

Read Aloud Ideas

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This issue of Read Aloud Ideas is focussed on the recorded stories of Jay O'Callahan and books to read aloud by William Steig, Joan Aiken, and Keith Robertson. Listening to stories while traveling in the car can make the trip more fun and less tedious for children. A recorded story allows you and your children to create individual inner movies while listening, yet gives you a shared experience. Many families travel during the month of August. Whether you listen to a recorded story, read to your children, or each person reads on their own, stories can make travel a more positive experience.



Jay O'Callahan

Jay O'Callahan is my favourite storyteller - a man who with a very few introductory sentences takes me into the world of his imagination. If you've never heard him, you're in for a treat. Jay has recorded stories for both children and adults. If you go to his website www.ocallahan.com you can read about all of them. Follow this [link](#) to hear a sound clip from *Pill Hill Quartet: "Electra"*. It's difficult for me to limit my choices to just a few of his recordings but I will – a sort of essential set of Jay O'Callahan for children.

The first recording I ever heard of his was *The Little Dragon and Orange Cheeks* available on both CD and audio cassette. The title story is about a little dragon who saves the world from freezing when he finally believes in himself. There are some great lines in this story that became standard in our family “It’s a great game” “Oh I did it, Oh I did it! Oh I did it, Oh I did it!”

The other stories on the CD are also delightful. When I read the title *Woe Is Me Bones*, I sing it – I can't say it because the tune Jay made up to go with this line in the story just fits the rhythm of the words. Even though I have heard these stories many times, I still get caught up and forget where I am. At the beginning of *The Little Dragon*, I think, “Oh yes, I know how this goes.” I'm aware that I am listening to a story but when the story ends, I'm always surprised because I forgot that it was a story I was listening to, I was so caught up in the world Jay created. This recording is suitable for children 4 and up.

Another recording suitable for young children is *Earth Stories*. My favourite story in this collection is *Herman and Marguerite* about a worm and a caterpillar. To quote from Jay's website: “It's the story of Herman, the worm and Marguerite, the caterpillar whose loving friendship gives each the strength to change and to save a lonely orchard.” Jay manages to draw me in again to a world underground where Herman worms and squirms his way around and sings to himself.

Two recordings for slightly older children *Raspberries* and *The Golden Drum* are each one long, complete story. *Raspberries* “Magical berries! Can they change an unlucky farmers life? Sad Simon is just about to lose hope when a small present makes a big difference. A juicy and delicious story for the whole family. *Raspberries* was first heard nationally on National Public Radio and has since become one of Jay’s classic stories.” For children aged 7 and up

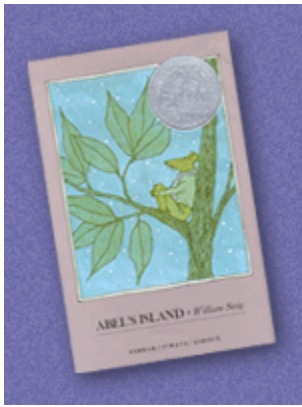
The Golden Drum is a fascinating story of a father and daughter relationship and of courage and growth. When I was not well in the spring of 2007 and in a lot of pain, I listened to this recording many times. It was both soothing, pulled me out of myself, and gave me hope. “Ororingy uses wit and courage in her quest for the magic drum that will save the enchanted land of Artana. She becomes Artana’s most powerful woman warrior.” For children aged 7 and up.



And then there are the stories he has recorded for adults that tell the stories of his childhood and teen years and about members of his family. These stories are powerful, funny, poignant, and moving. You can hear a bit of his humor in the audio clip from *Glasses* I mentioned at the beginning of this issue. This CD and *Pill Hill Quartet* has mix of stories that I delight in listening to over and over again. Jay captures his memories of childhood, his perception of various adults in his life with such clarity that I feel I know Mrs. Lawrence who read to her children and Jay and his siblings every Wednesday. “*Every Wednesday, we have Dickens and cookies.*” “*Dickens and cookies,*” I thought it was some kind of ice cream!

Jay worked for three years to create *Pouring the Sun*, a story he was commissioned to write to commemorate the steel mills in Bethlehem, PA. He looked through many photo albums, listened to many people’s stories before he chose his central character, Ludvika, an immigrant Polish girl who comes to Bethlehem, PA when she is 18 years old. “I wanted someone to represent the immigrant journey as well as the steel,” O’Callahan says. “They are the people who built the country, and we say that but we don’t know it. If we have stories where we meet them and see them, then for the first time we have a sense of who built this country and on whose shoulders we stand.” This is a very powerful story of the life of the steel mill factories told through Ludivka’s eyes. It makes me laugh, cry, and then laugh again every time I listen to it. Jay has recently been commissioned by NASA to write a story to celebrate NASA’s 50th anniversary. Check out his website for more information and to order his recordings. www.ocallahan.com.

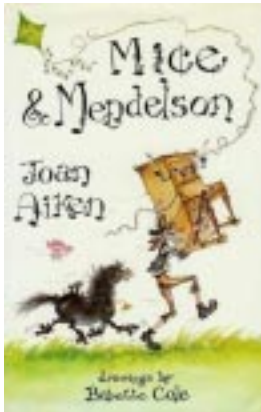




Books to Read Aloud:

Abel's Island by William Steig

Whenever I see a copy of this book, it brings back fond memories of reading this story to my children - an intriguing book. Abel, a sophisticated mouse, is swept away in a river when he goes to rescue his wife's scarf during a picnic they are having by the river. He is washed up on an island and has to find ways to survive so that he can go back to his wonderful wife, Amanda. This story, like *Sylvester's Magic Pebble* by the same author, is about a change of circumstances that happens in the flash of a moment. Unlike *Sylvester's Magic Pebble*, Abel is able to act in his new life and in the process learns all sorts of things about himself and his abilities. Like *Sylvester's Magic Pebble*, it has a happy ending. 7-8 years old and up



Mice and Mendelson by Joan Aiken illustrated by Babette Cole is a fun story to read to 5 yr. olds and up. Mr. Mendelson is an Orkney pony who loves music. The Lord who owns him gives him a piano because Mr. Mendelson loves music. He can't play but his two friends – the mice – can and do. There is a gypsy involved who tries to take the piano but it all ends well.

Joan Aiken wrote many books for children and adults. You can an extensive list of her books with descriptions on this [site](#). (Remove the 20% at the end of the url and it will load in correctly.) She's written a series of alternative history books for young readers (9-10 and up) with *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* as the first one. She also wrote follow up books to Jane Austin's characters for those who wish Jane had written more. One of my favourite adult novels by Joan is *A Cluster of Separate Sparks* - a spoof on Mary Stewart's romantic thrillers.

The last author in this issue is Ketih Robertson. His five books about Henry Reed (and the first one is *Henry Reed, Inc.*) are fun and easy to read aloud. Summer weather brings up nostalgic memories for me and the Henry Reed books fit into that nostalgia. Written in the 60's the books remind me of the summers I spent reading old *Reader's Digests* on my friend's front porch in between playing and swimming. There is something so timeless about the Henry Reed books perhaps because they all take place in the summer. Henry is a 13 yr. old boy, the son of a diplomat, who spends the summer in New Jersey visiting his maternal Uncle Al and aunt who live in the house where Henry's mother and his Uncle Al grew up. Henry adopts a beagle and names him Agony. He meets Midge and the two of them create chaos inadvertently in each of the five books. Warm, funny, and innocent, you and your children will find them a good read aloud sitting together on a porch or in the car as you drive. For children 9 and up *Henry Reed, Inc.*, *Henry Reed's Journey*, *Henry Reed's Baby-sitting Service*, *Henry Reed's Big Show*, and *Henry Reed's Think Tank*.

Feedback and comments are always welcome.
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Happy Reading!