

Reading Aloud to Children: Helpful hints

- **Plan enough time in each session** (10 - 15 minutes) to read aloud, to enjoy, and to discuss a story, poem, or information text.
- **Choose stories or texts that respond to children's expressed interests and experiences.** For very young children or Emergent readers/listeners choose books with vivid pictures, a strong story line, engaging characters and evocative language. Humorous and predictable books are particularly successful.
- **Preview the book yourself, so you can anticipate questions or reactions.** If possible practice reading it through so you can decide where to pause for emphasis or to elicit questions, predictions or reactions.
- **Introduce the book, pointing out the cover illustration, title and author.** Invite some predictions or comments that help the listeners connect the book to their own experience or to other books heard or read. Or give a brief explanation about why you chose to read this book. "This is the story of a boy who goes on an unusual trip. I chose it because you just came back from a trip." Or "This is the story about a special friendship between a mouse and a whale. I have read this many times. I wonder what you will think about it."
- **Read with expression that reflects the tone of the story or the characters.** And not too fast. Vary your pace so you can pause for emphasis, or to allow time for child(ren) to think about what's happening or what might come next.
- **Allow time for children to study the pictures** as you read, and to make comments and ask questions about the story.
- **Encourage predictions**, and then help children confirm or revise these as the story unfolds. Try to honor many ideas and interpretations, not just the "correct" ones. Instead of accepting or rejecting comments or ideas as right or wrong, use comments such as "that's one possibility, let's see what the author has in mind." or "Well that's an interesting idea. How did you think of that?"
- **Watch the children's expressions** and body language and be sensitive to signs of boredom or confusion; you may need to change your reading plan, change the book or do more preparation.
- **Save time at the end of the story to get reactions.** Ask open-ended questions that don't have right or wrong answers, and that can't be answered with a yes or no reply. For instance ask what the child liked (or disliked) about the book, and why? You may ask what s/he thought about the characters or how the problem was solved? Find out if the book made the listener think of any personal experience or other book heard or read.
- **Point out parts of the story you particularly noticed or liked** -- special language patterns or phrases, or parts of texts that made you feel or visualize something. Ask child(ren) if they noticed other parts.
- **Vary the length of time you spend reading aloud.** Don't be constrained by time. Some longer stories or chapter books can be read over several sessions, if the time in between is not too long, and if you plan good stopping places. Don't spoil a story by rushing to finish it. Children need to see that pleasurable reading involves time to savor language, ideas and pictures.
- **Remember that for some children, listening to stories is a new experience**, and they need to develop that interest and ability. Start with short, interesting selections, with strong pictures. In some cases allowing active children to manipulate play dough or to draw while listening may help. Be responsive to facial expressions and body language, and if the book is not working, don't be afraid to stop, without being punitive. Next time you might find a better selection.
- **Encourage discussion about the story.** Ask the child questions about what's going on, and encourage the child to predict what will come next -- but be sure not to turn a discussion into a quiz!
- **Most important: Have a Good Time!**