

From previewing to reading with expression, here are several helpful hints for anyone preparing to read a book aloud to a group of children.

Listening to literature being read aloud is one of the most valuable and pleasurable experiences beginning readers and writers can have. Read alouds should be part of every child's day.

Story time, circle time, and read alouds offer a chance to model good reading and thinking strategies and to expose young learners to a rich variety of literature. When this exposure is accompanied by supportive and engaging discussions, children are able to extend their world view and develop important critical thinking skills.

The following are some helpful hints that will help you make the most of your read aloud time.

- **Plan enough time for each session (15-20 minutes)**

You'll want to give yourself and the children enough time to read aloud, to enjoy, and to discuss the story, poem, or information text.

- **Choose stories or texts that respond to children's interests and experiences**

For very young children or emergent readers, choose books with vivid pictures, a strong story line, engaging characters, and evocative language. Humorous and predictable books are particularly successful.

- **Preview the book before you read it with the group so you can anticipate questions or reactions**

Practice reading the book through so you can decide where to pause for emphasis and where to elicit questions, predictions, or reactions.

Picture Walk

Book Talk/Commercial

Just imagine how excited you'd feel if you heard the TV weatherperson announce the possibility of a big snowfall on a *SCHOOL NIGHT!* Imagine what you'd be thinking about and how excited you would get. Perhaps you'd be thinking about staying up late to watch TV. Or sleeping in the next morning. Or you might be thinking about your homework and how you could just skip it until the next day. Maybe you'd be thinking about all the fun you could have spending the day playing in the snow-snow forts and snowball fights, sledding and snowmen. . . . Oh, and then you'd need to come inside and get warm. There's bound to be hot chocolate on a snow day-mmmm, I do love a good mug full of hot chocolate. Today we are reading *Snow Day!* I can hardly wait, let's get right to it and see what happens on this snow day. . . .

Theme/Topic Link

Sometimes unexpected things can make us change our plans. Rainstorms can cause us to cancel soccer practice. A flat tire on a bike can make us walk when we planned to ride. Sometimes we expect something in the mail and it takes a week longer to arrive than we thought it would. A delay at the airport can cause us to miss a trip. Unexpected events can make us change our plans, and that is what we are reading about this week. I have a basket of books here, and we will read one each day. These are stories about all kinds of plans that just don't work out because something unexpected happens. Let's take a look at the first one, *Snow Day!*, written by Lester Laminack, with illustrations by Adam Gustavson. Take a moment before we begin to read; let's think about what unexpected event may make these characters change their plans. What plans do you suppose they had? [At this point I sometimes have students share their thinking with someone near first, then share out.]

Let's settle in and see what goes awry in this story. . . .

Just Start Reading

about what's happening or what might come next.

- **Build in time for listeners to respond along the way**

Allow time for children to study the pictures as you read, make comments, and ask questions about the story.

- **Encourage predictions**

Ask children what they think will happen next. Help them confirm or revise these predictions 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 your audience**

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 next time.

- **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 he or she thought about the characters or how the problem was solved. Find out if the book made listeners think of any personal experiences or other books they've heard or read.

- **Point out parts of the story you noticed or especially liked**

Show the children special language patterns or phrases or parts of the text that made you feel or visualize something. Ask children if there were other parts of the book they noticed.

- **Remember that for some children, listening to stories is a new experience**

Some children aren't used to being read to and will need to develop that interest and ability. Start with short, interesting stories with strong pictures. In some cases, allow active children to manipulate play dough or to draw while listening. Be responsive to facial expressions and body language.

- Encourage discussion about the story

Ask the children questions about what's going on and encourage them to predict what will come next. Be sure, though, not to turn the discussion into a quiz!

- Most importantly: Have a good time!

- **Top 10 Ways to Talk to Kids About Books:** Get ready. It's life changing.

1. **Make connections.** Make connections between [kids and characters in the book](#). Make connections between what happens in the book and [what has happened in your life](#). Make connections between what happens in the book and [what happens in the world](#) around you.
2. **Make predictions.** Get kids thinking about what will happen in the book *before* they read.
3. **Activate schema.** Use what kids already know to talk about topics in the book. Get their brains moving before the reading begins.
4. **Ask questions.** Model strong questioning by thinking aloud as you read. Talk about your questions and show your child how asking good questions helps them to better understand what they read.
5. **Go on a book walk.** Sometimes, reading doesn't have to be reading every word on every page. Book walks are a great way to talk about the book—without reading it.
6. **Make inferences.** Bring together big concepts by using what you know, what you read, and what you think will happen in the book.
7. **Think deeply.** Kids can really surprise you if you aim high. Show them how to think deeply about what they read by asking hard questions and modeling critical thinking.
8. **Look at the book's print.** Talk about the print in the book, the layout, the words on the page.
9. **Talk about the pictures.** Use the illustrations to pull together ideas, discuss the illustrator's craft, and to strengthen comprehension.

10. **Visualize.** Make mind movies, images in the mind. Visualizing is one of the key components of comprehension; if kids can visualize, they're most likely understanding what they read!

How to Discuss Books with Your Kids

Picture Walk

Today we are going to read this book [hold the book so the front cover is visible]. It is called *Snow Day!* The author is Lester Laminack, and the illustrator is Adam Gustavson. Take a look at the illustration on the front. These two kids seem to be zipping down a hill on this red sled. Before we read this one, let's take a walk through the pictures and see what is going on.

Turn to the first illustration and begin a conversation. It may go something like this: Well, I see a boy looking right at us and his eyes are really large. He looks excited. I wonder what he might be excited about? And look at the girl lying there on the floor in front of the TV. Mmmm, that's interesting, the man on the TV is standing in front of a map and that looks like clouds and snowflakes. I wonder what that man is talking about. Oh look, there is one more person in the illustration. See the man over here? He looks like a grown-up and he's wearing an apron and has a spatula in his hand. It looks as if he is coming from the kitchen to see what is going on. Now I'm really wondering what these three are talking about. Let's turn the page and take a look at the next illustration, shall we?

Book Talk/Commercial

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Author Profile

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Theme/Topic Link

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. The questioning model sidesteps these challenges, allowing you to support your child's comprehension and critical thinking skills in your car, at home, on the subway, at the dinner table, or even just on your couch.

Parents can leverage this need for higher level questioning as a way to have meaningful conversations with their children and examine basic assumptions. Questioning can be the conduit between home and school, and it can create an environment that values the process of learning over the "right" answers.

Using Costa's Questioning Model

Level 2: Help your child analyze the story.

The Problems

- What are the problems in the story? Who or what is causing them? How do you think the problems will be solved?
- Name and describe a big idea or concept from this story.
- Describe the setting in your story. Is there a setting in real life that it reminds you of?
- Could this story have really happened? Why or why not?

The Characters

- What can you infer about the main character based on his actions?
- How and why do the main character's feelings change?
- If you could talk to the main character, what advice would you give him?
- Do the "good guy" and the "bad guy" share any similarities? How are they different?
- What do you wish the main character would have done differently? How would that change the story?
- Are all the characters likeable? Why or why not?

- Did the main character act in a way that was fair?

Personal Connections

- How would you have solved the problem if it happened to you?
 - Which of the characters remind you of yourself or someone you know? Why?
 - If you could be friends with one of the characters in your book, who would it be and why?
 - Describe a time when you felt like the character.
 - Is the main character someone you would want to be friends with? Why or why not?
 - Would you want to live in this story? Why or why not?
 - Why did you pick this book to read? What interested you about this book?
 - How is this book similar to another book you have read?
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- **3 ways to talk to your kids about books**

I remember a time, not so long ago, when Maddy, Owen, and Cora would talk...

The first—and best—tip for sharing books with young children is to have fun together! If children are engaged and enjoying themselves, they are learning. When children have positive interactions with books, they are developing good feelings about reading, which will motivate them to continue seeking out books and other literacy materials as they grow.

Talk or Sing About the Pictures

Babies cannot yet turn pages on their own, but an 18-month-old will want to give it a try, and a 3-year-old can certainly do it alone. Remember, it's OK to skip pages!

Show Children the Cover Page

Explain what the story is about. If you have an older toddler, ask them to guess what the story might be about.

Show Children the Words

Run your finger along the words as you read them, from left to right.

Make the Story Come Alive

Create voices for the story characters and use your body to tell the story.

Make It Personal

Talk about your own family, pets, or community when you are reading about others in a story.

Ask Questions About the Story, and Let Children Ask Questions Too!

Use the story to have a back-and-forth conversation with your child. Talk about familiar activities and objects you see in the illustrations or read about in the story.

Make Books a Part of Your Daily Routine

The more that books are woven into children's everyday lives, the more likely they will be to see reading as a pleasure and a gift.

- **At the Doctor's Office**
Read or tell a soothing story to your little one in the waiting room and sing or talk through the scary parts of the visit. Before the visit, read books about going to the doctor so your child knows what to expect.
- **At Nap Time**
Familiar routines always help babies calm down. Use books and stories to quietly ease your baby to sleep.
- **At Day's End**
You are exhausted, the baby is fussy. Lie down on the floor surrounded by books. Play a book on tape for your baby. Sing a song together while you all try to relax a bit.
- **At Bath Time**
Plastic bath time books are great fun and may help a fussy baby enjoy the tub a little more.

- **At Bed Time**

Soothing books and stories can work magic with babies who fight sleep!

Getting the Most Out of Picture Books

By Reading Is Fundamental

Picture books represent a unique literary form that blends stories with art. In a picture book, the illustrations are as important as the text, and both work together to tell the story. When you share picture books with children, be sure to pay attention to the illustrations-reading picture books means exploring the art as well. This article can help you get more out of picture books by showing you how to use the illustrations to engage children and enhance their reading experience.

Hook Kids in with Illustrations

We are told, "Don't judge a book by its cover." Well, children do it all the time. A child's first impression of a book is usually shaped by the pictures. So involve children in choosing books with wonderful, eye-catching illustrations that beg to be explored. Conduct "picture walks" through books by leafing through the pages to look at the images and discussing what you see before you read. That way, the illustrations will draw in even the most reluctant reader.

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Illustrations can do even more than draw a child into a book; they can hook children into a lifelong love of reading. For our youngest children, pictures are an introduction into the world of books. Long before they can read, children respond to images in an effort to place themselves and the others in their lives into the world around them.

Bring Books to Life

Pictures enable children to explore the world within their own imagination and make connections to characters and events they see depicted in books. When you help children connect with characters and events, you make the book more real to them. Here are some ways that illustrations bring picture books to life:

- When illustrations reflect people, objects, and situations familiar to children, the images help validate their emotions and experiences.

The process of making an emotional connection can help a child learn empathy and compassion for others.

See the World

Illustrations convey meaning and carry information, especially in non-fiction books where pages are often filled with commentary that is not in the text. Be sure to "read" your way around the pages-read and discuss the captions, tables, charts, and the information conveyed by the illustrations themselves. Storybooks, although fictional, can also convey a great deal of information. A story about a trip to a farm or to the moon may have illustrations that can teach kids a lot about these places. Realize that it takes time to explore picture books when you are using them to learn about the world.

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Expose children to pictures of the unfamiliar, or use images in books to confirm and expand upon what they already know. Illustrations in children's non-fiction books can expose children to new ideas, different people, and places they've never seen. Or careful exploration of the illustrations may uncover new facts about familiar objects. Whether fiction or non-fiction, a picture book can help children gain knowledge and move them to ask new questions about history, inventions, nature, other cultures, and more!

Build Reading Skills

Picture books help young children understand that words convey meaning, well before they are aware of the text. Pictures can help increase vocabulary, an important building block for reading. Books can help young children to identify:

- Colors, shapes, numbers, and letters.
- Names of people, places, animals, and everyday objects.

Picture books can also help build background knowledge that is essential to successful reading. A child who has never been to the zoo, a farm, or a beach can still learn all about these places by exploring picture books. Select books with simple or realistic images so that kids can point to objects and learn names.

Why is this important? Because it will pique their interest, introduce new words and concepts and give them an idea of what the story is going to be about. (Learn more about this from [Drs. Fountas and Pinnell](#).)