

THE BENEFITS OF READ ALOUDS FOR YOUNG READERS

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By  
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

THE BENEFITS OF READ ALOUDS FOR YOUNG READERS

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## ABSTRACT

Research shows that not all children experience a read aloud every day, in the classroom or at home. This is due to a number of factors, potentially including lack of time, lack of understanding of the importance of reading aloud, or lack of ability to read aloud. Not engaging in a read aloud with a fluent reader every day can have detrimental effects on children of all ages, but especially emerging readers. This study will demonstrate the social-emotional and academic benefits of reading aloud to young children at home and in the classroom. In the social-emotional sphere, the benefits of reading aloud are related to quality time spent with caretakers, discussion and the opportunity to introduce difficult topics. The academic benefits of read alouds are related to language development, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and the opportunity for other academic lessons. These benefits are applicable to children of all ages. This thesis also reviews the strategies that are most effective for caretakers, educators to use when reading aloud with children. Included in this thesis is a handbook intended for educators and families that reviews the importance of reading aloud with children and the most effective strategies to incorporate when reading aloud with children.

## CHAPTER I

### PROJECT INTRODUCTION

My love for reading started as a child. I had in-progress books stashed in my bedroom, bathroom, living room, and desk at school; my parents would check on me after bedtime to ensure that I was not reading with a flashlight under the covers. As I started college, the time I had to read for pleasure dwindled, but the love remained. I started learning more about the process of learning to read and how to teach children to read. In my first year as a first-grade teacher, I struggled with a host of first-year teacher problems--classroom management, time management, and parent management, to name a few. However, there was a bright spot in each day--the fifteen minutes after lunch where my students and I would sit on the floor and read. As I talked with my students about books, I realized that not all of my students had the same experience with books or the love for books that I grew up with. This deficit could be hindering these students from reaching their full potential as readers, for both academic and enjoyment purposes.

These experiences of reading below grade level, of rarely hearing books read aloud, of coming from homes where English is not the primary language spoken, and of not having access to books in the home are ones that are familiar to many students. In a survey of elementary age students, 62% of students reported they would like to be read to more often, and a majority of students reported that they were not read to every day at home or in the classroom (Ledger & Merga, 2018). Only 37% of

children ages 0-5 are read to daily (Scholastic, 2019). For a developing reader, listening to a fluent reader read aloud is a key component in learning to read, so this missing piece is detrimental for a developing reader (Allington & Gabriel, 2010). In another study, although a majority of preschool, kindergarten and first grade teachers reported reading aloud to their students at least once per day, a similar majority reported that they did not prepare ahead of time at all (McCaffrey & Hisrich, 2017). This shows a lack of understanding of the importance of reading aloud and a lack of understanding of the strategies necessary to implement quality read alouds in homes and classrooms.

### **Problem Statement**

There is a problem in our schools and homes. Reading aloud to students has innumerable benefits, and yet many of our primary-age students do not experience a read aloud daily (Lane & Wright, 2007; Ledger & Merga, 2018). According to the *Kids & Family Reading Report*, 55% of children aged birth to five years were read to at least five days per week, and only 37% of those children were read to daily. Although this number has increased since 2016, it still reveals that a large number of young children are not being read to daily, or not being read to at all (Scholastic, 2019). These percentages decrease even further after the child reaches age nine. The Scholastic 2019 Kids & Family Reading Report continued that the percentage of children who are read aloud to five to seven times per week decreases from 45% to 21% between the ages of eight and nine, and further to 7% after age 11. Children from households with incomes less than \$35,000 are read to less frequently, and their

parents are less likely to have received recommendations to read aloud to their children (Scholastic, 2019).

There are a few reasons for this deficit. In a world that is increasingly fast-paced and technology-driven, parents find that reading aloud to their children becomes less of a priority and more of a chore (Cox Gurdon, 2019). Parents own negative feelings about and experiences with reading have been shown to prevent them from starting a reading habit with their own children (Levy et al., 2018). Families of low socioeconomic status experience greater variation in the frequency of positive reading behaviors, including reading aloud, book ownership, and library visits (Storch Bracken & Fischel, 2008). Teachers report similar issues. Many educators struggle to find the time in the classroom to read aloud to their students and may feel pressured to give up read alouds in favor of more “rigorous” activities that focus on skills or are directly tied to an adopted curriculum (Layne, 2009; McCaffrey & Hisrich, 2017). In addition, as children get older, the responsibility for reading aloud and encouraging students to read seems to become misplaced--parents put the responsibility on schools, while schools put the responsibility on parents. With these misconceptions, children do not receive the encouragement or support they need to read (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018).

There is a need for more information about the benefits of reading aloud to children, especially in the early formative years of school and for students who come from low-income homes or homes in which a language other than English is spoken. In addition to the frequency of reading aloud, teachers and families should be aware



of the benefits of creating opportunities for quality shared reading experiences.

Schools and families should work together to make sure that all children receive the benefits of shared reading experiences.

### **Guiding Questions**

How can this handbook support families and educators in making the choice to read aloud to children?

What are strategies to prepare for and improve the quality of read alouds for elementary age students in the classroom and home?

### **Project Significance**

This project has the potential to impact students' enjoyment of reading and will be significant for teachers and families who wish to maximize the benefits of reading aloud to their children. It will encourage parents and families to increase the frequency of read aloud experiences for their children and the students they serve.

The benefits of reading aloud start at a young age, potentially even before the child is born--studies have shown that the brain activity of babies in utero picks up when a familiar voice is heard (Cox Gurdon, 2019). Reading aloud has been proven to activate more of a child's brain than other activities, such as watching a video (Cox Gurdon, 2019). Reading aloud helps pre-school children learn the patterns of speech and develop their vocabularies (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019). According to a study by Hart and Risley, by age 3, children from underprivileged families hear about 30 million words less than their counterparts from privileged families (Hart & Risley, 1997). As these children start school, those who have fewer words in their vocabulary

are at a disadvantage in the classroom. Reading aloud has positive effects on children's future academic skills (Barnes & Puccioni, 2017). Hearing a fluent reader benefits students' reading fluency and comprehension, vocabulary and oral language development, and visual literacy skills (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019). Read alouds have been proven to support the storytelling skills of children raised in non-English speaking homes (Bitetti & Scheffner Hammer, 2016). Reading aloud also has positive effects for older students who are able to read independently, but research shows that reading engagement and the frequency of reading declines as children reach age 9 (Scholastic, 2019). Reading aloud should continue even after students can read independently, as it can benefit students' social-emotional development. During the time that children spend listening to a read aloud, they can safely learn to deal with novel experiences, handle big feelings and navigate the world around them as they grow (Cox Gurdon, 2019). Finally, time set aside for reading aloud can be an important time for children to build positive relationships with those around them, including parents, caregivers and educators (Cox Gurdon, 2019; Trelease & Giorgis, 2019).

### **Project Description**

The goal of this project is to provide teachers and families with reasons to engage in frequent, high quality shared reading experiences with their students and children. This project consists of a handbook which will provide information about the benefits of reading aloud, ways to read aloud effectively, and resources to help increase access to books and further information on this topic.

### **Definition of Core Concepts**

***English Language Learner (ELL):*** Refers to a student whose first language is one other than English. Depending on the school or classroom situation, these students may receive extra services for specific English language instruction.

***Fluent reader:*** Refers to any reader who possesses the skills to read aloud to an audience. In a family setting, this could refer to any immediate family member or caretaker, including a mother, father, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling. In a school setting, a fluent reader could be a teacher, support staff member, administrator, classmate, or even another student.

***Read aloud:*** Refers to any experience where a fluent reader reads aloud to a child.

***Shared reading experience:*** Refers to any experience in which a fluent reader and a child engage in a book together. The terms “shared reading experience” and “read aloud” may be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

### **Summary**

The result of this project is a handbook that will provide teachers and families with information about the importance of prioritizing shared reading experiences with their students and children, and how to conduct those experiences to maximize benefits. Chapter II reviews the research available on the importance and impact of shared reading experiences. Chapter III is a description of this project. Chapter IV is a guide to how this project should be implemented in school and home settings. Chapter V is a summary of the project and recommendations for how to use this

handbook to benefit families, educators, and ultimately children through quality read  
alouds.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Much research has been done on the effects and benefits of read alouds for children in the primary age range. In their article “Every Child, Every Day,” Allington and Gabriel (2010) promote listening to a fluent reader (in the home or in school) as one of the six elements of effective reading instruction, which can be done in the home and in the classroom. This literature review will outline current practices and effects of the home literacy environment on children’s achievement and attitude toward reading. Then, this chapter will examine current practices and attitudes toward read alouds in classroom literacy environments. In conclusion, this review will outline recommendations for implementing effective read aloud experiences in home and classroom settings.

#### **Read Alouds in the Home**

Shared reading experiences in the home have been proven to have a positive impact on children’s achievement and enjoyment of reading (Barnes & Puccioni, 2017; Ledger & Merga, 2018). However, socioeconomic and language factors can present barriers to having a robust literacy environment in the home. The section below explains children’s perceptions of their home literacy environment, the effects of shared reading experiences on children, and common practices in homes with socioeconomic and language barriers.

## **A Child's Perspective**

On the whole, children have positive attitudes toward shared reading experiences in their home environment. Saenz and Feliz (2007) found that 68% of children involved in their study expected or asked to be read to daily. Similarly, Ledger and Merga (2018) found that 70% of children in their study, across two age cohorts, wanted to be read to more often, and that reading was considered to be a reward or break from other work. A large majority of children in the same study connected reading aloud with pleasure, and associated reading aloud with words such as 'happy,' 'relaxed,' and 'good inside.' Children also reported that their mothers read to them most frequently (Ledger & Merga, 2018). This research shows that children enjoy being read to, and caregivers and other adults can capitalize on this enjoyment to strengthen relationships and capitalize on the benefits of reading aloud. In addition, research has shown that children are observant of the reading habits of the adults in their home environment. In interviews with children about the reading that occurred in their homes, Merga and Mat Roni (2018) found that children "were often keenly aware of parental hypocrisy," with one child stating, "Even though my dad doesn't like reading books, he still wants me to read books" (p. 216). Reading aloud can "nurture the parent-child relationship, instill a love of books and reading, and send a clear message that spending uninterrupted quality time with your child is enormously important" (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019, p. 24). Enjoyment of reading and relationship building between parents and children can be an important benefit of reading aloud.

## **Effects of Read Alouds in the Home**

Research suggests that different aspects of the home literacy environment have different effects on children's academic achievement and attitude toward literacy activities. A study involving preschool children by Barnes and Puccioni (2017) found that shared reading experiences could predict academic achievement. Specifically, the quality of discussion during reading was correlated with math achievement, while the quantity of reading experiences was correlated with early reading achievement (Barnes & Puccioni, 2017). In other areas, Bitetti and Scheffner Hammer (2016) found that children who were read to at least once per week scored higher on an assessment of storytelling ability than those who were "rarely" read to, and this finding held true for ELL students. Reading aloud can also support brain development in young children. In a study comparing levels of functional brain activity in preschool age children, Hutton et al. (2018) found that stories presented in an illustrated storybook format provided an effective level of scaffolding for preschool age children, as opposed to animated video and audio-only formats. Their research found that animated videos possibly overstimulated visual perception areas of the brain, while audio formats did not provide enough feedback. The combination of static images with audio was found to provide support for the active language and visual networks associated with learning (Hutton et al., 2018).

The positive effects of reading aloud to children extend beyond academic achievement. Wiescholek et al. (2018) identified two dimensions of the home literacy environment-- "active" being things that children participated in, and "passive" being

the materials and parents' influence on the child. The study found that both active and passive home literacy environments have an impact on children's reading enjoyment and the frequency of literacy activities, although the active literacy environment was more strongly associated with frequency of literacy activities (Wiescholek et al., 2018). This suggests that the quality of the home literacy environment as a whole affects children's attitudes toward reading and literacy, and to maximize the benefits of a positive home literacy environment, there must be strong active and passive aspects.

In the passive division, parents must provide reading materials, model reading habits and have high expectations for their child's reading habits. Trelease and Giorgis (2019) contend that "print in the home is a proven life changer worldwide," and that "the mere presence of books can often be enough" (p. 103-104). Students who have access to books of their own are more likely to spend time reading and being read to. In addition, research by Merga and Mat Roni (2018) has shown that children are observant of the reading habits of the adults in their home environment. In interviews with children about the reading that occurred in their homes, Merga and Mat Roni (2018) found that children associate the importance of reading with their role models' reading habits.

In the active dimension, parents should engage in literacy activities with their children, including reading aloud with them. Hutton et al., (2017) proved that higher levels of "child engagement during shared reading may directly influence--or "turbocharge" --the development of foundational emergent literacy skills, particularly



comprehension, in preschool-age children” (p. 9). Other studies found that the quality of literacy activities had less of an effect on children than the quantity of parent-child interactions. Ozturk et al. (2016) found that there was no strong connection between parents and children engaging in literacy activities and children's reading enjoyment, but there were connections between parent expectations and engagement in nonliteracy activities with increased reading enjoyment. This suggests that it is not necessarily engagement in “literacy activities” that impact a child’s attitude toward reading, but “the children’s everyday interactions with their parents, which can be seen across various family settings including play activities, benefits young children’s attitudes toward literacy when they are learning to read” (Ozturk et al., 2016, p. 502). This proves that spending time reading with young children not only benefits their future academic performance but can foster relationships between parent and child and spark a love of reading. Enjoyment of reading is a key factor in students’ willingness to read, and a child who enjoys reading will likely be a reader for life. Therefore, enjoyment of reading can be a worthwhile goal.

### **Barriers to Read Alouds in the Home**

Socioeconomic status and language can present obstacles to families’ engagement in reading and reading activities. In a home with a low socioeconomic status, parents might work longer hours or hours that do not allow them to be home with their children. In a home in which English is not a primary language, parents may struggle or feel uncomfortable reading to children in English. Higher parent education has been linked to increased frequency and quality of shared reading

experiences in the home (Barnes & Puccioni, 2017). Although there is variation in homes of low socioeconomic status, Storch Bracken and Fischel (2008) found that higher levels of parent education predicted higher parent and child interest in reading and the number of parent-child reading experiences. Finally, a passive home literacy environment--that is, one with high parental expectations, more reading materials, and strong reading role models--was also associated with higher parent education levels (Wiescholek et al., 2018). These findings suggest that children whose parents have a low level of education may come to school with less reading experience than others. These disparities highlight the need for teachers to spend classroom time reading aloud to children.

Language can also be a significant barrier to parents reading with their children. Parents who are not comfortable speaking English may not be comfortable or able to read books with their children in English or the language of school. A survey of English-speaking Latino parents revealed that while 95% of parents had books in their homes, only 53% read with their child daily, and it was most likely to be the mother who read with the child (Saenz & Felix, 2007). However, as has been shown in other research in this review, it is more likely that positive interactions between parents and children, rather than strict literacy activities, that have a positive effect on children's attitudes toward reading. In addition, because many of the benefits associated with reading aloud are social-emotional and related to language, it can be assumed that the benefits of reading aloud are the same in any language, not

only English. The benefits of spending time reading together transcend the barriers presented by language.

Some parents report having negative memories or associations with reading from their own school experiences. However, it has been found that parents who did not have good relationships with reading as children, find they have developed a greater sense of enjoyment of reading with their children as adults (Levy et al., 2018). This is encouraging, as it suggests that parents and children can benefit from mutually enjoyable reading experiences, without being affected by parents' past negative reading experiences.

### **Read Alouds in the Classroom**

The benefits of reading aloud can go “beyond skills and literacy development in the classroom” (Wiseman, 2010, p. 432). Maximizing the benefits of read alouds requires careful planning and use of strategies. This section will outline children's perceptions of read alouds in the classroom, common current practices of teachers, and strategies that have been proven to be effective for children's academic development.

#### **A Child's Perspective**

As in the home environment, it has been found that children have positive perceptions of read alouds in the classroom. Ledger and Merga (2018) found that a majority of children reported they enjoyed being read to, and wanted to be read to more often. A study involving children from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Caldecott award-winning books found that the first graders were capable of

comprehending and enjoying the complex texts selected, even though it was thought the books would be too advanced for the students (Hall & Williams, 2010). Reading aloud in the classroom was also shown to have a positive impact on students' enjoyment of individual Silent Sustained Reading (Pegg & Bartelheim, 2011). This shows that being read to can influence a child's enjoyment of reading for themselves. As in the home literacy environment, read alouds in the classroom are positively received by students and can have positive effects on students' enjoyment of reading.

### **Teacher Practices and Attitudes Toward Read Alouds**

Although many teachers report reading aloud to their students, the justifications for read alouds and strategies practiced varies widely. A study of preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers carried out by McCaffrey and Hisrich (2017) found that 74% of the teachers read aloud every day, but 50-70% of the teachers did not plan ahead for their read alouds or did not read the selected book ahead of time. In the same study, the teachers reported prioritizing enjoyment and development of language skills over content and other skills in their read alouds. Other studies found that strategies used during the read alouds were mostly teacher-directed and included clarifying and low-level comprehension questions most often (Beck & McKeown, 2001). An in-depth observation of one teacher by Hall and Williams (2010) revealed that her read alouds were mostly teacher directed and included mostly higher-level analysis questions during a nonfiction read-aloud, and book focus questions during a narrative read-aloud. These teacher-driven practices, while common, are not ones that have been shown to benefit students. Research

suggests that reading aloud is beneficial, but in order for teachers to maximize the benefits of reading aloud in the classroom, research-based strategies must be carefully implemented.

### **Strategies for Effective Read Alouds**

There are strategies that have been proven to increase the rigors of reading aloud to emergent readers. Much of the literature available encourages the use of carefully chosen complex texts, highlighting vocabulary, asking follow-up questions of students, rephrasing and redirecting student comments when necessary, and above all, encouraging discussion of the deeper meaning of texts (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Lane & Wright, 2007). Lane and Wright (2007) promote three research-based strategies that maximize the effectiveness of reading aloud to children--dialogic reading, which focuses on prompts for children; text talk, which focuses on vocabulary; and print referencing, which focuses on verbal and nonverbal cues to direct children's attention to the text. Each of these strategies focuses on encouraging students to make connections and go deeper into the meaning of the text. However, in order for students to gain the most benefit from read alouds, teachers must take on the role of a guide, rather than a leader. Encouraging "young children to interact with texts, and talking with them about the pictures and stories as you go, hugely intensifies the benefits they get from the time you spend reading together" (Cox Gurdon, 2019, p. 3). Wiseman (2010) identified four ways that the teacher can help students build knowledge: confirming student comments, modeling explicit think-alouds, extending student responses and ideas, and scaffolding students'

understanding as a class. These methods all require that students be at the center of the read-aloud, instead of the teacher.

Read-alouds can be particularly beneficial to English Language Learners. Carefully chosen read-alouds can provide opportunities for ELL students to learn and use new vocabulary, interact with meaning and other students, and connect students with other experiences (Giroir et al., 2015). Strategies such as Text Talk highlight new vocabulary and provide students with opportunities to use new language (Beck & McKeown, 2001). As the population of EL students in our schools increases, teachers should be aware of the strategies they use to reach those students effectively. Read-alouds, when planned appropriately, can be an effective tool to support English Learners' vocabulary and language development.

### **Recommendations for Implementing Effective Read Alouds**

Families, teachers, and schools each provide a unique support for emerging readers. In order to implement and use read-alouds effectively, there are strategies that can be used to maximize the benefits of reading aloud to young readers. This section will explain recommendations for families, teachers, and schools.

#### **Recommendations for Parents and Families**

The home literacy environment is an important influence on students' reading, and families may not know how to effectively support students. Families should be encouraged to utilize community resources, such as libraries. This is especially important for families of low socioeconomic status, who might not have the resources to give students reading opportunities in the home. Multiple studies show that

mothers are the most likely to read to children, but fathers can play an important role in their child's literacy development by reading themselves and reading with their children (Swain et al., 2017). As cited in this review, it is arguably more important for parents to spend quality time with their children than to force them into rote literacy practice. Levy et al. (2018) contends that

It is important that parents understand that shared reading does not need to be about rigorously decoding print, or sticking faithfully to the sequence of printed text, but can be an opportunity to talk about, or around the text, sing songs, talk about their days and just enjoy spending time together. (p. 145)

The role of parents, siblings and other caregivers should be to spend time with children, encourage students to enjoy reading, and provide a robust passive and active home literacy environment, whatever that might look like for their situation. Parents should be encouraged to do what they can, and if support is needed, should reach out to teachers and schools for support with specific strategies. Above all, "there isn't a right or a wrong way of reading aloud, except if you just don't do it" (Trelease & Giorgis, 2012, p. 153).

### **Recommendations for Teachers**

Teachers are often told to forgo read-alouds in favor of more "rigorous" academic lessons and activities, but there are strategies that can maximize the benefits of read-alouds in the classroom. Teachers must understand that "creating powerful read-alouds does not simply happen. Planning is an essential practice for quality instruction, and read-alouds are no exception" (McCaffrey & Hisrich, 2017, p. 98).

Teachers should be mindful of the texts they choose to read aloud and provide plenty of opportunities for students to engage with their own and others' ideas. Teachers should also be aware of their own role in the read-aloud and limit their comments and questions to ones that will encourage students' ideas and understanding. When appropriate, teachers should be aware of English Learners in their classrooms and take the time to plan for the use of strategies and vocabulary that will support English Learners. Finally, Lane and Wright (2007) argue that "Educators and parents should ensure, however, that attempts to build literacy through read alouds do not detract from children's enjoyment of good books" (p. 674). While teachers should keep these strategies in mind, they should also remember that enjoyment of reading is a worthy goal on its own, and that students who enjoy listening to reading are more likely to build their reading skills by reading on their own.

### **Recommendations for Schools**

Beyond implementing read alouds in the classroom, schools employ a number of staff members, including Speech/Language Pathologists, administrators, and support staff who can also promote reading and literacy activities to students and families. In some cases, schools can provide families with books, access to literacy materials and support with read-aloud strategies that can be implemented at home. However, given the importance of the active dimension of the home literacy environment, as defined by Wiescholek et al. (2018), it could be that "promoting families by providing reading material, such as books, is not enough" (p. 62). Schools should be aware that the responsibility of encouraging reading must be shared



between school and home, and “fostering reading engagement is a shared job in which teachers can play a vital supporting role” (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018, p. 219). Schools should be prepared to support families with not only access to books, but with encouragement and strategies to support families and students. Ultimately, this will start with all staff recognizing the importance of reading and reading aloud so that they can feel comfortable recommending this practice to families.

### **Conclusion**

This review first explained current read aloud attitudes and practices in the home, then in the classroom. Then, this chapter presented recommendations for families, teachers and schools to support children's literacy growth. The next chapter will present a detailed description of this project.

## CHAPTER III

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this project was to inform teachers and families of the importance of reading aloud with emergent readers. It provided strategies for conducting a read aloud session to maximize academic and social-emotional benefits for the child. This chapter will present an overview of the project, the targeted audiences and the goals of the project.

#### **Description**

This project is a handbook titled *The Art of Reading Aloud*. The first section serves as an introduction to the topic and provides research supporting quality read alouds for families and educators. The second section provides an overview of the components of a quality read-aloud, including book choice, environment, and child-specific considerations such as age. This information is not specific to families or educators, and so can be used by anyone. The third section provides strategies for families to increase engagement when reading aloud with children in their homes and will include a list of resources for families. These resources include information about organizations that will provide ways for families to get books at low cost, and organizations that will continue to highlight the importance of reading and reading aloud to children. The fourth section provides strategies for teachers to implement during read alouds in their classrooms to increase the effectiveness of reading aloud.

It includes a list of resources for educators that can help increase the number of books available in the classroom for teachers and students. This section also includes a list of books and organizations that can be used for further information on this topic. The fifth section reviews recommendations for schools to build a culture of reading that will encourage students to become lifelong readers. These recommendations can be used by anyone who works at a school site to increase awareness of how reading and reading aloud can benefit students.

The target audience of this project is elementary teachers and caregivers of preschool and elementary age children. The target impact of this project is to educate teachers and caregivers about the importance of reading aloud to emergent readers, and to provide strategies and tools to make read alouds more effective and enjoyable both at home and in the classroom.

### **Summary**

In conclusion, this project will highlight the significance and effects of classroom and at-home read aloud experiences for emergent readers, and how to incorporate strategies that will make read alouds enjoyable and effective at home and at school. The next chapter describes how to implement and use this handbook.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This handbook is designed to be used by both educators and caregivers of children.

In the home setting, this handbook will provide families with strategies for starting to make reading aloud a habit in the home, even with the barriers present in today's fast-paced world. The handbook will also provide families with ways to make reading aloud enjoyable for both the child and the reader. Finally, the section "Resources for Families" will offer resources for families to increase the number of books in their homes, and resources to support them in their reading journey.

This handbook can be used as a starting point to create additional resources for families to increase understanding of how to use these strategies. For example, videos modeling effective read alouds could be created to be shared with families. The strategies and key resources could be condensed into a shortened, one-page handout to be given to families. This information and potential resources could be disseminated in a number of ways--upon request by a caregiver, at parent-teacher conferences, or at school-sponsored events such as Back to School Nights, Open Houses or Literacy Nights.

In a school setting, the information in the handbook could be transferred to a presentation and presented in a professional development session. The handbook could be used by teachers or administrators to further develop their knowledge of the

benefits of read alouds. The strategies presented in the handbook can be used by teachers to maximize the time spent reading aloud in the classroom. As mentioned previously, educators could use this handbook to create additional resources for school staff and families, such as videos modeling an effective read aloud or handouts detailing the benefits of reading aloud. The “Resources for Educators” section provides a list of suggestions for further reading development and reading on this topic, as well as a list of resources for increasing the number of books in a classroom available to teachers and students.

The strategies in this handbook can help school staff members begin to build a culture of reading at a school site. It can help educators create buy-in among their colleagues by providing research detailing how reading aloud can benefit students and their love of reading. This handbook also provides a starting point for educators to make their school site a community of lifelong readers. Some of these ideas are as simple as making read alouds standard in all classrooms or having featured readers read aloud before school; others are more involved, such as making a “Reading Lounge” and inviting popular authors to visit.

## CHAPTER V

### PROJECT SUMMARY

This project has identified the ways in which reading aloud can positively impact children, emerging readers and independent readers alike. These benefits can be found in the home, classroom and school environments. In addition to the academic benefits of listening to a fluent reader, shared reading experiences provide opportunities for relationship building between a child and a trusted caregiver or peer. Reading aloud can be a safe space for children to develop emotionally.

This project has also presented strategies for families and educators to implement as they read with children, which will make the time spent reading aloud more profitable. Many of these strategies focus on the engagement of the child and the interactions that can be fostered--between child and reader, between the child and the book. It is in these interactions that “the word-magic happens” (Cox Gurdon, 2019, p. 77).

### **Recommendations**

This handbook can be used alone as a resource for families and teachers who want to increase the time they spend reading aloud to children, and to make that time as effective as possible. After reading, individuals should feel empowered to make and justify the time they spend reading aloud to children. However, there are a number of ways to expand and use this handbook for other purposes. Individuals and groups could expand this handbook to make additional resources for school staff and

families to increase understanding of the benefits of reading aloud and how to maximize read aloud time. For example, an individual could take the suggestions from this handbook and create videos to model an effective read aloud, which could be shared with families and school staff through trainings or school events. A teacher could use the strategies in this handbook to create a simple handout to give to families at a Back to School Night event or during parent-teacher conferences. School administrators could use this handbook as the basis for a teacher professional development session to increase teachers' knowledge of reading aloud, and to create buy-in for a culture of reading at a school site. This handbook shows that research supports spending time in classrooms reading aloud, so teachers should feel comfortable using this handbook to justify their classroom read alouds.

### **Conclusion**

Although this project recommends certain steps to take and strategies to implement when reading aloud, it is important to remember that it is the time spent together and the engagement of the child and reader that is essential. Families and educators alike experience barriers to reading aloud, and these barriers are valid. However, reading aloud is too important to succumb to the challenges, and there are ways to overcome them. In the words of Jim Trelease, "there is no wrong way to read aloud, except if you just don't do it. So get a book and a child and start reading!" (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019, p. 153).

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## APPENDIX

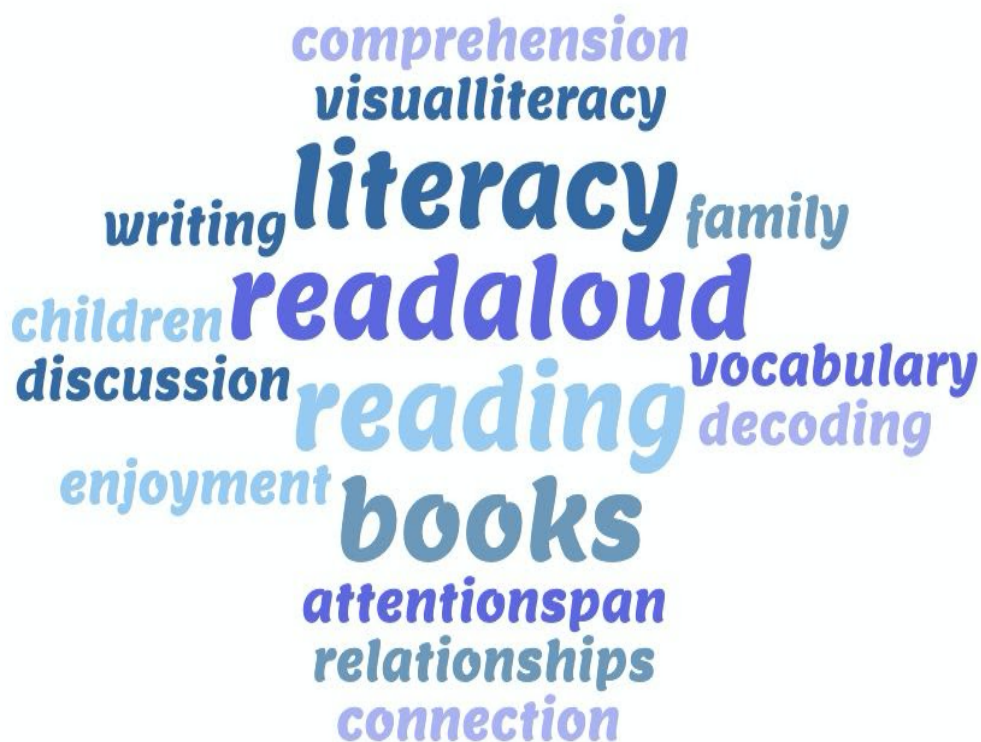
APPENDIX  
THE ART OF READING ALOUD

# The Art of Reading Aloud

Compiled by Katelyn Denio

California State University, Stanislaus

May 2021



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## Introduction

Parents, caregivers and educators tend to have common academic goals for the children in their care--they want them to be able to read, to be curious, to be successful in school. Families and teachers alike look for the “magic pill” for increasing academic skills and success--purchasing online programs, looking for academic TV shows, buying games on their iPads. The reality is that there is no “one-size-fits-all” program that will magically increase reading scores. While not a “magic pill,” the benefits of reading aloud to infants, toddlers, school age children and teenagers are substantial. The effects of reading aloud to a child do not appear overnight, but compound over time to lead to reading success and enjoyment.

In both the classroom and in the home, there are barriers to reading aloud--language, lack of time, knowledge, other priorities. This handbook will provide you with strategies to build a home and/or classroom that fosters a culture of reading. After reading, you’ll be ready to pick books and to start engaging with young readers.

“There isn’t a right or a wrong way of reading aloud,

*except*

if you just don’t do it.”

(Trelease & Giorgis, 2019, p. 153).

## Read Alouds by the Numbers

**62%** of students reported they would like to be read to **more often**.

(Ledger & Merga, 2018)

A **majority** of kindergarten and first grade teachers reported they

**do not prepare** for read alouds.

(McCaffrey & Hisrich, 2017)

Children with household incomes of **less than \$35,000/year** are read to **less frequently**.

In 2019, only **55%** of children aged birth to five years were read to at least **five times per week**.

Only **37%** of those children were read to daily.

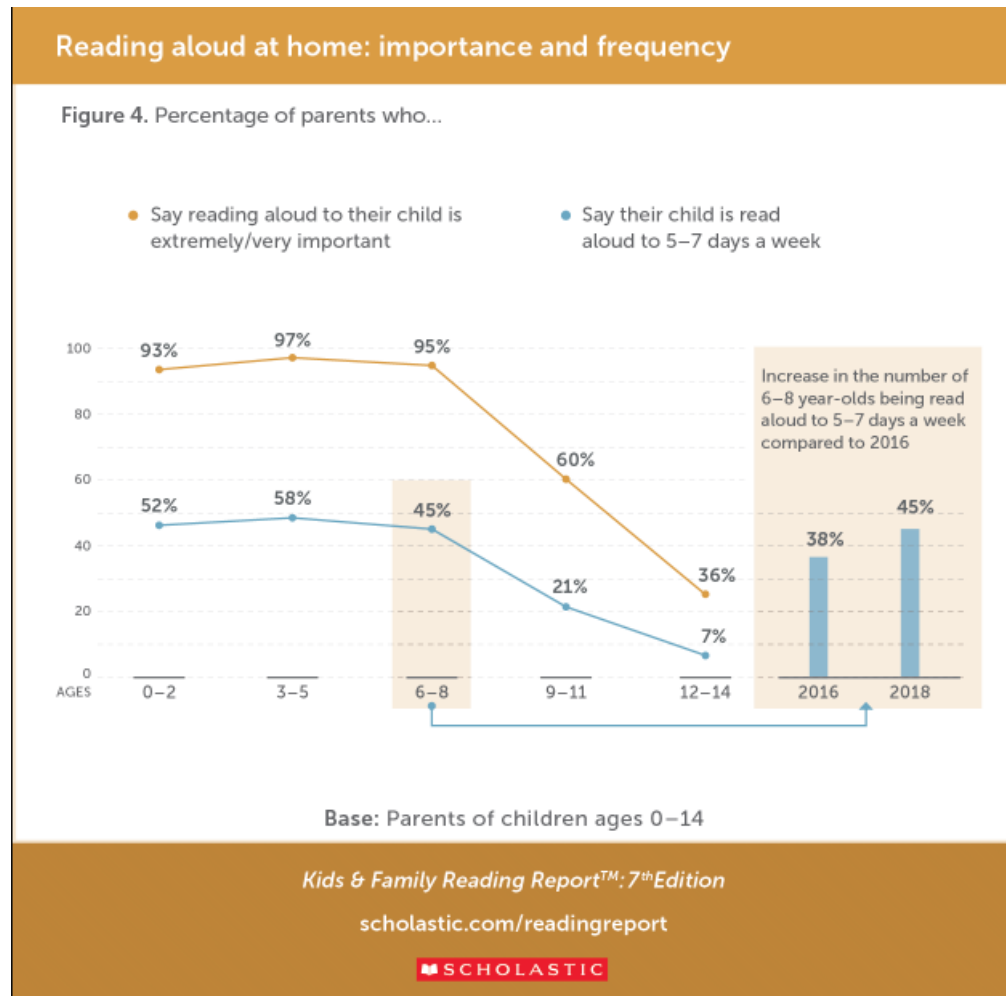
(Scholastic, 2019)

Image: Instagram @scholasticparents



The following graphic shows the read aloud reality for children after the age of 8—the frequency of being read aloud to decreases dramatically after the age of 8. Happily, the image also shows that the number of children being read aloud to is increasing.

Image: Scholastic, Inc., 2019



### **Why Read Alouds? (The Research)**

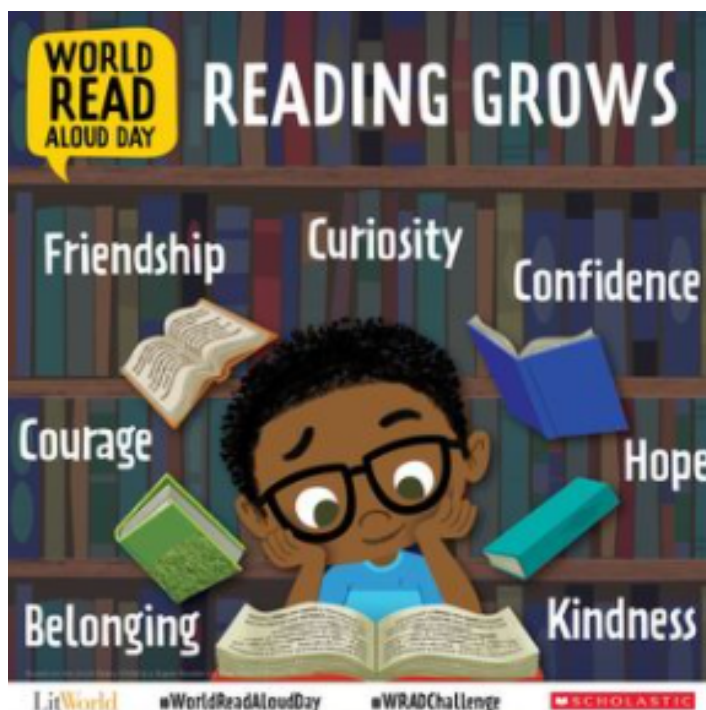
Time and time again, research has shown (and continues to show) that reading aloud to children is beneficial in more areas than one. If you have accepted this as truth and want to get to the practical stuff, skip this section. If you're interested in learning more about how read alouds prime a child's brain for optimal development and want to know more about the benefits that reading aloud can be responsible for, keep reading!

John Hutton is a pediatrician and neuroscientist who has been involved in several studies examining the effects of reading aloud on children's brain activity and development. His studies have proven that stories presented in a format of audio paired with illustrations is the "sweet spot" for activating the brains of preschool aged children, rather than animated stories or audio-only stories (Hutton et al., 2018). In addition, Hutton's studies on shared reading experiences show that when children are actively engaged and participating in a read aloud, their brains are "turbocharged" in certain areas of the brain related to foundational emergent literacy skills like decoding, comprehension and language. These areas include those related to neural processing, working memory, language access and development (Hutton et al., 2017).

Reading aloud can open the doors to numerous academic benefits. According to a 2017 study, the frequency of reading aloud was positively correlated with childrens' early reading achievement (Barnes & Puccioni, 2017). Jim Trelease, educator and author of "The Read-Aloud Handbook,"

contends that listening to a story read aloud has positive effects on childrens' reading comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and oral language and visual literacy skills, to name a few (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019). Richard Allington, a literacy professor and researcher, includes listening to a fluent reader read in his list of the six elements of effective reading instruction (Allington & Gabriel, 2010). For students who are learning English as a second language, even one read aloud per week has been shown to positively affect scores on assessments of storytelling ability (Bitetti & Scheffner Hammer, 2016).

In the classroom and at home, reading aloud provides an incredible opportunity to develop a child's social-emotional skills. A read aloud can be a safe and nurturing experience for children of any age, and



provides opportunities for warm, positive interactions with others. For young children, books can provide access to vocabulary that they wouldn't hear in everyday conversation. For older students, books can provide an incredible opportunity to open discussions for difficult topics, like racism and death. In

the classroom, stories can create shared experiences that turn a room full of strangers into a community of learners.

Image: Instagram @scholasticinc

## Quality Read Alouds

Whether you are a parent, babysitter, or education professional, there are a few key factors to consider when choosing a book and conducting a read aloud.

### Making Time

- Whenever, wherever

One of the barriers to reading aloud for many teachers and families is time. Teachers are faced with increased demands on their valuable instruction time, including high standards and testing. When many parents work demanding schedules and children are involved in extracurricular activities, it seems that time together is rare. However, research and experience has shown that reading aloud is worth the time, no matter the setting. Children can reap the benefits of reading aloud even with 5 minutes of time. For teachers, this might mean reading a poem in the 2 minutes before recess, or reading a picture book while waiting for the dismissal bell to ring at the end of the day. For families, if a ten minute wait in the doctors' office is the only opportunity, take it! There are numerous pockets of time throughout the day, if we commit to looking for and taking advantage of them.

### Environment

- Inviting, comfortable
- Allows child to see pictures and interact with book and reader.

It is no coincidence that children and parents alike treasure the ritual of a bedtime story. The space that you choose to read aloud should be inviting and comfortable--think beds or couches with pillows and blankets, comfortable chairs, or even the floor! Your space should allow for both the reader and the child or children to sit comfortably, with space to see the pictures and interact with the book and the reader.

### Choice of Book

- Enjoyable!
- Appropriateness will depend on different factors

At its core, a read aloud is simply that: one individual reading to another. However, a quality read aloud requires a little more preparation. The book chosen should be enjoyable for the child and the reader--if it's not a book that you would enjoy reading yourself, a child will pick up on the lack of interest or enthusiasm! Classroom and at-home book choices may differ. In the classroom, books may be chosen for specific purposes or that correspond to current topics of study, while books read at home may be chosen strictly for enjoyment. No matter the setting, a book is a great starting point for fun, and even questions and discussions about deep, sometimes difficult topics that children grapple with as they grow.

## Engagement

- Active readers, active listeners

Research has shown that a child's brain is more activated when they are engaged with the story being read to them (Hutton et al., 2017). No matter the age of the child being read to, there are a few simple ways to get them involved. When reading with very young children, invitations to turn pages or point to specific objects in the illustrations increase engagement. Using a child-friendly, engaging voice can also increase a young child's interest. As children get older, questions, invitations to make predictions, and discussions about themes and topics in the book may be appropriate. On the other hand, research also shows that when the reader is unengaged, (such as distracted by a smartphone or other device), the child's interest wanes as well (Hutton et al., 2017). Mem Fox, educator and children's book author, has great [examples](#) of ways to use your voice to engage children on her website (Fox, 2013).

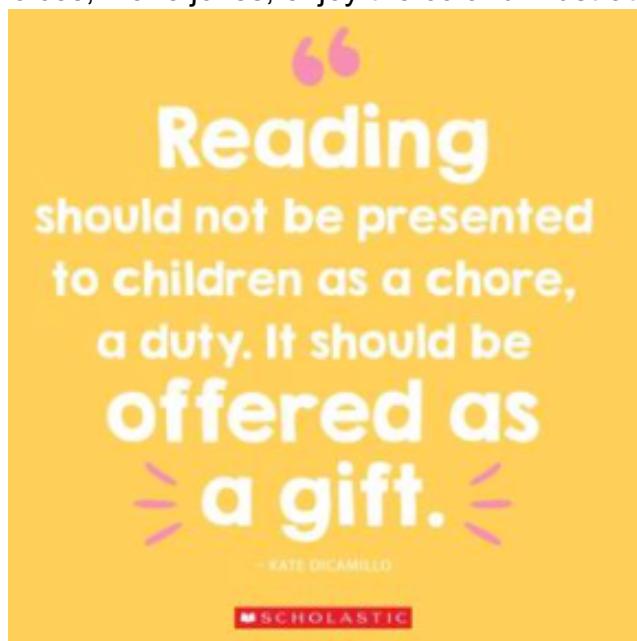
## Enjoyment

- Don't make it a chore!

Whether in a classroom or at home, remember--this time is meant to be enjoyable, not a chore. Although your end goal might be to boost a child's literacy skills, it's important to not make this hard for you or the child.

Engaging in a story should be a fun time! Avoid forcing the child to read or respond to questions that are beyond their intellectual level. This can result in a negative experience that leads a child to associate reading with "stress and assessment, rather than enjoyment and engagement" (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018, p. 217). Instead, focus on talking, engaging and having fun. Use voices, make jokes, enjoy the colorful illustrations. An important goal of

reading aloud is to foster relationships and show children that reading is worthwhile. Image: Instagram @scholasticparents





## Read Alouds at Home

### Environment

- Diversity and choice of books
- Reading models

A key factor in creating lifelong readers is the environment in the home. It has been proven that the mere presence of books in the home increases the likelihood of a child being read to and enjoying reading in the future (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019). Ideally, children would have a range of books to choose from. Similarly, adults must communicate that reading is an important and worthwhile

activity. Children must view the adults in their lives as readers. Children are perceptive, and notice when the story being told (reading is important!) doesn't match what they observe (but my parents don't read) (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018). To a child, this contradiction indicates that reading is not, in fact, important to the adults in their lives and so is not important. In order to overcome this contradiction, let your children see you read--books, the newspaper, magazines. Their observations carry more weight than you may notice.

Image: Instagram @scholasticbookfairs



### Interactions

- Limit distractions
- Foster interactions

Reading a book together is a perfect opportunity to bond and spend time with your child. Make this time extra beneficial for your child by sitting close together, being comfortable and present. When you and your child are both focused on a common experience, the magic can happen. Create opportunities for interactions between yourself and your child, between yourself and the book, between your child and the book. Jim Trelease, an author and educator, encourages parents to think about reading as a “game of ping-pong, not darts” (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019, p. 46). When the

interactions become one-sided, like a game of darts, the read-aloud is in danger of becoming more like a quiz, rather than quality time.



### Multiple role models

- Multiple role models
- Reading is for boys, too! Interviews with children show that they notice far more about adult reading habits than we might realize (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018). To communicate that reading is an important and worthwhile activity, children should see a variety of role models reading to themselves and to

them regularly. An especially important point is that children are more likely to see their mothers reading, and more likely to be read to by their mothers than fathers. Current research indicates that girls are more likely than boys to report reading independently, and to have a more positive view of reading (Trelease & Giorgis, 2019). Could this be a result of children seeing and being read to by primarily female reading role models? To combat this trend, children--not just boys--need to experience positive male reading role models, including male school staff, fathers, older brothers, grandfathers. Just as with any read-aloud, this time also provides an opportunity to create and strengthen relationships between children and the adults in their life. Read aloud partners don't have to be limited to adults--there are incredible benefits to siblings reading together too, for both the reader and listener!

Image: Instagram @scholasticparents

### What happens if...

- I don't speak English (or the primary language of school)

The benefits of reading aloud to a child are not limited to English. Conducting read alouds in other languages provides the same emotional and some of the same academic benefits. Children still get experiences with books, stories,

and learn about how language works. Also, these same benefits can come through by listening to audiobooks with a child. This experience can create a feeling of closeness and start conversations, no matter the language in which it is conducted.

- My child isn't listening!

Allow the child to sit comfortably, move around and increase the child's involvement in the story. Ask the child to turn pages, to demonstrate a character's actions or facial expressions. This advice still holds true for children with differences that make it difficult for them to sit still and listen to a story. In her book "The Enchanted Hour," the author interviewed Gabe, a nonverbal young man with autism. When asked if adults should keep trying to read to children who appear to not attend to stories read aloud, Gabe responded "A...million times...yes. *We are always listening*" (Cox Gurdon, 2019, p. 65). While the benefits of reading aloud don't show up immediately, they are there! Keep trying, and remember that your efforts don't go unnoticed by your children.

- My child won't sit still!

There are many factors that can contribute to a child's attention span and willingness to sit and listen--age, maturity, intellectual disability. At home, there are no rules that say a child has to be sitting in a parents' lap to read! Some children may need to walk around, or may only be able to engage for a few minutes at a time. Some children may be content to sit and listen to story after story, others may need an active, excited parent to read a page at a time. Remember, a read aloud should be a positive experience, so make things as short as they need to be, and don't force it. Even a 3 minute read aloud counts! As your child grows, so will their attention span.

- I don't have any children's books.

Luckily, there are numerous resources that offer ways to get books into the hands of children for free or at a low cost. Public and school libraries are great resources to get hands into the books of your children, and thrift stores are a low-cost option for a wide range of used books. For more information about how to obtain free or low-cost books for your home, see the section titled "Resources for Families."

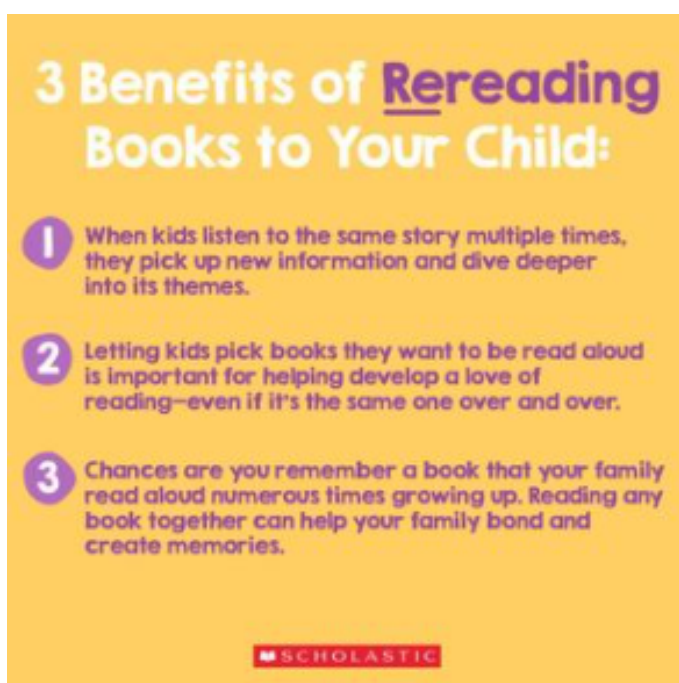


Image: Instagram @scholasticbookfairs

- My child is “too young!”

Many new parents ask the question "When should I start reading to my child?" There is a simple answer to this question: as soon as possible! Studies show that premature infants's heartbeats and breathing stabilize when listening to a parents' recorded voice (Cox Gurdon, 2019). At that age and in the infant stage, the benefits of reading aloud are more related to the voice of a loved adult, so what is being read doesn't matter as much. Reading aloud can benefit children's language development. Young children learn to talk by listening to the speech patterns of those around them, and books provide a convenient pattern and example for natural language. As children grow, there are a variety of books available for children at a range of ages. At around 6 months old, children can be drawn in by a read aloud with colorful, simple illustrations. Cloth, board and plastic books are great options for children at this stage, as they can be easily manipulated by the child themselves. By one year old, children can start to become more involved in a read aloud experience--turning pages, pointing to objects, and attempting to repeat common words.

- My child requests the same book over and over (and over) again!



Our instinct may be to encourage the child to pick another book, maybe for our own sanity as much as anything else. However, this handbook advises you to take a deep breath, and read it again! Rereading books has numerous benefits. Rereading allows for vocabulary repetition, a deeper understanding of tough concepts, and the comfort of a routine for a child who may be dealing with something an adult doesn't understand.

Image: Instagram @scholasticparents

- My child can read by himself/herself

Research shows that after about third grade, the frequency of shared reading experiences decreases dramatically (Merga & Mat Roni, 2018; Scholastic, 2019). However, many children regret this loss of time with their parents, and read alouds still hold benefits for children who can read independently. The time spent in a read aloud can be a valuable and safe time for parents and children to have conversations around difficult topics, to bond, and to grow closer. Independent readers can also be the ones to read to younger children--all of the same reasons to read are still valid!

- I don't have time to read!

Find time! This communicates to your child that reading is important, and that time spent with them is important. Five minutes in the car before soccer practice starts, ten minutes while in the dentist's waiting room, or two minutes' break from homework can be impactful. With our ability to get information with the touch of a finger, there is no reason to not be able to spend a few minutes reading a story or poem with a child. As Meghan Cox Gurdon, author of "The Enchanted Hour" recommends, "Start small. Start where you are. Start today! There is no need to be heroic and commit to an endless future of reading aloud...Just begin. Pick up a book, or a magazine, or a cereal box, and try reading it out loud to someone you love" (Cox Gurdon, 2019, p. 197).

Instagram @scholasticparents



### Resources for Families

There are two factors that can positively influence a child's future reading success: parents that understand the importance of reading aloud, and having books available in the home. Hopefully, this handbook has helped with the first factor. Luckily, there are many resources that help families with this second factor, and serve to educate families and make getting books into the hands of children easy and affordable.

Image: Scholastic @scholasticinc

**WORLD READ ALOUD DAY**

## How to Raise a Reader

- 1 Start a reading habit early.
- 2 Read every day.
- 3 Keep books all around your home.
- 4 Visit the library or bookstore on a regular basis.
- 5 Let your children choose their own books.
- 6 Be a reading role model.

**LitWorld** #WorldReadAloudDay #WRADChallenge **SCHOLASTIC**

- **Scholastic Parents**
  - Offers literacy activities for at home, book recommendations, and access to books
  - Instagram accounts (especially @scholasticparents) provide encouragement and tips for reading aloud
- **Read Aloud 15 Minutes**
  - Organization that works to make reading 15 minutes per day the recommendation for families
  - Provides research, book recommendations and resources for families
  - For more information, visit: [www.readaloud.org](http://www.readaloud.org)
- **Local libraries**
  - Summer Reading Programs
  - Activity Hours
  - Storytime
  - Free audiobooks, books to check out
  - For more information, visit your local city or county library
- **Reach Out and Read**
  - Organization that encourages reading in pediatric care
  - Provides resources, recommendations, and tips for reading aloud to families, especially those in low-income situations.
  - For more information, visit: [www.reachoutandread.org/](http://www.reachoutandread.org/)
- **Little Free Libraries**
  - Book-sharing organization based on community libraries
  - Great for book access when away from home
  - Website includes a Little Free Library locator
  - For more information, visit: [www.littlefreelibrary.org](http://www.littlefreelibrary.org)
- **Imagination Library**
  - Free to register
  - Available in select areas
  - Provides children in provided areas with one book per month of life until age 5

## Read Alouds in the Classroom

### Choosing a quality book

- Identify the purpose
- Is it developmentally appropriate?

It is important for teachers to remember that read alouds are not only for language arts lessons. Read alouds can be chosen to support curriculum. In a language arts unit focusing on technology, consider “Unplugged,” by Steve Antony. Read alouds are a great way to start discussions about respectful behavior and differences among students. For example, if you’ve noticed that your students are having a hard time with physical boundaries, try reading “Benny Doesn’t Like to Be Hugged” by Zetta Elliot. Also, reading aloud for fun is a perfectly acceptable excuse to try a new book! There is a read aloud that can fit virtually any classroom situation or struggle, so why not use them to your advantage?

Obviously, there are some books there are beyond the maturity and developmental levels of our students. However, studies show that students' listening comprehension often outstrips their reading comprehension (Layne, 2009), and even young children are capable of comprehending "complex" texts that are related to class content and discussion. (Hall & Williams, 2010). When choosing books to read aloud, look for a variety of books. Every book exposes students to new knowledge and helps create background. If one of our goals is to create lifelong readers, students need to be exposed to a vast variety of books, topics and genres. A student who is convinced he or she doesn't like reading maybe hasn't seen the right book yet! How can a student discover that she loves reading and learning about space travel if she's never read a nonfiction book about Mae Jamison?

### Planning for a read aloud

- Guided or unguided
- Increase student choice

A 2017 study showed that 50-70% of preschool, kinder and first grade teachers do not prepare ahead of time for read alouds (McCaffrey & Hisrich, 2017). Clearly, primary teachers know that read alouds can be a great way to fill an extra 8-10 minutes before recess. Picking up a book and seeing where it takes you and your students can lead to great discussions and teaching opportunities.

However, in other situations, planning ahead can be beneficial. Even quickly previewing a book selected for a read aloud can give a teacher ideas about where to include it in curriculum, lessons that it can be used with, and questions to ask to prompt discussion. For example, the picture book “Dude!” by Aaron Reynolds lends itself nicely to a minilesson on reading expression and punctuation, but could also be used to show how pictures can tell a large chunk of a story. For older students, chapter books such as “The Phantom



Tollbooth” by Norton Juster are a great way to practice making predictions, and a quick glance through shows that it can be easily used to plan grammar minilessons. Planning, even quickly, for a read aloud can maximize the time spent and help teachers justify the time they spend in a read aloud.

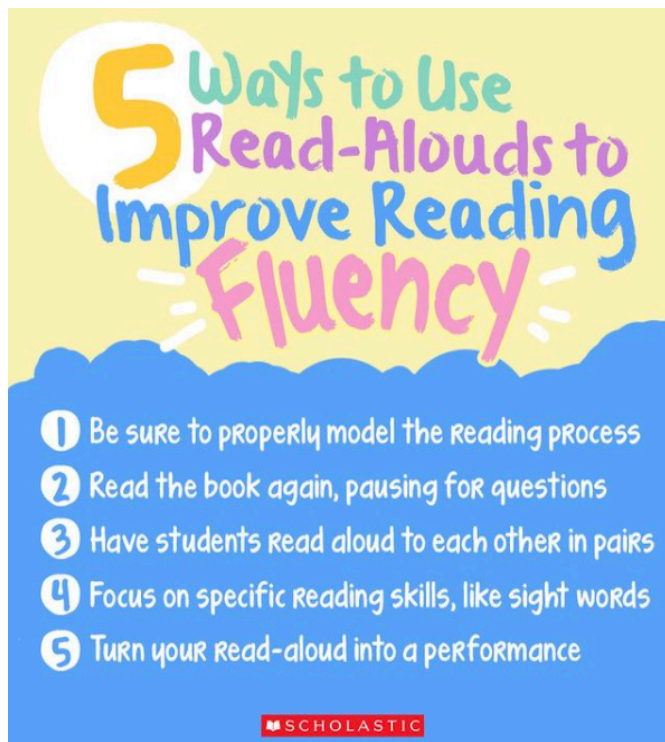
### Conducting a read aloud

- A two-way street
- Using interruptions to your advantage

Just as with read alouds at home, a classroom read aloud should not be a quiz. Read alouds should be a two-way street, with opportunities for student discussion and questions. Ample research shows that students get the most out of read aloud experiences when they are allowed and encouraged to talk, discuss and ask questions (Wiseman, 2010). In many cases, the teacher is the one leading the read aloud, which makes it a teacher-centered experience in which the teacher holds the

knowledge. However, giving students plenty of opportunities to participate, interact with the teacher and their peers, and share their ideas ensures that students are actively engaged in building knowledge.

Image: Instagram @scholasticteach



Knowledge can be constructed during a read aloud in a variety of ways, but most of these strategies focus on the read aloud being an interactive experience. The following are strategies recommended by Angela Wiseman, an Associate Professor of Literacy Education at North Carolina State University. The examples are provided by the author of this handbook, and are based on the text “The True Story of the Three Little Pigs,” written by Jon Scieszka and illustrated by Lane Smith.

- Confirmation of student statements
  - Student: “Hey, that sounds the same as in the three little pigs story we read yesterday!”
  - Teacher: “Yes, in the story we read yesterday, the pig said the same words: ‘not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin!’ You noticed a great text-to-text connection!”
- Extension (by teacher and students) of student ideas to broader, deeper meanings
  - Student A: “The wolf ate the first little pig!”
  - Student B: “Yes, that’s what happened in the book we read yesterday, and this is the same story!”
  - Teacher: “You are both doing a great job with making connections to the story we read yesterday! Do you think the wolf ate the pig because he is mean? Why do you think he ate the pig?”
- Explicit teacher-modeled think-alouds
  - Teacher: “As I am reading, I see that the text says, “My name is Alexander T. Wolf.” I also notice that the author uses pronouns like ‘I’ and ‘my.’ That tells me who the narrator is --it must be the wolf!”
- Building meaning in a social context
  - Student A: “The wolf wasn’t the bad guy like in the story we read yesterday!”
  - Student B: “I agree because he just wanted some sugar! He didn’t want to eat the pigs!”
  - Teacher: “Hmm, I see that you agree! Does anyone have a different opinion about the wolf?”
  - Student C: “He was a bad guy because he ate the pigs!”

### **Don’t forget the extras!**

- Develop visual literacy skills

When getting ready to read aloud, don't neglect the parts of the book that provide extra information about the story. The front and back covers, speech bubbles, and jackets of books may give extra information about the story. The author, illustrator and even publisher are pieces of information that can lead students to more books they enjoy. Elementary students are often eager to find "matching" or extra pictures not typically included in the story. As children

learn to "read" the pictures, they begin to develop visual literacy skills that they will use later in life to navigate the images they will encounter in the world.

### What happens if...

- My administrator walks in while I'm "just" reading aloud?

Hopefully, this handbook will help you be confident telling others your reasons for reading aloud. As educators, our goal should be to facilitate a lifelong love of reading in our students. To accomplish this, we need to expose our students to a variety of literature, genres and topics in a variety of forms, and read-alouds are a great way to do this.

Also, it is important to remember that building rapport with students is essential to a well-run classroom, and read alouds are a perfect way to create opportunities for community-building experiences.

Image: Instagram @scholasticparents



- My students misbehave during our read-aloud time

In my experience, students love read alouds, no matter their age. In my first year of teaching, that was sometimes the most positive part of our day! This handbook is not a “how-to” about classroom management, but it must be mentioned that engaged students rarely “misbehave.” Consider what the “misbehavior” looks like. For example, a student who shouts out may be making predictions, making connections, or asking questions about the topic. These interruptions are ones that can actually be productive teaching opportunities and can lead into a quick (less than five minute) skill development lesson. If students are truly unengaged, then it might be time to reconsider read aloud choices or allow students to guide the book choice.

Image: Instagram @scholasticparents



### Resources for Educators

This section includes resources for further reading and information about programs that can help educators build their classroom libraries. This is not an exhaustive list--there are so many resources available!

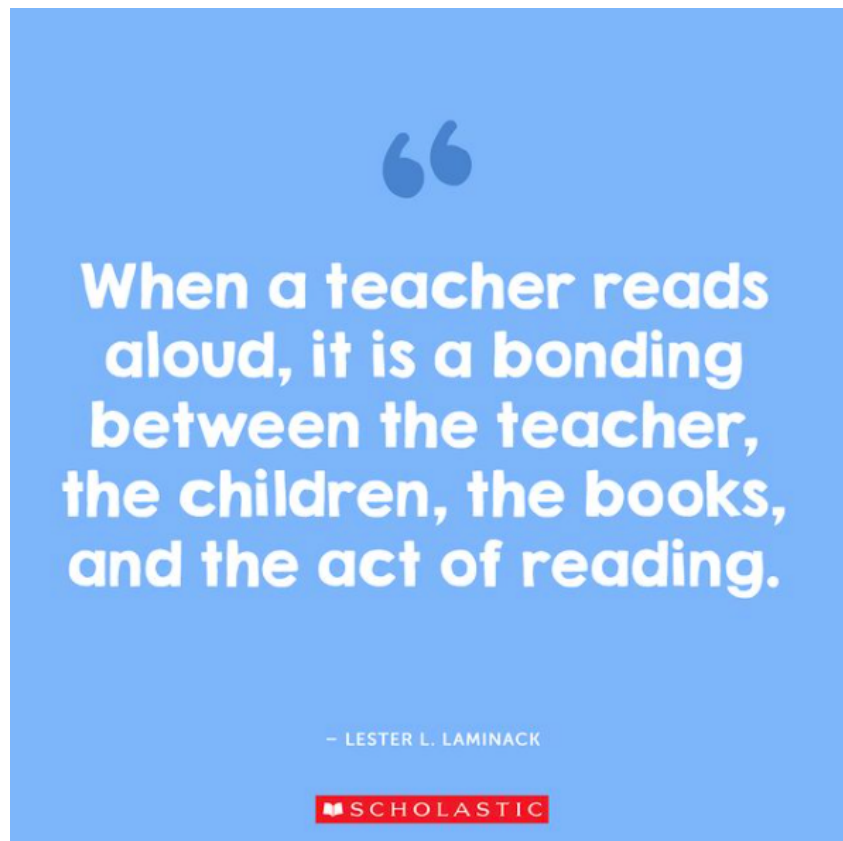
- **Children's Book Project**
  - Offers free books for classroom libraries
  - For more information, visit: [www.childrensbookproject.org](http://www.childrensbookproject.org)
  
- **Scholastic Book Clubs**
  - Offers discounted books to teachers
  - Book Club includes a substantial rewards program
  - FACE (Family and Community Engagement) program offers family and/or school workshops to increase access to books and information about the importance of reading
  - For more information, visit: [www.scholastic.com/home](http://www.scholastic.com/home)
  
- **Digital Libraries**
  - Epic!
    - Free for teachers
    - Includes audiobooks, read-to-me books, books without audio, definitions
    - Ability to search by genre/topic, reading levels, build/share/assign
    - collections
    - For more information, visit: [www.getepic.com](http://www.getepic.com)
  - RazKids
    - Requires an annual subscription
    - Leveled books, some with lesson plans
    - For more information, visit: [www.raz-kids.com](http://www.raz-kids.com)
  - StorylineOnline
    - Free
    - features award-winning actors reading childrens' books
    - Each story has a teacher's activity guide
    - For more information, visit: [www.storylineonline.net](http://www.storylineonline.net)
  
- **For further reading**

Please note that this list includes a few of the books that I have enjoyed while researching this handbook. It is by no means a complete list, and the resources for educators about the benefits of reading aloud are endless!

  - Jim Trelease

- “The Read-Aloud Handbook”
- Practical tips about how to read aloud at home that can be applied in the classroom as well
- Donalyn Miller
  - “The Book Whisperer”
  - “Reading in the Wild”
  - Books focus on engaging children with reading and creating students who love to read
- Mem Fox
  - “Reading Magic”
  - Details the ways in which reading aloud can benefit young children--a great companion to this handbook!
  - Provides easy-to-implement ways to engage children during reading
- Steven Layne
  - “Igniting a Passion for Reading”
  - Contains tips for creating classroom and school environments in which reading is highly valued

Image: Instagram @scholasticteach



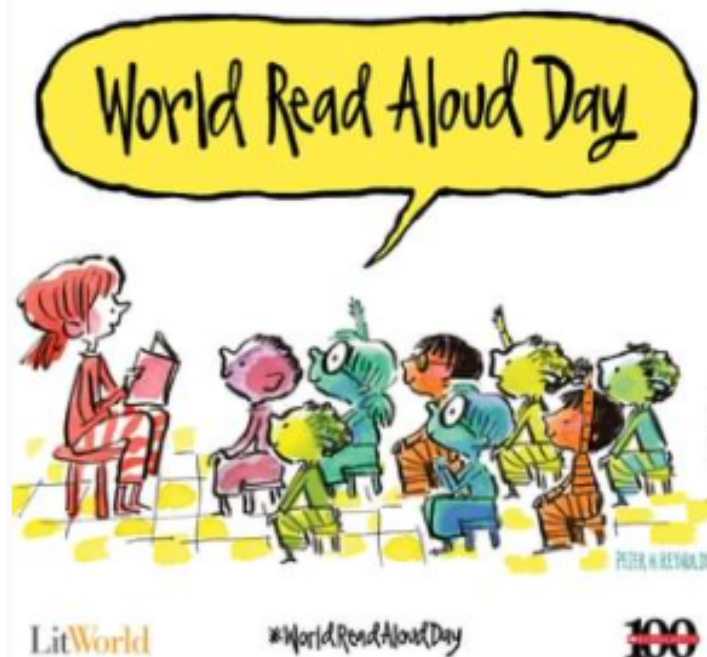
### Supporting a Culture of Reading at School

By now, you have been hopefully convinced that reading aloud to students is an important task. However, a question might remain--whose responsibility is it? The truth is that the message that reading is worthwhile must be a shared responsibility--between teachers, families, and school staff as a whole.

#### Getting started

- Get everyone involved

To develop "a culture of reading," all stakeholders at a school site must recognize the importance of reading aloud. This is a tall order, but is vital to students understanding and recognizing the importance of reading themselves. A school that has a culture of reading has this as a common goal: to create lifelong readers. Reading must be enjoyable for this to happen, and the best way to positively



expose students to books? Reading aloud! When in doubt, just remember: "A good book read well will do more for the woes of our disenfranchised readers than all the leveled books the publishers can crank out." (Layne, 2009, p. 53) In his book "Igniting a Passion for Reading," Steven Layne reminds us that in a school, every adult is a child's hero--from the principal, to the custodian, to the librarian. How powerful would it be if every adult in a school setting engaged in read alouds, recommended books and communicated the importance of reading to students?

Image: Instagram @scholasticteach

#### Activities at school

"Igniting a Passion for Reading" includes numerous activities that can be incorporated into a school's routine to make reading something to celebrate and enjoy. Some are simpler than others, but all are doable with the support of the whole school. Celebrate books by advertising "hot reads and recommendations" from adults and students. Give students a chance to hear adults other than their teachers read by implementing school wide read

alouds before school, after school, and online. Invite school staff, parents, and community members to participate. Create and celebrate special “Reading Days,” like Scholastic’s World Read Aloud Day, usually held in February of each year. If possible, invite authors to visit and read to students. Create time and space for reading, such as by opening a “Reading Lounge” separate from classrooms and the library. Finally, make reading aloud and time to read a common practice in every classroom, from TK to sixth grade. Steven Layne lays out a plan for creating a school of readers in Chapter 10 of his book “Igniting a Passion for Reading” (Layne, 2009, p. 145). While not all of these ideas may be possible at every school site, it can provide a starting point for creating a school of reading adults and students.

### Getting families involved

- A team effort
- School events



When creating a culture of reading, remember that everything must be a team effort. Your team has players who are so influential-- administrators, teachers, support staff, parents, and even the students themselves! When all of these players work together, magic can happen. It is part of the school’s responsibility to share knowledge and strategies for

reading aloud to families. They might know that reading is important, but do they know how to implement it effectively? Hopefully, the strategies in this handbook will be helpful in sharing this knowledge. This handbook can be used to create resources, like videos modeling effective read alouds, handouts, or short workshops to help share this information. These resources can be shared during Back to School Nights, during parent-teacher conferences, or upon request by caregivers. School events to celebrate



reading can help bring school staff, students and families together to celebrate reading. Reading or Literacy Nights can consist of sponsored read alouds, author talks, book sales or giveaways, or be “Open-House” style with opportunities for students to read and share their learning with teachers and families. Book fairs, such as those sponsored by Scholastic, Inc. can also be a great way to create excitement about reading. Scholastic also offers a number of programs through FACE (Family and Community Engagement) that offer workshops to educate teachers and families on various aspects of literacy and their importance.

Image: Instagram @scholasticteach

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