Tips for Reading Books with Children

As a caregiver, you can bring the magic of books to children. Books bring fun and wonder. They build dreams. They help children learn about the world and themselves.

Doing well in school depends on being able to read, write, talk, and listen. Reading with children helps them:

- get a head start on reading
- do better in school
- like reading
- like school
- have stronger imaginations
- be better writers
- be better listeners
It is sometimes helpful to think of reading goals with children in three steps – before, during, and after reading.

With these three steps in mind, here are some time-tested strategies that help make books come alive for children.

**Before Reading the Book with Children**

**Have a regular time to read**

First, you can help children by having a regular reading time during the day. Your regular reading time might be during circle time, before naptime, at the beginning of the day, or at the end. Pick a time and circumstance that works for you and the children. By having a regular reading time you:

- show children that reading and books are important
- bring a world of wonder and joy, knowledge and insight to children
- make sure reading and books don’t get short-changed
- provide a sense of stability and routine for children

You can:

- read another related book, or a book by the same author or illustrator
- design art, language, dramatic play or discovery activities that build upon the book
- talk to parents about the books you are reading with children and suggest things they can do at home to extend the learning to home
- invite guest speakers that relate to the topics and themes
- take a field trip to the library and check out similar books

Of course, you will not use all these tips every time you read with children. Try to use the techniques that fit for that book and the group of children. But over time, you will want to use all the techniques. It’s a good idea to read through the checklist to remind yourself of all the things we can do that really help children get the most out of reading.
Encourage children to retell the story

Children enjoy hearing the same book over and over again. They love to hear the sound of familiar words and rhymes. They love knowing what is going to happen next. You will want to have children try to retell the story to you.

You can:

• give the children flannel board pieces and encourage them to retell the story using the flannel board
• have props and let children act out the story
• reread the book the next day
• ask the children to help. Pause and ask them if they remember what happens next.

Extend the reading

Children love a good story. They often applaud and giggle at happy stories, sniffle at sad ones, and shout, "Read it again!"

Extending the reading connects literacy to other areas of learning, such as intellectual, artistic, social and physical skills. And, it builds upon children's enthusiasm for books.

Give children opportunities to choose books

Children love to help pick out books to read. Picking out a book gives them a feeling of being important and helps boost their interest in reading.

You can:

• make sure you have read the book yourself before reading it with children
• choose the first book for story time and let children choose the second
• select a different child each day to choose a book for the day
• pick out two ahead of time and let the children vote for the one they want to read
• read a book to the whole group that one or two children request

Make sure children can see the book

To get the most out of books, young children need to see the pictures. The pictures help them better follow and understand the story. The pictures also help the children connect the words they are hearing to the objects, characters, and action. Besides, most children's books have great illustrations. You can:

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• read a book to the whole group that one or two children request
• have children move to a spot where they can see before beginning the story
• hold the book up near your head to read
• tilt the book slightly down so the children sitting at a lower level can see
• move the book back and forth slowly so everyone in the circle can see

Preview the book

Talking about the book before starting to read it with the children is called previewing. It helps get children excited about reading the book.

You can:
• have children look at the cover and ask them what they see
• have them guess what the book is about
• talk about who wrote the book
• talk about who drew the pictures

While Reading the Book with Children

Read at a good pace

You will want to read the book at a relaxed pace. This helps children follow the story. They can ask questions or point out things in the story. It is important that you find a pace that is best for you and the children.

• point out similarities and differences between characters in the book and children in your classroom, such as colors of clothing, boys or girls, tall or short, and so on
• use the book as a springboard to your classroom or play area. For example, if you read a book about birds, see if children can see any outside

After Reading the Book with Children

At end of book, ask children what happened

Reviewing the book helps children realize that books tell a story and that they can review the book in their minds.

You can:
• talk about the book with the children after reading it
• ask questions like, "What was the story about?" or "What happened at the end?"
• ask, "What did you like best?" or "What was your favorite part?"
• ask about certain parts of the story, such as "Do you remember when...? What happened next?"
Encourage prediction

Encouraging children to predict what comes next is fun and keeps them engaged. It also is a great way to build attention and memory.

You can:
- ask children what they think will be on the next page
- ask what they think will happen to a particular character
- ask what might happen next, and then say, "Well, let's turn the page and read the words to find out if your guess is right"
- let them chime in with repeated lines, such as, "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, what do you see?"

Connect to real life

Books may seem very simple, but they can have great meaning for children. You can help them learn from the characters in books.

You can:
- choose a particular book because of something happening in children's lives, such as a new brother or sister, an upcoming doctors visit, or the death of a loved one
- talk about similar things in children's own lives
- pay attention to how well the children are following you and be willing to adjust accordingly
- realize when you are reading too slowly (the children get restless and their attention begins to wander)
- realize when you are reading too fast (the children also may get restless because they aren't engaged; they may get frustrated and keep interrupting because they never get to ask a question or make a comment)
- realize when you are reading at just the right pace (the children get to participate but you don't lose half the group while you are interacting with one or two children)

Use expression during reading

You can use your voice to make the book interesting and fun. It brings the book alive.

You can:
- make your voice sound excited, scared, gentle, or loud
- use a different voice for different characters
- speed up and slow down depending on the action in the book
- make sound effects noises from the story, such as splashing water, clunking blocks, or swishing wind
Encourage children’s participation

You will want to get children involved in the story. Children have their own ways of being involved. Some children are very active and talkative. Others are quiet and pay close attention. Still others ask a lot of questions. Each style is okay. When children participate, they show that they are excited about the story and about reading.

You can:

- let children ask questions and chime in
- use open-ended questions, such as "What do you think?" or "What would you do?"
- specifically ask questions of quieter children
- accept that some children participate more than others

Help children learn new words

You may point to words on the page as they say them. This helps children learn that words have meaning. And, this helps children learn that written words can be spoken. You shouldn't be too concerned if most children can't identify the words. With younger children, it is more important for them just to learn that these squiggles and lines actually stand for words.

You can:

- say the word when children don't know
- have a prop - something the children might not know the name for - and let children pass it around
- have children repeat the name of the object or picture with you
- write the names of objects from the book on pieces of paper. Put the pieces of paper around the room and have children find them and bring them back to you.

Encourage children to name or look at something on the page

There is so much to learn from books. Pointing to pictures and having children name objects builds their language skills.

You can:

- point to a picture and ask children to name it
- have children repeat the name of the object with you
- point out details in pictures, such as color, size, or shapes.
- help with answers if they don't know
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