

## Sharing books with children

### What is reading aloud to children?

What it is ...	... and isn't!
Adults read while children listen for enjoyment.	Children read aloud so that adults can test them or see how well they can read.
Adults read to children so that they can enjoy stories and books.	Children read aloud to practise their reading.
Adults try to choose books that they think will interest children.	Adults choose books that they think are 'right' for children.
Children also have opportunities to choose the books that are read aloud.	Adults always decide which books will be read aloud.
Children are encouraged to ask questions and make comments.	Children only ever answer questions about stories.
Adults ask questions that help children connect to stories.	Adults ask questions that require children to remember 'facts' from stories.

### Key benefits of reading aloud

1. When you read aloud and children enjoy the story, they see reading as an interesting and satisfying activity, and they realise why they should learn to read for themselves. Motivation is a very important part of becoming – and remaining – a reader. To make reading a habit, children have to *want* to read regularly.
2. Reading aloud shows children how we read and how books work. This knowledge makes it much easier for them to learn to read for themselves.

3. Children are able to understand and enjoy stories that are far beyond their own reading ability when they hear them read aloud.
4. Hearing new words and expressions used in stories develops children's vocabulary and gives them a rich language to draw from when they read and write on their own.
5. Reading aloud to children gives you things to talk about. It also helps you get to know each other and builds a bond between you.

## How to read aloud

Here are a few tips on how to read aloud to children to make the experience an enjoyable one.

- \* Start by reading the title of the story and the name of the author and illustrator. Doing this helps children recognise that stories are written and illustrated by people just like them!
- \* Don't read too fast.
- \* Put lots of expression in your voice to create the mood and use a different voice for each character when she/he speaks.
- \* Use body gestures and actions, where appropriate – for example, if the character is cross and stomping around, stamp your feet as you read.
- \* Walk around and show the children the pictures as you read, or have them seated in front of you so that they can all see the pictures while you read the text.



- \* Sometimes run your finger under the words as you read, to help children make the connection between the words that we are saying/reading and the words they are hearing.
- \* It doesn't matter for how long you read for – and you don't have to finish a book. Read and explore the story only for as long as feels satisfying for everyone!

## Talking about the story

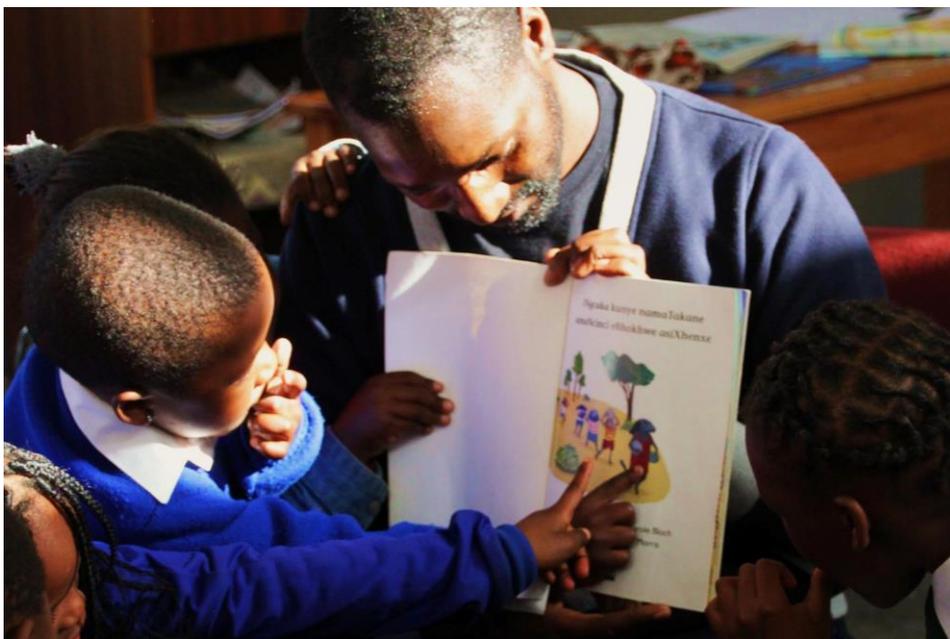
Talking to children about the story you are reading together is just as important as reading the words to them. Through discussing the pictures and characters, and what is happening in the story, children learn about how stories work and how to explore them. Rather than trying to 'teach' children, just let the conversation flow naturally as you enjoy the story together.

Here are a few ideas for helping the conversation along. Select ones that fit best with the story you are reading. And remember that the idea is always to *explore* the story together rather than to 'test' the children's understanding of what you are reading.

- \* Being able to guess what comes next while you are reading is a skill that competent readers use all the time. As you read a story, develop children's prediction skills by asking, "What do you think will happen next?" at various points in the story.
- \* Young children often ask, "Why?" You can either answer their "why" questions by sharing your ideas ("I think it is because ..."), or you can ask, "Why/What do you think ...?"
- \* You can also make open-ended comments as you read – for example, "I wonder what he/she's going to do now." and "I wonder why if she's seen the dog hiding there.". This demonstrates for children how we think about what we read as we are reading it.
- \* Encourage children to enjoy and look carefully at the pictures. Draw their attention to different parts of the picture on a page, comment on these parts yourself and ask them to do so too. Ask younger children to find particular people or objects in the pictures.

Draw their attention to the size of a large or small word on the page, or the interesting sound a word makes as you say it.

- \* Many stories focus on how characters deal with challenges that they face in life. It is powerful for children to relate these things to their own lives. Encourage them to make strong connections by saying something like “This story reminds me of how important it is to treat people well. What does it remind you of?”
- \* Thinking about the causes and effects of events and, characters’ feelings and actions deepens children’s understanding about how stories and life work! Help them to do this by asking questions such as “Why do you think XXX happened?” and “Why do you think XXX did that?”
- \* Don’t forget to pause sometimes too so that children have an opportunity to make comments or ask questions about story, express their thoughts about it or share ideas that the story sparks for them.



- \* As you read together, say what you think and ask children what they think too. This helps them to learn how to approach books. You can also discuss aspects of the story once you have finished reading it. For example, you could ask: “Did you enjoy the story?”, “Who are your favourite characters?”, “Which part of the story did you like the most/the least?” and “How did it make you feel when ...?”

## Other important book experiences

Helping young children to develop the ability to read and write is a serious business because being literate is extremely important in our daily lives. But we also need to remember that we don't have to actively teach or tell children *about* books and reading. Instead, we need to allow young children to learn about books by exploring them in different ways.

In most educational settings teachers read aloud to the whole class, which is an important practice. It's also good to find times to read to small groups of children, as well as individual children.

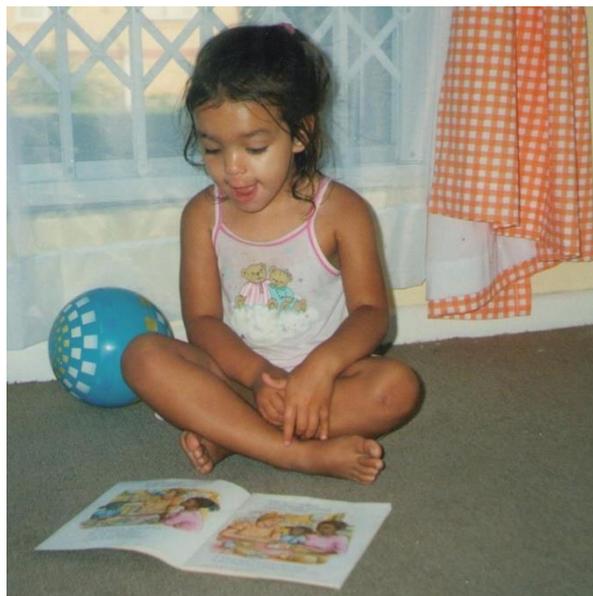
Children need time where they can look at and read books on their own or with friends. Providing areas that are cosy and comfortable for the children to sit and enjoy books encourages them to spend time with books.

All children need opportunities to 'play' with books. Here are some of the ways that children at different stages of development might 'play' with books.

- \* **Babies** like to try out books by touching, patting, shaking and even chewing them! Try giving babies board and cloth books when you want to allow them to handle books on their own, like during nappy changes. These kinds of books are tough and don't break easily. Older babies enjoy books with flaps, pop-ups and buttons that they can press to make sounds.



- \* **Many toddlers** like to pretend to read aloud and **older children** often like to pretend to be ‘the teacher’ and read to the class. They can be found turning the pages of a storybook telling their own story as they go or retelling a story they have heard often – sometimes even with the book upside down! They are practicing reading and showing you that they understand what books are about. Encourage them by making sure that there are always some books around for them to pick up and ‘read’ when they want to.



- \* **Young children** often act out stories they know during play, or create their own stories, using familiar story characters. In these imaginary play times, children learn about symbols – when they use a stick as a fairy’s magic wand or a box as a car, it means that they understand how one thing can ‘stand for’ another. Understanding this is important for literacy learning.

Playing with books offers children opportunities for important literacy learning and it’s what children do naturally when we read to them and they have books to choose from in their environment.