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### Reading Aloud with Children of All Ages

Derry Koralek

*"The single most important activity for building knowledge for their eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children."* Becoming a Nation of Readers, The Commission on Reading 1985.

*"The single most important activity for building these understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children."* Bus, Van Dzenoorn, and Pellegrini, 1995; Wells, 1985.

*"Shared book reading times that involve talking about the book and other topics is the first of three recommended key practices to support language theory and literacy development."* Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children, the 1998 report of the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children.

It's important to read aloud to children of all ages

Reading aloud presents books as sources of pleasant, valuable, and exciting experiences. Children who value books are motivated to read on their own.

Reading aloud gives children background knowledge, which helps them make sense of what they see, hear, and read. The more adults read aloud to children, the larger their vocabularies will grow and the more they will know about the world and their place in it.

Reading aloud lets parents and teachers be role models for reading. When children see adults excited about reading, they will catch their enthusiasm.

Reading aloud can introduce books and types of literature—poetry, short stories, biographies—children might not discover on their own.

Reading aloud introduces the language of books, which differs from language heard in daily conversations, on television, and in movies. Book language is more descriptive and uses more formal grammatical structures.

Reading aloud lets children use their imaginations to explore people, places, times, and events beyond their own experiences.

Reading aloud gives children and adults something to talk about. Talking supports the development of reading and writing skills.

Reading aloud supports the development of thinking skills as children and adults discuss books, articles, and other texts they read together.

Reading aloud is fun.

Read aloud early, later, and as often as possible

Reading aloud is important from infancy through the high school years. Families and teachers can create and continue a tradition, introduce and reinforce the pleasures of reading, and, as children get older, set the stage for meaningful conversations about numerous topics.

Read aloud at a predictable, scheduled time that fits with daily routines at home and school. And read aloud spontaneously—when adults and children are in the mood for a story.

Families can increase read-aloud opportunities by asking older siblings to read to younger ones; teenage babysitters to read while caring for children; and grandparents and other relatives and friends to read during their visits. Teachers can do the same using volunteers and other visitors to the classroom.

Read aloud at home and in school and when away from home or the classroom—at the doctor's office, on the bus, while waiting in line, outdoors, on a field trip.

Reading aloud is more than saying words

Talk about what you are reading—before, during, and after a read-aloud session. According to the IRA/NAEYC position statement (1998), "It is the talk that surrounds the storybook reading that gives it power, helping children to bridge what is in the story and their own lives."

Use the text to discuss real-life experiences and issues. Stories and books can be springboards to meaningful discussions about many different topics.

Make the book come alive. Vary your expressions and tone of voice to fit the plot. Use a different voice for each character. Pause when appropriate to create suspense.

Read for as long as children can pay attention.

Gradually read for longer periods of time as their attention spans grow.

Involve the listener in deciding what, when, and how long to read. Invite active participation during and after the reading.

Follow up after reading a book. Offer materials for art projects and dramatics. Look for more books by the author or on the same topic. Plan an activity that builds on what you have read.

Further hints and recommendations:

Reading Aloud with Babies

Reading Aloud with Toddlers

Reading Aloud with Preschoolers

Reading Aloud with Kindergarteners

Derry Koralek is editor of *Young Children*, NAEYC's journal. This article is based in part on *The Read Aloud Handbook* (5th ed.) by J. Trelease (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2001) and *Much More than the ABCs: The Early Stages of Reading and Writing* by J.A. Schickedanz (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1999). It was compiled for Reading Is Fundamental ([www.rif.org](http://www.rif.org)).

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