Explore nonfiction titles, and even poetry

Don't forget to pick out nonfiction books and alternative types of writing to keep your child intrigued and learning! Read about robots, planets and space, sea creatures, or literally anything that your child is interested in. Mix up your child's reading with different types of writing, like children's poetry.



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If you loved Shel Silverstein as a child, pick up *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and introduce your child to some of the most engaging poetry your child can read! Find kid-friendly magazine or internet articles, and introduce your child to a whole new world of text. By varying the types of reading your child is exposed to, your child will make gains in everything from literacy acquisition to knowledge from around the curriculum.

Dual language books, or titles that include words in a second language

Is your child learning growing up learning two languages? Or do you live in an area with a large population of Spanish speakers? Even if you answered no, books that mix languages are invaluable for children. They teach kids about cultures found across America and the world, while increasing a child's vocabulary.

Reading Aloud: Tips for Parents

Now that you've selected the right books for your child, it's time to take a closer look at the techniques to use during your read-aloud sessions. Use the following tips to facilitate flawless reading experiences for your child:



Parents: pre-read the book to provide vocabulary support and build schema

Once you've selected the perfect books for your little learner, be sure to look over the texts before you read them aloud to your child. Look for any vocabulary that may be challenging for your child, and think of ways to support the learning of that word.

For instance, adding a helpful phrase or word, you may be able to clarify the meaning of the vocabulary word to help it "stick" with your child. Take a look at the story itself, and make sure to activate your child's prior knowledge while reading to build the schema necessary for comprehending and connecting to the text.

Give the book a grand introduction!

Encourage your child to take a close look at the book cover, illustrations, color, etc. By analyzing the title and cover of the book, ask your child to make predictions about what the story may be about, and potential conflicts that may be presented in the book.

Read the book multiple times

This is important. Don't read a book once, put it down, never to return to it again. Instead, plan to read a book with your child at least 3 times, on 3 separate days. After introducing the book the first time, know that your child will be familiar with the book and its themes. On each subsequent reading, ask your child different questions that dig deeper into the text. Ask your child what he or she notices upon reading again. Scaffold your questions by encouraging your child to think about more complex questions or observations with each reading.

Utilize think-alouds during reading

Finally, teachers use a trick in the classroom called "think-alouds". This is where the teacher thinks to him or herself aloud while reading or teaching a concept. Model this behavior with your child, revealing what you're thinking about as you read the text. By modeling this information, your child will learn what to look for while reading, and thereby learn the strategies you use to deconstruct a text.

Not only will you be growing your child's emerging literacy skills, you'll undoubtedly enjoy the quality time you spend with your child, and the excitement on your child's face when they read a favorite book time and time again. Now that you have the tools to choose the right books and know a few "tricks of the trade", take your read alouds to the next level using the strategies above!

