

CHAPTER 2

The Power of Reading Aloud to Your Students: Guidelines and Top 5 Read-Aloud Strategies



Best Ever Advice on... Reading Aloud

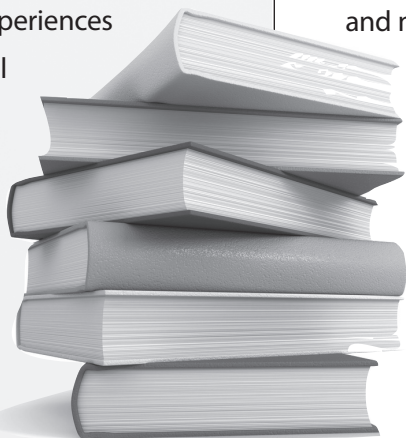
I believe that read-alouds reach their highest level of potency when they are based on a careful balance between fiction and nonfiction—exposing learners to the language forms and structures of the many different text types they need to control as a reader. The language of a set of directions, an informational poem, a Seymour Simon description, and a newspaper all differ dramatically from the language of a novel or picture book. If we are to empower students as readers of all the texts in their world, we must ensure they have ample opportunity to listen to and reflect upon the broadest possible range of text types. Read-aloud weaves a rich tapestry of wonder and thoughtful reflection that gains strength and momentum when built upon a wide range of subjects and differing text structures.

—Linda Hoyt, Author of the *Interactive Read-Alouds: Linking Standards, Fluency, and Comprehension* series (Heinemann)

Reading aloud every day to your students is a research-based, proven way to motivate your students to read on their own, model good reading, promote critical thinking, and create a sense of community in your classroom.

Perhaps you recall being read to as a child. Maybe you hold precious memories of a special adult at home sharing books with you every night for a bedtime story. Or maybe you remember filing into a classroom in elementary school after lunch recess, settling onto the rug or into your desk and chair, and losing yourself in a great book as the teacher's soothing voice transported you into the characters' lives and wove delicious stories that made read-aloud your favorite part of the school day.

When you read aloud to your class, perhaps for some of your students it will be the only time in their childhoods that someone reads aloud to them. You are helping all of your students develop a lifelong love of reading and providing them with memorable experiences with wonderful books!



Why Reading Aloud Is Your Secret Weapon for Inspiring Your Students to Read

The importance of reading aloud to children on a daily basis can't be overestimated. The U.S. Department of Education Commission on Reading took into account over 10,000 studies and found that the most important activity for building the skills and background for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (see Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Children who are read to are usually the very best readers in the classroom, and they acquire large vocabularies, write well, and do better in other subject areas, as well.

Guidelines and Practical Tips for Great Read-Alouds

Select books YOU like to read aloud.

Be sure to choose books that you enjoy sharing with your class, and make sure to expose your students to modern classics as well as the old standbys. (See Suggestions for Read-Alouds as well as the Online Resources and References for recommendations.) When you are passionate about the read-aloud book, the students sense it and begin to share your enthusiasm for reading. If you begin reading a book and notice that your students are not enjoying it, abandon the book and explain that sometimes that is what readers do when they are not enjoying a particular title.

Set aside a consistent place and time slot of 15–20 minutes per day to read aloud.

Try never to give up your read-aloud time, even if some days you need to switch the timing of your read-aloud or even cut it short a bit. Make reading aloud such an ingrained habit in your classroom that the students beg you not to skip it. When my husband and I read aloud to our children when they were young (we still read aloud to the 12-year-old!), they simply could not fall asleep without their read-alouds and begged if we tried to skip reading to them.

Go under the spell of a good book.

Noted author and respected educator Lucy Calkins (1997), in *Raising Lifelong Learners: A Parent's Guide*, says that read-aloud is the time to go under the "spell" of a beautiful book and laugh, cry, and get lost in the flow of the story and the language.

Refer to your rich read-alouds artfully during reading and writing lessons.

In their book *Learning Under the Influence of Language and Literature*, Lester Laminack and Reba Wadsworth (2006) describe six types of read-alouds: books that (1) address standards, (2) build community, (3) demonstrate the craft of writing, (4) enrich vocabulary, (5) entice children to read independently, and (6) model fluent reading. For example,

- You may select a particular book to demonstrate a comprehension strategy from your district standards, such as making connections. When reading the short story "La Bamba" from Gary Soto's *Baseball in April and Other Stories* to fifth graders, we asked

the students to watch for personal connections during the read-aloud. Afterward they discussed their connections to the story that included their experiences with talent shows.

- You might read aloud from a book like *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen that is dripping with descriptive language, then refer to it again during a writing lesson to model rich vocabulary usage.
- The nonsense words from a Dr. Seuss read-aloud later seep into a phonics lesson when creating rhyming words.

Keep the read-aloud experience “pure” without too much direct instruction; however, it is quite natural to selectively draw on examples from your read-alouds during other reading and writing lessons.

Select books that cover some of the content.

You can choose books that take place during a time period in history that you are teaching about, or a particular topic in science.

Use good reading strategies before, during, and after reading.

Before reading, encourage students to help you predict what the day’s reading may be about based on visual clues. Review the events that happened in the portion of text you read the day before. During reading, ask students to enjoy the book, but ask them to watch for something such as connections they make or clues to solve the problem in the story. After reading, students may wish to discuss points they wondered about or favorite parts of the text. Make the discussion feel as natural as a chat among friends rather than a teacher-directed “quiz”!

Break the rules.

As your students become hooked on your read-aloud time together, be sure to occasionally go over time and read more. You’ll find that often when read-aloud is over, the students will whine and ask you to read on. Sometimes just do so! Your students will love it.

Lori’s Top 5 Surefire Strategies for Reading Aloud

Try these proven read-aloud strategies and watch your students’ interest in reading and comprehension soar!

1 The Read-Aloud Challenge: Read 5–7 Times a Day

This sounds like a crazy idea, but it really works and students absolutely love it. Try reading aloud 5–7 times per day and choose the amount of time that works for you.

- One of the read-aloud sessions is longer to build attention, comprehension, and stamina: around 10–15 minutes. The rest of the read-alouds are fast: 1- to 3-minute “quick reads” that you squeeze in at different times throughout the day.
- Open the day with a quick read-aloud, do one again right before recess and lunch, or read aloud as you transition between subjects or when students are lining up.
- Include poems, nonfiction, newspaper articles, how-to books or directions, jokes, menus, online material, and short stories. Keep a bin in which to store a variety of read-aloud materials.
- Assign a student the task of selecting the quick reads for the day and checking off the allotted number of read-aloud hits throughout the day.
- Ask students to turn to partners and discuss the reading by making up questions to quiz each other, or have them discuss what they are wondering by posing open-ended questions.



2 Senses Alert (Oczkus, 2009)

As your students listen during read-aloud, ask them to be on the lookout for sentences, words, and phrases that require them to use their senses to really experience and comprehend the book.

- Throughout the reading, ask questions like, Did you see that? Did you hear that? Can you taste that or feel that?
- Ask students to turn and talk to partners after you read a portion of text and give examples of one or more senses depending upon the text.
- Ask students to make movies of the book in their heads. Even when reading a picture book, the illustrator leaves some of the action up to the reader to formulate in his or her head.
- After a read-aloud session, students may quickly sketch a scene they imagined during the reading. Students share sketches with one another.
- Discuss how visualizing and using other senses helps good readers comprehend text.



3 Partner Talk/Discussion Starters (Oczkus, 2009)

Before and after reading aloud, to deepen student comprehension, allow students to quickly turn and talk to partners for just a minute or so about their questions, confusions, and ideas related to the text. You might try using discussion starters such as these to guide and direct the interactions (select one at a time for younger students or put this list on a chart and allow the students to select their own discussion starters):

- Something new I learned was....
- I liked the part where...because....
- I realize now that...because....
- This reminded me of...because....
- I was surprised by...because....

4 Literacy Mystery Boxes (Pearman, Camp, & Hurst, 2004)

This is a very clever idea that some educators developed and then shared in an article in *The Reading Teacher* journal. The authors suggest bringing in a box that holds several items that relate in some way to the story. So, for example, to help students predict what *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White is about, the teacher pulls out of the box a plastic spider, a plastic rat or pig, a spider web, or a blue ribbon. For *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, the authors suggest bringing in a stuffed caterpillar, green leaf, apple, and lollipop. The possibilities for mystery boxes are endless, even for students in middle school and high school. Mystery boxes make reading aloud memorable for students and provide discussion prompts and opportunities for rich vocabulary instruction. Have students bring in mystery boxes to go with the books they are reading, as well.

5 Interactive Engagement (Oczkus, 2009)

You can easily make your read-alouds a bit more interactive by inviting students to turn and talk to partners before and after the reading. Discussion alone has been shown to deepen comprehension (Lapp, Flood, Ranck-Buhr, Van Dyke, & Spacek, 1997). Sometimes that is all it takes to grab your students and focus their attention. You may also choose from these interactive engagement ideas after a read-aloud:

- Drama—Ask students to make faces to demonstrate the emotions of the characters in various parts of the reading. Or ask volunteers to come forward and act out portions of the text. Students may also turn to a partner and “interview” each other, taking turns role-playing as characters.
- Art—Students can quickly sketch a favorite part or character, or what they’ve learned, and share with a partner.





Before Reading: Activate Prior Knowledge

- What do you remember about being read to as a child? How does that experience shape your approach to reading aloud to students in your classroom?
- What are some of your students' favorite read-alouds? What is hard about reading aloud to students? What is the best thing about reading aloud to students?



During Reading: Respond While Reading

- While reading this chapter, mark your text with self-stick notes. Use symbols to indicate questions (?), things you want to try (T), something you connect with (+), something interesting or surprising (!) (adapted from Hatt, n.d.).



After Reading: Think About and Discuss

- Justify reading aloud. Why does it matter? How can you make time for it?
- Should parents read aloud to students at your grade level? Explain.
- What age is "too old" for read-aloud? Review the Education Week article "Reading Aloud to Teens Gains Favor Among Teachers" (Zehr, 2010) and discuss.
- What are the six types of read-alouds suggested by Laminack and Wadsworth (2006)? Name some books you could use for each.
- Do you agree with the guidelines in this chapter? Why, or what else would you add? What guidelines have you found to be useful when reading aloud to students?
- Discuss ways to make your read-alouds more interactive and engaging. How can students turn and talk to a partner during your read-aloud? Which of the Top 5 would you like to try with your students?

Putting Read-Alouds Into Practice

Professional Development Breakout Groups



- Make a chart and list the problems you have experienced when reading aloud to your students (e.g., choice of books, attention span, fitting it into your schedule). What are some possible solutions?
- Work with team members to research books for reading aloud at your grade level. Share read-aloud ideas.

Lesson Sharing



- Try one of Lori's Top 5 lessons with your class. Be prepared to share. On a scale of 1–5, how did the lesson go? Explain. What do you want to try next?

Teacher as Reader



- Discuss in detail what you remember about someone at home or school reading aloud to you as a child. What did you like and dislike?
- Are you satisfied with the way you read aloud to your students? What could you do to improve your technique? Where in your life do you read aloud (e.g., in church or for another group, to your own children or an elderly parent, while listening to audible books)?

Before the Next Meeting



- Read:** Select the next chapter your group will read. Mark the text during reading.
- Try:** Try one of the lessons from the next chapter, or try something new from this chapter.
- Observe:** Visit a colleague's classroom to observe a lesson on reading aloud, or record yourself teaching a lesson and share the video at a meeting.

Going Deeper With Read-Alouds

- Try a book study using this practical resource loaded with fresh new takes on getting the most from reading aloud to your students:

Laminack, L.L., & Wadsworth, R.M. (2006). *Learning under the influence of language and literature: Making the most of read-alouds across the day*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Or consider studying the resources listed on page 28.

Interactive Read-Aloud Bookmark Lesson

Objective: Provide students with a bookmark with prompts that they can use as they “turn and talk” to one another.

Common Core Connections: Students confirm their understanding of a text read aloud by asking and answering questions. Encourage students to compare and contrast the reading with other material they’ve read. They need to provide evidence from the text when explaining their thinking. Encourage students to use words and phrases from the read-aloud in discussions.

Teacher Modeling: Throughout a read-aloud session, pause periodically and model how to use one of the bookmark prompts. Conduct a think-aloud that starts something like this: “In this part here, I am thinking....”

Guided Practice: Ask students to turn to their partners and use the same prompt you just modeled. Eventually, give students choices among several prompts. Listen to the pairs and invite students to share with the whole class. Praise their efforts.

Independent Practice: Students may use the same prompts you used in your read-aloud lesson when they read their independent reading books. They can mark with self-stick notes those passages they wish to share with the group or a partner.

Wrap Up: Ask students how the discussion helped deepen their comprehension. Ask which of the prompts on the bookmark is their favorite or the most helpful and why.

Lights, Camera, Listen Lesson

Objective: Focus students’ attention on sensory images during a read-aloud.

Common Core Connections: Ask students to share evidence from the text, plus their experiences, to infer visual images. Encourage students to use selection vocabulary.

Teacher Modeling: Pause periodically during and after a read-aloud to read from the text and think aloud as you demonstrate how good readers use sensory images to comprehend a text. Select specific portions of text to use as examples. Say, “During this part, I could see [or hear or feel]....”

Guided Practice: Invite students to turn to a partner or their tablemates and share the sensory images they see and experience. Students may sketch before or after discussing examples with a partner.

Independent Practice: Students hunt in their own independent reading books for other strong examples of sensory images and then sketch those as well.

Wrap Up: Invite students to tell partners and the class how sensory images help them comprehend as they read. Share favorite examples from the text.

Assessment Tips

During read-alouds, observe students and listen to their responses in class and partner discussions. Encourage students to use physical, verbal, and sometimes written responses to your read-alouds (e.g., thumbs-up, slates, make a face, dramatize, and partner talk). Keep a clipboard or student role sheet nearby to jot down quick notes and observations during or after the lesson.

Connect: Are students making logical connections to themselves, other books, and the world? Do they vary their connections?

Predict: Do students use the text plus text clues (e.g., text structure, previous events, headings) to help make sensible predictions? Do students change predictions during reading?

Question: Do students ask questions that go with the text? Are questions just literal or are they inferential, too? Do students question the author?

Inference: Do students use text clues to make inferences about character traits or feelings?

Monitor/Clarify: Do students identify words and ideas that are unclear? Do they identify multiple ways to figure out words and ideas? Do they use sensory descriptions during reading?

Summarize: Do students retell in their own words and in order? Do they use text structure to help organize a summary?

Synthesize: Do students identify new ideas from the reading or how they have been changed?

Evaluate: Do students evaluate and give reasons for opinions about the author’s style, storyline, or characters’ actions?

Interactive Read-Aloud Bookmark Partner Turn & Talk Points



Listen carefully while your teacher reads aloud. Take turns discussing with your partner

Before Reading:

- I think this is about...because....
- Already this reminds me of...because....
- I think I will learn...because....

During and After Reading:

- It was confusing when....
- At first I thought..., then I realized....
- I was surprised by...because....
- So far...has happened....
- This reminds me of...because....
- Something new I learned was....
- I liked the part where...because....
- It was so (funny, sad, wild) when....
- I think the character...was very... because....
- The author probably wrote this because....

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- Something new I learned was....
- I liked the part where...because....
- It was so (funny, sad, wild) when....
- I think the character...was very... because....
- The author probably wrote this because....

Lights, Camera, Listen

Scenes from (title) _____ by (author) _____



Listen as your teacher reads aloud.



Make a movie in your head. Use all your senses.

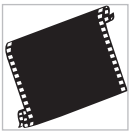


Sketch what you see.

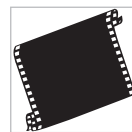


Share with a partner. Choose a scene to act out, and classmates guess your scene.

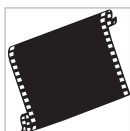
Scene One _____



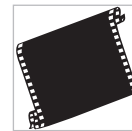
Scene Two _____



Scene Three _____



Scene Four _____



Suggestions for Read-Alouds

Picture Books

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman

Charlie Anderson by Barbara Abercrombie

The Great Kapok Tree:

A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest
by Lynne Cherry

Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel
by Virginia Lee Burton

Rikki-Tikki-Tavi by Rudyard Kipling
The Story of Ferdinand by Munro Leaf

Chapter Books

Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
by Roald Dahl

Harriet the Spy by Louise Fitzhugh
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by
C.S. Lewis

Stone Fox by John Reynolds Gardiner
Stuart Little by E.B. White
Winnie-the-Pooh by A.A. Milne



Q&A

Many of the teachers in my building skip reading aloud because our school is under fire to bring up test scores immediately. How do I justify taking the time to read aloud to my students?

You can't afford to *not* take the time to read aloud to your students.

The benefits of read-aloud are many, as students develop background knowledge, comprehension, robust vocabularies, and critical thinking skills. If you throw in discussions about the read-aloud, students develop oral language and deeper understandings.

I am not sure what books make good read-alouds for my grade level. Any suggestions?

See the Suggestions for Read-Alouds, Online Resources, and References provided here, for a start. You do *not* need to purchase books to read aloud to your class. You can rely on your school librarian or public librarian for suggestions. One of my favorite online resources is a website sponsored by Jim Trelease, author of the best-selling book *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (2006). Pam Allyn (2009), teacher and staff developer, suggests books by ages and themes in *What to Read When: The Books and Stories to Read With Your Child—and All the Best Times to Read Them*. See also literacy specialist Nancy Anderson's *What Should I Read Aloud? A Guide to 200 Best-Selling Picture Books* (2007).

"Make reading aloud such an ingrained habit in your classroom that the students beg you not to skip it."

Online Resources

International Reading Association Choices Reading Lists:
www.reading.org/resources/Booklists.aspx

Featuring annual Children's Choices, Teachers' Choices, and Young Adults' Choices reading lists.

Jim Trelease's Home Page:
www.trelease-on-reading.com
Read-aloud expert Jim Trelease provides many suggestions for reading aloud to children of all ages.

Read Aloud America Recommended Books: readaloudamerica.org/booklist.htm

Suggested read-aloud titles for infants through high schoolers.

Storyline Online:
www.storylineonline.net
Celebrities read children's books aloud.

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