

# The Benefits of Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success (Bredekamp, Copple, & Neuman, 2000). It provides children with a demonstration of phrased, fluent reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It reveals the rewards of reading, and develops the listener's interest in books and desire to be a reader (Mooney, 1990).

Listening to others read develops key understanding and skills, such as an appreciation for how a story is written and familiarity with book conventions, such as "once upon a time" and "happily ever after" (Bredekamp et al., 2000). Reading aloud demonstrates the relationship between the printed word and meaning – children understand that print tells a story or conveys information – and invites the listener into a conversation with the author.

Children can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It exposes less able readers to the same rich and engaging books that fluent readers read on their own, and entices them to become better readers. Students of any age benefit from hearing an experienced reading of a wonderful book.

## "Think aloud" to model how to make connections

By modeling how fluent readers think about the text and problem solve as they read, we make the invisible act of reading visible. Modeling encourages children to develop the "habits of mind" proficient readers employ.

Helping children find and make connections to stories and books requires them to relate the unfamiliar text to their relevant prior knowledge. There are several comprehension strategies that help children become knowledgeable readers. Three are:

1. Connecting the book to their own life experience
2. Connecting the book to other literature they have read
3. Connecting what they are reading to universal concepts

(Keene & Zimmermann, 1997)

Helping children discover these connections requires planning and modeling. Parents and teachers can encourage and support thinking, listening, and discussion, and model "think-alouds," which reveal the inner conversation readers have with the text as they read (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Parents and teachers can point out connections between prior experiences and the story, similarities between books, and any relationship between the books and a larger concept.

Here are some examples of "think-alouds":

- To make connections between the book and your own life, think aloud as you share. When you read the beginning of *A River Dream* by Allen Say, for example, you can comment, "This book reminds me of the time my father took me fishing. Have you ever been fishing?"
- To make connections between related books with the same author or similar settings, characters, and concepts, say "*Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters* by John Steptoe is an African tale that is similar to the tale of *Cinderella*. Both stories are about sisters – one kind and the other spiteful. Do you know any stories about nice and mean sisters or brothers? Let's continue reading to find out other ways the stories are similar."

- To connect a book to a larger world or universal concept, you could say to your student, "*Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon helps me understand that we are all the same in many ways, but it's our differences that make us special."

While fluent readers make these types of connections with ease, many readers do not. Children need to be shown this type of thinking and then asked to join in and participate in book conversations. This active involvement gives you, the teacher, a glimpse into each reader's thinking.

## Sample read aloud collections to try

### **Family traditions** (Age range: all)

- *Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco
- *Dumpling Soup* by Jama Kim Rattigan
- *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen

### **Friendship** (Age range: all)

- *Chester's Way* by Kevin Henkes
- *Henry Hikes to Fitchburg* by D. B. Johnson
- *Matthew and Tilly* by Rebecca C. Jones
- *Henry and Amy (Right-Way-Round and Upside-Down)* by Stephen Michael King
- *Ira Sleeps Over* by Bernard Waber

### **Immigration** (Age range: second grade and up)

- *Painted Words/Spoken Memories* by Aki Kaurismäki
- *Going Home* by Eve Bunting
- *How Many Days to America? A Thanksgiving Story* by Eve Bunting
- *My Freedom Trip* by Frances Park and Ginger Park
- *The Memory Coat* by Elvira Woodruff

### **The wonders of literacy** (Age range: second grade and up)

- *More Than Anything Else* by Marie Bradby
- *Papa's Stories* by Dolores Johnson
- *Amber on the Mountain* by Robert Johnston
- *Tomás and the Library Lady* by Pat Mora
- *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco

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By: [Judith Gold](#), [Akimi Gibson](#)

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