

Parent Resource

Title : Making the Most of Reading Aloud: Practical Strategies for Parents of Young Children

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Making the Most of Reading Aloud:
Practical Strategies for Parents of Young
Children
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If you put a group of preschoolers in a room and read them a story, do they all hear the same thing?

In a recent study, researchers attached brain scanners to children and then watched what happened as they listened to recorded stories. Separately, they asked the kids' parents, "How often do you read to your child?"

Children whose parents reported more reading at home showed significantly heightened brain activity in one region: the parietal-temporal-occipital association cortex.

Put simply, reading aloud to young children stimulates and strengthens the part of the brain associated with visual imagery, story comprehension and word meaning. These preschoolers may have heard the same words, but—depending on their home experiences—their brains processed the information differently.

Why Read Aloud?

This may be the first brain-imaging study showing the benefits of reading aloud to young children, but it builds upon decades of related research. For example, one early childhood study found that kindergarten children who were read to at least three times a week had a "significantly greater phonemic awareness than did children who were read to less often, and were almost twice as likely to score in the top 25 percent in reading readiness."

Reading aloud also helps kids develop positive associations with books. It feeds their imagination, helps them bond with caregivers, and gives them contextual understanding of places, people, events and classic tales that transport them beyond their home and neighborhood.

In fact, the landmark *Becoming a Nation of Readers* report from 1985 concluded that "the single most important activity for building knowledge for their eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children."

Such studies point to the the "why" of reading aloud. But what about the "how"? What strategies can parents use to make these recommendations a reality?

How Parents Can Make the Most of Reading Aloud

1 Start Early:

Reading to babies helps build bonds, vocabulary and habits. If reading a story is part of the bedtime routine from infancy or toddlerhood, your child will likely become even more invested than you are in maintaining the regimen. To encourage exploration, keep at least one small basket of books at kid level—and expect them to get chewed on, stepped on, spilled on and adored.

2 Get Library Card:

Parents sometimes struggle to find books that will hold their children's attention. For this task, the children's room at your local library is your best ally. Browse the stacks and displays, but—better yet—ask the librarian for recommendations based on your child's age and interests. Many libraries host story hour—a great opportunity not only to expose your child to reading but also to hear how another adult reads and engages kids with books. For online book recommendations by age, try Reading Rockets great read alouds for babies—age 3.

3 Give Toddlers and Preschoolers a “Part”:

Predictable books follow a familiar pattern—such as repeated lines or obvious sequences (days of the week, letters, or numbers). Young kids love *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* and, more recently, the *Pete the Cat* series because they can quickly anticipate what comes next and can become involved in the reading experience. Once your child picks up on the pattern, prompt them to recite key lines or complete a sentence that you start. Nursery rhymes and rhyming books, such as *The Cat in the Hat* or *ChickaChicka Boom Boom*, can also prompt interactive recitation.

4Read the Pictures:

Illustrations are visual context clues that can help kids build their vocabulary ... and their emotional literacy. Before reading a book, take a “picture walk” through the pages. Look at characters and the setting and make predictions about what might happen. When an emotionally charged event occurs, pause to look at the characters’ facial expressions. Ask, “How do you think she’s feeling right now?” Authors who are particularly skilled at portraying emotions in both words and pictures include Kevin Henkes, Patricia Polacco, Arnold Lobel, and Mo Willems.

5Press the Pause Button:

Some nights, it’s tempting to rush through books on the way to “lights out.” But by occasionally pressing the “pause button” before you turn a page—stopping to notice something about a picture, to explain a word, to ask a question, to make room for your child to ask a question—you can support your child’s comprehension. Prompts like these show them that you are engaged in the story too:

- What do you think is going to happen next?
- Wow. Why did he do that?
- Oh my. I wonder what she’s going to do now!

6Model Making Connections:

Strong readers aren’t passive—their minds are constantly making connections between what they read and the world around them. Reading aloud affords the perfect opportunity for you to model your own thought process. As you read, pause to connect the book to other books you have read together, to your memories, or to places or events you both know. For example:

- The grandma in this story reminds me of your grandma. They both love making pies and telling stories.
- Hey, she has brown eyes and loves dinosaurs—just like you!
- Look at all those tall buildings! It looks a little bit like New York City, where your uncle lives.

- He seems nervous about the first day of school. Do you remember your first day of school?

- There's a bear in this story! What other stories have we read about bears?

Jim Trelease, author of the classic Read Aloud Handbook, believes that parents who read aloud to their children provide them with a “reading role model” and help them associate reading with pleasure. As he notes, “We read aloud to children for the same reasons we talk with them: to reassure; entertain; bond; inform; arouse curiosity; and inspire.”

lives.