



Reading Aloud: Background Information

The single most important activity for building...understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children.¹

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Key Messages

I. Reading aloud leads to reading success.

Support for reading aloud as a literacy approach is found in neuroscience. Magnetic resonance imaging and other brain imaging technologies have given us insight into how children learn. We know that an infant's brain is not entirely genetically predetermined. According to Rima Shore's summary of research, *Rethinking the Brain*², approximately 55 percent of a newborn's brain is shaped by environmental experiences.

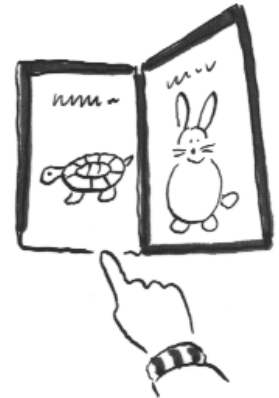
Why read aloud? Because it:

- ⇒ Sends children the message that reading is a wonderful activity. The warm, nurturing bond that is created motivates children. This “pleasure connection,” as read-aloud expert Jim Trelease dubs it, is essential to creating children who are lifelong readers.
- ⇒ Is a social event—a shared activity, filled with discussion and involvement.
- ⇒ Teaches children book awareness. Children learn that pictures provide clues to stories; books and print go from left to right; print represents written language; and stories have a beginning, middle, and end.
- ⇒ Helps children make sense of their world, understand why things happen and how they work, and make connections between personal experiences and the ideas and information in the book.
- ⇒ Promotes empathy and understanding as new characters and subjects beyond the child's immediate sphere of reference are introduced.
- ⇒ Increases children's vocabulary by exposing them to the unique and rare words that can be found in books.
- ⇒ Improves a child's attention span and ability to listen. Studies of reading aloud to infants have shown that babies' attention spans stretch from 3 to 30 minutes after just a few read-aloud sessions.





- ⇒ Increases children's ability to comprehend written texts. Listening comprehension is directly tied to reading comprehension. Because children can listen on a higher level than they can read, reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible to them.
- ⇒ Teaches children how to read expressively, as they imitate the vitality with which a book was read aloud to them.
- ⇒ Encourages children to stretch their minds: it stimulates the imagination, hones observation skills, enhances listening skills, promotes curiosity, and gives children practice in problem solving.
- ⇒ Models for children how fluent readers read and reflect on what is read.



II. On Reading Aloud: Start early, read often, involve your child, and use a wide variety of great read-aloud books.

According to most research, reading aloud should begin early, occur daily, and be a participatory activity. Reading aloud is important to even very young infants who don't understand language, because it exposes them to the sounds of language that they are trying to comprehend. They become conditioned to both the rhythmic sound of reading and the visibility of books in the environment.

Infants

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that babies be read to every day, beginning at age six months. Other reading experts believe that reading aloud should begin at birth. While some people may doubt the benefits of such an early start, it certainly doesn't hurt.

Reading aloud to older babies involves letting them use their senses to learn about the properties of books. When they hold and chew on books, they learn what books feel and taste like. When they turn the pages, they learn that they can look at books on their own. They learn to point to pictures as a story is being read.

Choosing Books for Infants

- ⇒ Infants are stimulated by sight and sound; they like books with brightly colored illustrations and simple objects; are soothed by rhythmic sounds and exciting words; favor short, easy-to-listen-to texts; and like to explore books with their feet and mouths, making heavy-duty board and cloth books good choices.
- ⇒ Both Mother Goose and Dr. Seuss are ideally suited to an infant's needs. The pleasure in hearing rhyme is similar to the enjoyment in listening to harmony-it helps to bring order to chaos.



Toddlers

Toddlers are able to understand language and thus derive much from being read aloud to. They can point out particular objects in pictures and learn their names. For this age group, the illustrations convey as much meaning as words do, if not more.

Choosing Books for Toddlers

- ⇒ Toddlers tend to like books about things that spark their curiosity; they love playing with words and can enjoy the repetition of rhymes and the silliness of nonsense words; and they can begin to learn values, explore their feelings, and gain insight about growing up.
- ⇒ Toddlers enjoy the whole process of listening to a story read aloud and like books with pages they can turn, illustrations they can point to as adults ask questions, and phrases that sound silly and are repeated predictably.

Preschoolers

With preschoolers, reading aloud comes alive. They learn that print carries meaning and that stories are organized in a certain way. They can delight in the sounds of words and rhymes. Many preschoolers enjoy having the same book read to them over and over. Repeated readings help children gain a sense of competence, control, and self-esteem. Predictable books enable them to join in the read-aloud process and to return to these books on their own. They can discuss the books that have been read aloud and relate them to their lives.

Choosing Books for Preschoolers

- ⇒ Young preschoolers still favor stories about children and families. Older preschoolers enjoy humor and fantasy. Some even enjoy hearing chapter books read to them.
- ⇒ Ensure diversity in the read-aloud materials, in terms of both subject matter and genre. Poetry and nonfiction are just as suited to reading aloud as fiction.

*(See the **Guidelines for Choosing Read-Aloud Books and the More Tips for Choosing Read-Aloud Books** handouts for more information.)*

Reading aloud needs to take place every day and continue long after children have learned to read. In fact, research on older students underscores the fact that the more often children are read to, the more students will achieve academically.

To be effective, reading aloud must involve the child as an active participant in the reading process. Providers who support interactive reading, in which children and the teacher ask each other questions and discuss matters centered on the text, foster children's understanding of both text and vocabulary. Inviting children to discuss the story leads to greater comprehension, because “the talk that surrounds the storybook reading...gives it power, helping children to bridge what is in the story with their own lives.”¹



III. Recognized techniques can enhance the read-aloud experience.

Here are basic techniques that family child care providers might effectively use:

- ⇒ Establish a regular time for reading aloud.
- ⇒ Point out the cover illustration and identify the names of the book's author and illustrator.
- ⇒ Read slowly enough for children to take in the words and look at the pictures.
- ⇒ Stop during the reading to invite children to complete a predictable phrase or sentence, to guess what might happen next, or think about how they themselves might react in a similar situation.
- ⇒ Talk about the book afterward. Be sure to ask the children to describe their reaction to the book.



*(See the **Techniques to Enhance the Read-Aloud Experience** *handout* for more information.)*

In addition to these general strategies for reading out loud, special considerations should be made for reading aloud to children of specific ages or at different or delayed developmental levels. Techniques differ for babies, mobile infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

*(See the **Guidelines for Choosing Read-Aloud Books** *handout*.)*

If children have developmental delays, it is best to determine which read-aloud techniques and books are most appropriate for their current developmental level rather than their chronological age.

Choosing books that are responsive to second-language learner's cultures will help them to better understand stories in both their first and second languages.

¹ Neuman, S.; Copple, C.; and Bredekamp, S. Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children, National Association for the Education of Young Children. 2000.

² Shore, R. Rethinking the Brain: New Insights Into Early Development. Families and Work Institute. 1997.