



10 Tips 'N Tricks for Read Alouds



1. How to Choose a Book.

Make sure you marry the right reading style with each book:

Roddy Doyle's *The Giggler* Treatment (about dog poop) asks for a wry, arch, playful style -lots of enthusiasm; Scott O'Dell's *Island of the Blue Dolphins* suggests a quieter, deadpan style - it's a story about Nature, so let the prose do the work.

2. How to Make the Time.

If reading aloud is important, you must prioritize: Sometimes this means doing something else (the dishes, say) later; sometimes it means not doing something else (Monday Night Football isn't that good this week); and sometimes it means making something boring - say, waiting at the doctor's office - interesting.

3. Punch Vocabulary. Make the language in a story more interesting for both you and your listener by choosing the most interesting word in each sentence, and doing something more with it: emphasize it, italicize it, underline it, enunciate it, whisper it, elongate it -bring it out to some (subtle) place of prominence and enliven the prose.

4. Pause. One of three tips that help reset your child's attention span and can be used to heighten drama or suspense or emotional impact; in this case, pay special attention to every mark of punctuation: every comma and period, hyphen and parentheses. One word sentences are written that way for a reason.

5. Slow Down. Also resets attention span; and heightens drama, suspense, and emotion;

A Conversation About Books: 3 Levels

Level 1 questions are basic "wh" type questions focused on what can immediately be seen (or read). Level 1 includes introducing new vocabulary. For example, pointing to a picture and ask "What type of feet does this animal have?" Here the adult is looking for a specific, correct response to expand the child's vocabulary.

Level 2 questions are open-ended and solicit the child's feedback. For example, the reader might ask, "What is happening in this part of the story?" Here the adult is trying to encourage the child to share what he or she is thinking about and make meaning from the text.

Level 3 questions are more advanced and introduce concepts like text features and story components. For example, the adult reader might ask, "Who was the main character and how did he feel?" This may include questions that connect the story to their own life. For example, "How would you feel if that happened to you?"

but not the same as pausing; slowing down means adjusting the pace of a sentence; or a paragraph; your listener will notice immediately.

6. Whisper. Everyone knows the whisper effect, when you want to make someone pay even closer attention; so this one also resets the attention span; heightens drama and suspense and -especially can make the most malevolent characters even more malevolent. • Together, these three tips -Pause, Slow Down, Whisper- represent the pure heart of effective reading aloud.

7. Accents and Voices. Borrow indiscriminately and shamelessly from everywhere to mimic different voices; you kids don't care how perfect they are, only that the voices in a dialogue are different and distinct, bringing the characters alive. Also: give each character who talks a lot some identifying trait or mannerism to make it easier for you to trigger the voice (e.g. Draco Malfoy lords it over everyone - perhaps he drawls or sneers; Hermione Granger is a goody-goody -perhaps her voice is a little prissy.)

8. Ask Questions. Use the opportunity and pace reading a book give you to ask questions before, during, and after a reading; to serve multiple purposes: rehearse or remember characters or plot developments; explore moral or ethical questions; make associations with other books and media -film and otherwise.

9. Give 'em a Quiz. Not to make reading like school, but as a memory cue; kids love showing off their knowledge, having a reason to pay even closer attention, owning a book or story thoroughly and in detail. Pretty soon, they'll be asking you questions.

10. Permit an auxiliary activity. Kids will get distracted - for a good reason: because they've made an association and are pursuing it. When pausing and whispering and slowing down aren't enough, it's OK to let 'em color or draw or doodle -or braid their hair or wash the dishes -to let their restless minds refocus on your story.