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Interactive Book Reading for Each and Every Child

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Why is shared book reading important?

Shared book reading provides a fun and rich context for promoting children's early language and literacy skills. When adults use high quality, interactive shared book reading strategies, children can gain skills in oral language, vocabulary, and print awareness, all of which are important for future reading development (see NELP Report 2008). Shared book reading can also be used as a context to support children in understanding and talking about important things such as race, culture, inclusion, and diversity (Artman-Meeker et al., 2016; Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Children's literature can help us plan for positive and meaningful opportunities for children to learn and talk about important social concepts, and build a mindset of inclusion in our classrooms.

First Things First: Selecting Children's Books

The books we choose for our classroom are the foundation for high quality shared book reading. Below are some guiding questions and resources to consider when selecting books for read alouds and building your classroom library



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1. What is your goal for the read aloud?

Are you focusing on specific vocabulary words, planning to engage children in a conversation about a specific topic, or teach a new concept? Preview books with your goal in mind, and ask yourself if the text and illustrations will support that goal and provide you the opportunity to use your shared book reading strategies.

- For example, Justice and Kaderavek (2002) recommend selecting books that have less than 5 words per page, use bold print, and have repeated words and print if the goal of your read aloud to support children's print awareness.
- You can find a guide for selecting books that support instruction around a specific goal from this [DEC Connect Module](#) on shared reading

2. Is the book about something children in your classroom are interested in?

3. Are there opportunities for children to relate in positive ways to the characters and storylines, and make connections to their own lives?

4. Do the illustrations and text present positive and accurate representations of all people and cultures?

→ [The National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness](#) provides several guiding questions consider around this such as*:

- “Does the overall message promote respect?”
- “Are there problematic words or any offensive or negative terms (lazy, ugly, slow, savage)”
- “Are diverse characters shown in leadership roles and having realistic lives?”

*Guiding questions and tips for library considerations from the [Selecting Culturally Appropriate Books](#) guide

- In building your full classroom library, consider whether you have a variety of books that positively represent...*
- A wide range of cultures
 - Different lifestyles and family compositions (foster families, multi-generational families, single parent homes)
 - Characters that do not reinforce gender stereotypes
 - People of color in positive roles
 - People with disabilities as active, capable main characters
- When thinking specifically about how people with disabilities are represented in stories, there are several additional guiding questions to consider (taken from Artman-Meeker et al., 2016, pp. 157):
- How are individuals with disabilities portrayed?
 - How are families portrayed and what are caregiving roles?
 - Do characters represent cultural and linguistic diversity?
 - Whose point of view is dominant?
 - How do individuals with disabilities make decisions and influence their own lives?

You can find more detail about evaluating books and using children's books to discuss disability and inclusion in the article by Artman-Meeker and colleagues (2016) in the reference list.

- Incorporate books in children's home language in your classroom library. The Head Start Early Childhood Learning Knowledge center has a [great guide for where to find children's books in a wide variety of languages](#)

There are several resources available online to help guide you in finding and selecting books to build a library that represents people of all races, cultures, language backgrounds, and abilities:

[Vanderbilt IRIS Center: Books with positive portrayals of people with disabilities](#)

[Dolly Gray Award winning booklist \(given to books with portrayals of people with disabilities\):](#)

[The Social Justice Books: A Teaching Change Project](#)

[University of Wisconsin Cooperative Children's Book Center](#)

[Anti-Defamation League Children's Literature Guide](#)

[NAEYC guide for using children's literature to support a culturally responsive classroom](#)

What are the elements of high quality shared book reading?

- **Make it interactive and follow the child's lead.** Make sure that both you and the children have active roles during storytime. Allow children to ask questions, point to pictures, and make comments about what they see and hear during story time. Follow their lead by labeling pictures they point to, expanding their comments, and asking follow up questions that can help them connect to a new concept or vocabulary word. These strategies are summarized and demonstrated in this [video from the Puckett Institute](#)
- **Define new words.** Help children understand new or unfamiliar vocabulary words by previewing words before reading, pointing them out in a story, giving a child friendly definition, and making connections to known concepts (Ezell & Justice, 2005; Wasik 2010).
- **Ask questions!** One way to encourage children to actively participate and share their ideas do this is to ask questions. A specific type of shared book reading, called **dialogic reading**, involves using five different types of questions or prompts throughout the read aloud. You can read more about dialogic reading strategies, and see videos of teachers using the strategies [here](#).
- **Pause and give children space to share their ideas** after making a comment or asking a question before you start reading again or ask another question (Ezell et al., 2000; Justice & Kaderavek., 2002).
- **Read the same book more than once.** Repeated reading has been found to support children's vocabulary development, as well as their listening comprehension (see Trivette et al., 2012). Repeating stories makes them predictable and familiar to children, which can help them engage and be active participants during read alouds (Ezell & Justice, 2005).

How can we support active participation for each and every child?

In early childhood classroom settings, children with and without disabilities may have varying strengths and needs related to key communication skills such as answering questions, receptive and expressive language, and mode of communication, all of which could impact a child's ability to access the benefits of a shared storybook reading interactions. In order to ensure that all children can access the rich learning opportunities that can be embedded in shared book reading, practitioners need to be prepared with adaptations to instructional strategies and literacy materials, particularly for learners with disabilities (Roberts et al., 2010). Below are some tips and resources for supporting each and every child in engaging shared book reading in the classroom:

- **Use props or objects** to help children make connections to new vocabulary words and bring features of the story to life (Browder et al. 2008).

- **Make sure all children have a mode of communication they can use to respond and engage in the interactive shared book reading.** Ways that children can respond and engage in interactive shared book reading include:
 - ◆ Responding and commenting verbally
 - ◆ Gestures such as pointing to illustrations
 - ◆ Pointing to or holding up pre-made pictures of relevant vocabulary words or story characters
 - ◆ Using an adaptive or alternative communication (AAC) device
 - A great resource for using stories that have been adapted for learners with complex communication needs can be found [here](#)
 - This [video](#) also provides some tips and examples of how to use picture symbols or an AAC device during read alouds [min 1:00-12:00]:
 - An AAC device can be used by the child to answer questions and make comments about the story, and it can also be used by the teacher to model words and expand child responses (Quinn et al., 2020).

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