



5 Reasons it is Important That We Read Aloud to Our Kids

By Pam Allyn, excerpted from her book, *"What To Read When: The Books and Stories To Read With Your Child--And All The Best Times To Read Them"*

Develop Shared Values.

The best children's books convey a strong sense of what the author feels about the world and about our moral responsibility to it, in a way that appears almost invisible. Literature is a moral compass for goodness in the most sweeping sense: it includes looking at human frailties in the face and finding the courage to deal with them. It is much easier to talk with your child about some of these issues in the context of a powerful story, through a character who comes to life on the page, whether it be through the eyes of a frog (Frog and Toad) or through the eyes of a badger (Bedtime for Frances).

Fall in love with language.

Children are fascinated by how things are made, how things fit together. A sentence is the perfect unit to explore together. It is a magical construction that conveys ideas and emotions. Rhythm, grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation all contribute to the architecture of magical language. By reading aloud, you are passing on those rhythms and those nuances of language.

Build Comprehension.

We can "practice" strategic reading when we read aloud together. Great readers ask questions as they read. Great readers make predictions. Great readers visualize scenes as they read. They use what they already know to construct new understandings. By stopping to think together, by managing hard parts of understanding together, you are modeling the joyful work your child will also always need to do on his own. Reading aloud will help your children learn long after they can read independently. As your child makes her first forays out into the world of reading independence, she still needs to "see" a reader read: what do we all do to comprehend and understand? Great readers pause to think about their reading; they reread parts that felt hard; they make connections with the other texts they have read. The read-aloud makes this process visible—your child will use what she learns from watching you when you read aloud to her.

Learn the Power of Story.

All of humanity loves a story. We tell each other our sorrows, our joys through stories. We tell history through stories. The news itself is simply a composition of people's stories. We reach out across time and space and culture to one another through the telling of story. After the earthquake in Haiti, the hurricane in New Orleans, or the fall of the World Trade Towers in New York City, people across the world came together to help because of the individual stories of others. Every compelling story has a few key elements: characters moving through a plot structured by conflict, a turning point, and a resolution. Through books, children begin to feel the power of many stories, and also begin to reach for the power of telling their own tales. Their stories matter too.

Find Comfort.

Never underestimate the power of the read-aloud to bring comfort to your child. The world outside can be hard, especially for a young child trying to navigate his way through social relationships, school, his worries and fears, teachers and other adults, along with the news of the world swirling around him, most of which he is picking up on in ways you might now even imagine. Books provide ways to talk about all of this. Books say that yes, happy endings are possible. Books say that if the ending is not necessarily resolved, there are people out there practicing courage and also navigating the world just like you. When your child wants to reread certain books over and over, embrace this too. There is something in that book that may be providing a certain kind of critical comfort. My daughter, Katie, kept Mrs. Piggie Wiggle by her bed for years, and occasionally we would open it up and read excerpts even after she was well on her way as an independent reader. I could always tell that a day had been a little bit hard when Mrs. Piggie Wiggle came back out. She always solved problems in the funniest ways and she was just so dear and comforting to a sensitive young girl navigating new worlds.