



# Why Read Aloud to Students?

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Studies have demonstrated that reading aloud to students helps all students, not just struggling students, develop specific skills and strategies in reading, such as:

- Involving students in reading for enjoyment
- Demonstrating reading for a purpose
- Providing an adult demonstration of phrased, fluent reading
- Developing a sense of story
- Developing knowledge of written language syntax
- Developing a knowledge of how texts are structured
- Increasing vocabulary
- Expanding linguistic repertoire
- Supporting intertextual ties
- Creating a community of readers through shared enjoyment and shared knowledge
- Making complex ideas available to students
- Promoting oral language development
- Establishing known texts to use as a basis for writing and other activities

Furthermore, studies show that read alouds should not stop at grade 3 or 4. Read alouds have great instructional value throughout high school and even into college, especially for struggling readers.

Some suggested steps in an effective read aloud include the following techniques:

- **Prepare, prepare, prepare!** Do not expect to do a good read aloud if you haven't planned, and certainly if you haven't pre-read the text. This preparation also includes making certain to pick a text you like. If you do not like the text, your body language or voice will give this away. Make sure the text interests and connects with you before you read the text aloud to students.
- **Meaning Statement** – Make a main idea statement that will give the students an idea of what the story is about. Give the statement before or while the students see the cover of the book.
- **Vocabulary** – Choose only two or three words to introduce prior to reading the book. The introduction of too many words will have little to no effect on increasing vocabulary development.
- **Big Ideas** – Talk about any big ideas the text might cover, such as slavery, or women's rights, etc.
- **Preview the book** – if the book has pictures, take a picture walk through part or all of the text. If the book is a chapter book, read the titles of some of the chapters. Ask students for predictions when doing these activities.
- **Content/Vocabulary Questions** – Ask students to recall the meaning of a vocabulary word when it is presented in the story. Ask yourself specific questions out loud that guide your own comprehension. For example, "I wonder what it would feel like if..." or, "I can't imagine how I would feel if that happened to me," or, "I remember when we read... that something similar happened." Acting out your own thinking demonstrates to the students that readers interact with text to gain meaning. When you get to a place that proves or disproves a prediction, encourage students to self-check predictions and explain why they were correct or incorrect.
- **Unusual Language Structures** – If the text uses unusual language structure, such as the word choices indicate the book was written long ago, or every sentence begins with a prepositional phrase, or the poem has a cadence that helps direct word choice, talk about it and point this out.
- **Respond to Student Questions** – You may not be able to respond to all the questions students ask, but do respond to some of them. Take breaks at logical points in the text to answer or discuss questions, Make sure that you don't always answer the questions from the same students – share the wealth of receiving attention from you.
- **Making Connections** – Think aloud about what text-to-self, text-to-text, and/or text-to-world connections you have made reading this book.

- **Take Notes** – the more often you read a specific book, the more difficult it will be to recall your first reactions to the text. Take notes about these reactions for future readings – these first reactions hold the kernels for demonstrating reading skills and strategies you use to students.

In *Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers*, authors Dorothy Strickland, Kathy Ganske, and Joanne Monroe point out:

Because struggling readers' experiences with text have so often translated into work rather than fun, a primary objective of the read-aloud should be to engage these students, as well as the rest of the class, in a reading experience that is rewarding because it is meaningful and enjoyable. To make sure students can devote their full attention to the reading and lose themselves in the story, it is a good idea to ask them to set aside competing desk activities, or have them gather on the floor. Then, supplied with a good book, an awareness that reading too fast is not a good model, and a willingness to risk feeling silly by taking on the voices of characters in the story, teachers are ready to model fluent reading. In addition to showing that reading is expressive, the modeling will demonstrate that good readers read in phrases, not word by word, and that the phrase reading, pauses, and change in voice inflection that signal various types of punctuation facilitate the meaning-making process.... Fluent reading should be modeled every day, but it does not have to be done with a lengthy chapter book. Poems and picture books work equally well when time is short. Book talks can also be used to model fluent reading (123).

If you want to have a positive impact on student reading, comprehension, and vocabulary development, prepare for a read aloud and read. Immerse both yourself and your students in the story, and share your thoughts, share yourself with the students. As Jim Trelease points out, "The more you read, the better you get at it. And the better you get at it, the more you read."

## Resources

- Benchmark Education Company. "Read About Best Practices in Understanding Read-alouds." [http://www.benchmarkeducation.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=4016](http://www.benchmarkeducation.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4016)
- Block, Cathy Collins & Susan E. Israel. "The ABCs of Performing Highly Effective Think-Alouds." *The Reading Teacher*. 01 Oct. 2004.

- Strickland, Dorothy, Kathy Ganske, & Joanne Monroe. *Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers: Strategies for Classroom Intervention 3* – 6. International Reading Assoc. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Pub., 2002.
- Trelease, Jim. *The Read Aloud Handbook*. NY: Penguin Books, 2003.