



PARENT EXPRESS

Tips for Read Aloud

Shirley Wilkins, WVU Extension Agent, Pocahontas County

Reading aloud to children is the first step to helping them into literacy and is a basic way to continue supporting their reading. A good read-aloud can engage both emergent and conventional readers, entertain younger and older listeners, and motivate them to read on their own.

As Orville Prescott says in his book, *A Father Reads to His Children*:

“Few children learn to love books by themselves. Someone has to lure them into the wonderful world of the written work; someone has to show them the way.”

When you read aloud to children, you are indeed “luring them into a wonderful world” and showing them the way to become part of that world.

The following read-aloud tips give some sensible suggestions for a good read aloud:

- **Preview books!** Don’t be caught off guard by inappropriate or difficult language or themes.
- **Have a ready supply of books.** A selection may not work with your audience or take as long as planned.
- **Use a variety of selections,** such as picture books, chapter books, fiction, nonfiction, poetry, serious topics and humorous stories.
- **Use books covering a range of reading levels.** Older listeners will enjoy a good read aloud featuring a picture book. Younger listeners are able to listen at a higher reading level than they can read themselves.
- **Make sure ALL children can see the pictures easily.** Share the illustrations in chapter books when reading to a group. When reading aloud one-on-one, make sure the book is positioned so the child can see both illustrations and text.
- **Establish eye contact with children.** Monitor their engagement.
- **Set the mood** by allowing your audience time to settle down and get comfortable. Then, focus them by introducing the book to be read or discussing where you left off in a book you’ve been reading.
- **Invite the children into the book** by talking about the author, the illustrator, the dedication, the title, other books by the same author and/or illustrator, and so forth.
- **Explain unusual vocabulary ahead of time** to avoid interrupting the flow of the story.
- **Use a lot of expression.** Try dramatic voices for characters, making sound effects and changing your tone of voice to fit the plot.
- **Use props.** Bring in a stuffed animal mentioned in the book, use puppets and wear simple costumes or masks to enhance your presentation of the book.
- **Be patient and tolerant.** Some children haven’t developed their “listening muscles” yet and may find it difficult to sit still and listen. When reading to a small group or individual children, make paper, crayons or Play-Doh available to help keep their hands busy. The child in the group who is sitting under the table with his or her back to you but is being quiet is still benefiting from hearing you read aloud.

– continued

- **Find a suspenseful spot to stop in a long book** or if you are reading a long chapter.
 - Set aside time to **discuss what you have read** after each read aloud. Help children explore their feelings about the story and how it connects to their lives.
 - **Organize writing and/or art activities** to encourage children to explore the book you read to them.
 - If possible, **make the book available** for children to read, reread or look through after the read aloud.
 - **Don't be afraid to change books** if a selection isn't well-received.
- **Don't read books you don't personally enjoy.**
 - **Avoid books with too much dialogue** and too many characters. They are difficult to read aloud and listen to.
 - **Practice. Practice. Practice.**

Sources

Reading Partners 2011 Training Guide. Morgantown WV: WVU Extension Service, 4-H Youth Development, Youth Literacy Team.

Read Aloud West Virginia Resource Kit. (1998). Charleston, WV: The Education Alliance.

Trelease, Jim. (2001). *The Read-Aloud Handbook: Fifth Edition*. New York, NY: Penguin Books.

WVU is an EEO/Affirmative Action Employer. Underrepresented class members are encouraged to apply. This includes: minorities, females, individuals with disabilities and veterans.

The WVU Board of Governors is the governing body of WVU. The Higher Education Policy Commission in West Virginia is responsible for developing, establishing and overseeing the implementation of a public four-year colleges and universities.

Trade or brand names are mentioned for information purposes only. The use of trade or product names does not imply endorsement by the WVU Extension Service to the exclusion of other products that may be equally suitable.

Reasonable accommodations will be made to provide this content in alternate formats upon request. Contact the WVU Extension Service Office of Communications at 304-293-4222.