



Do's and Don'ts of Successful Reading Aloud Storytimes



Tutorial Organization

- The following slides are organized into the following:
 - Absolute Musts-The really, really important parts of a good storytime.
 - The Do's-These Do's will enhance and polish your storytime.
 - The Don'ts-These Don'ts will help you avoid potential pitfalls.



Book Introduction

- When everyone is ready, introduce the book.
- Include three things:
 - 1) A short sentence or two that relates the book to your children.
 - 2) The title of the book.
 - 3) The author and/or illustrator of the book.



Sample Introduction

- Today our story is about a very special orange kitty in the book called *Annie and the Wild Animals*. Jan Brett is the author who wrote the story. She also illustrated the book with beautiful pictures.
- Point to the title as you say it, as well as the name(s) of the author and/or illustrator. Use the words 'Author' and 'Illustrator.'
- Explain that the author writes the story and the illustrator draws the pictures. Sometimes the same person does both.



Let 'em See the Pictures

- Move the book around, either as you read or at the end of the page, so that each child can see the illustrations.
- This is very important because the children are "reading" the pictures as you read the words.
- In picture storybooks, the illustrations show a lot of the story action.
- Try not to block the illustrations with your arm as you turn the pages.



Read Like You Mean It

- Read with expression. Change the pitch (high-low), tone (gentle-rough), and volume (soft-loud) of your voice to show different characters or create a mood.
- Pace your reading to fit the story. Let your voice reflect anticipation. A short pause can create suspense.
- Do not read too quickly. The children need enough time to look at the pictures and think about what they are hearing.



Get Your Body Into It

- Get involved. Let your facial expressions show the story content by smiling, frowning, showing surprise, anger, etc.
- Gasp, whistle, say "oh my!"
- Let your natural expressiveness punctuate and enhance the story.



Emphasize with Motions

- Point to characters or objects in the pictures as you read about them.
- Show motion, as when Peter slides down the hill in *"The Snowy Day"* by Ezra Jack Keats.
- Drop blueberries into a small metal pail to echo the sound, "Kuplink, Kuplank, Kuplunk," in *"Blueberries for Sal"* by Robert McCloskey.
- Mimic Max's magic trick of "staring into all their yellow eyes without blinking," in *"Where the Wild Things Are"* by Maurice Sendak.
- Don't take away from the story with too many extra motions.
- Use only those which seem natural and comfortable for you.



Let the Kids Help You Tell the Story

- Ask the children to take part in any story that has a repetitive phrase.
- For example, they will enjoy repeating, "Hundreds of cats, Thousands of cats, Millions and billions and trillions of cats," in *"Millions of Cats"* by Wanda Gag and "Terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day" in *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst.



Closing the Storytime

- When you have finished reading, close the book and say, "And that's the story of *"Annie and the Wild Animals"*."
- Wait a few moments. This gives the children time to ask questions or make comments.
- Do not ask, "Did you like the story?" or "Wasn't that a good story?" They will want to please you with a "yes" answer and may not give their true ideas.



The Do's



Do #1

- Half the battle of reading aloud successfully to children of all ages is in the selection of books.
- Become familiar with the very large selection of children's books available.
- You are in the enviable position of exposing children to books. Be diligent about choosing quality literature.



Do #2

- Preview the book by reading it to yourself first. (Children know when you are winging it.)
- Such advance reading allows you to spot material you may wish to shorten, elaborate on, or eliminate.
- It is perfectly acceptable to adapt the text to the age level of the group without destroying the integrity of the story.



Do #3

- Add a third dimension of the books whenever possible.
- Bring in items that generate discussions about the book and how it relates to the children's own lives.



Do #4

- Young children frequently find it difficult to just sit and listen.
- Between read-aloud segments, lead children in stretching exercises and then allow them a moment to settle down quietly.



Do #5

- The art of listening is an acquired one. It must be taught and cultivated gradually, it doesn't happen overnight.
- Always wait for the attention of the whole group. The children will begin to realize that you will wait for them to stop talking and fidgeting.
- Complementing the children who are focused and attentive helps. Gently looking at children who are talking or fidgeting will signal them that you are waiting for their full attention.



Do #6

- If you are reading a picture book, make sure the children can see the pictures easily.
- Seat the children on a rug -- with you in a child's chair so that the children in the back row can see the pictures above the heads of the others.



Do #7

- Remember that even sixth grade students love a good picture book.
- There are many picture books with very powerful themes that elicit excellent discussions.



Now for the Don'ts



Don't #1

- Don't read stories that you do not enjoy yourself.
- Your dislike or lack of enthusiasm will show in the reading, and that defeats your purpose.
- Your intent will be contagious.



Don't #2

- Don't overwhelm children, but do challenge them. Consider the intellectual, social and emotional level of your audience in making a read-aloud selection.



Don't #3

- Don't start a reading if you do not have enough time to do it justice. You want plenty of time to introduce the story, read it properly, and then discuss it afterwards.



Don't #4

- Don't be unnerved by questions during the reading, particularly by young children.
- Use your own judgment. If answering the questions will disrupt the flow of the story, wait until the end and then discuss the story and answer the children's questions.



Don't #5

- Don't impose your interpretations of a story upon your audience. Let it come from the children with your gentle guidance.



A Reminder!

Reading aloud does not come naturally to everyone. Doing it successfully comes with practice.



Sources

Bookpals National Program

The Bookpals National Program is comprised of professional actors from the Screen Actor's Guild Association who volunteer their time to read aloud to children nationwide.

National Network for Child Care