

# For Reading Outloud

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*Learning At Home: A Mother's Guide To Homeschooling*  
*Newly Revised Edition*

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Some of the information presented here appeared in my book, *Learning At Home*.  
Enjoy!

## **When to start**

You can begin reading to your child as soon as you talk to your child – in other words - from birth. However, reading a story to a baby won't be the same as reading to a toddler. The baby will enjoy the sound of your voice but it will be a while before your baby understands the meaning of the story. At about 6-9 months many babies respond to books – especially ones with pictures and simple words. They enjoy being read to and respond to the story by getting excited or anticipating what will be on the next page. You can make simple “baby-proof” books from small plastic photo albums by slipping family photos or pictures from magazines into the pages and sealing them with transparent tape. Board books are also good books for babies. Toddlers seem to especially enjoy books with animals in them.

## **Why is it important to read to your children?**

When you read out loud to a child, you show your child that reading brings pleasure. You and your child are caught up in another world, enjoying the characters, how they cope with the situations they find themselves in, and how the story resolves. Because reading is such an important skill for children to develop, being read to gives children real experience with the written word. It helps them to see that reading is fun and is a worthwhile skill to develop.

Reading out loud stimulates your child's imagination. You can travel to a farm and “see” the animals. You can visit a garage and “see” the different cars and trucks, etc. Both of you can travel to places that you might never visit in real life - imaginary worlds where animals talk or people live on other planets.

Being read to increases your child's exposure to and awareness of language. Your child will begin to hear the rhythms and patterns that words take as they tell a story. These experiences will help your child as he or she learns to read. Even a young child will pick up the sounds of meaningful conversation and speak in tonal sounds before speaking actual words.

You don't need to worry if your child doesn't understand every word in a story. Children often just enjoy the flow of words and over time learn the meaning of the words in context. This is why it is so helpful to read the same story more than once. Many children like to hear their favourite stories again and again.

## **Reading out loud increases vocabulary.**

Let me give you an example from William Steig's book *Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride*.

“Harum-scarum gusts of wind turned the leaves this way and that. Then the rain they had hoped for came, with scattered drops as big as acorns slapping down, followed by a drubbing deluge.”

I like the words *harum-scarum* and *drubbing deluge*. My children did, too, and sometimes I would hear them using these words as they played. They would never have used them if I hadn't read them that story as these words had not been a part of my vocabulary before I read them the book.

Reading out loud to your child can give both of you a shared experience that can bring you closer together. That's why it's important to continue to read out loud to a child who is beginning to read by him or her self. A child who has been read to knows that stories can bring pleasure, information, and new understanding. This makes the work of learning to read more worthwhile. And continuing to read to your child even after they have become proficient readers on their own continues to be important as it gives you and your child opportunities for conversations and discussions about many topics.

## **So how do you go about reading out loud?**

Do you need to be an expert actor or actress – with a different voice for each character? No. If you can talk, as in have a conversation with a friend, then you can read out loud. Just as you change and modulate your voice to

express your emotions in conversation, you change and modulate your voice as you read.

Young children are an appreciative audience. They enjoy being read to; they don't need lots of dramatic voice effects in order to enjoy a good story. As you get more comfortable, you can become as dramatic as you are inspired to be. Keep in mind that you need to pay attention to your child's comfort level with your dramatic efforts. If you are reading stories as part of a calming process, such as bedtime, too many dramatics will over stimulate children.

Read slowly – don't try to race through a story. Keep a calm and steady pace. No one wants to have to strain to understand a story. If you are unsure of a good pace, try listening to some recorded children's stories from the library and see what pace you find easiest to listen to. This would probably be a comfortable pace for your child as well.

### **Choosing books – what to look for**

I look for a positive family image in the books I read out loud. A series of three picture books by Vera Williams - *A Chair For My Mother*, *Something Special For Me*, and *Music, Music Everywhere*, suitable for ages 4 and up, is a good example.

*A Chair For My Mother* tells the story of a family's recovery after a fire destroys all of the things in their apartment. Neighbors help them by bringing them various pieces of furniture and household goods. What they are missing is a comfortable chair to relax in. The girl, her mother, and her grandmother put all their spare change in a big jar. When it is full they go and buy a chair. The next two stories continue with the same characters. Although it is suitable for children 4 and up, older children will also like the stories and, in fact, will probably understand it better.

One of my favorite longer books to read aloud that has a positive family image is contained in two books – *Ida Early Comes Over the Mountains* and *Christmas With Ida Early* by Robert Burch. The story begins with Ida who is "as close to six feet as seven" asking for work at the Sutton's house. The story takes place in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Georgia during the tail-end of the Great Depression. Aunt Ernestine, who Randall, the oldest son, thinks of as "a battleship," has been helping the family since the children's mother died the previous spring, but she is not used to children.

When Ida comes to the door "fresh as ragweed" to ask for work, the father offers her the job of taking care of the family. The youngest children, twins – Clay and Dewey, are quite intrigued with Ida. Ida is an unusual character not only for her height but also for her skills. Rather than walking to a peg and hanging up her sweater, "*she held the sweater over her head, twirled it around twice, and let it go. It sailed to the corner, landing neatly on the hat rack.*"

Here's one of my favorite quotes from the book. I thought of it often when my children were small and they asked me to do something with them when I wanted to finish some household task.

Dewey said happily, "Guess what, Aunt Ernestine? Ida Early's going to read us the funny papers!"

"No, she's not! Ida's going to wash the dishes." Aunt Ernestine sounded very sure of it.

"Of course I am," said Ida, sitting down between Clay and Dewey. "But first we'll just have a look at Orphan Annie."

"Oh, boy!" said Dewey. "We like Little Orphan Annie."

After Ida read the strip to them, Clay said, "We like Dick Tracy, too."

"Well ain't that a jolly coincidence?" said Ida. "So do I! In fact, I like 'em all!"

"So do we!" said Clay. "Let's read some more."

Ida started reading Dick Tracy to them, but Aunt Ernestine interrupted them. “The comic strips will wait; the dishes won’t.”

“Oh, no, ma’am,” said Ida Early. “It’s the other way around. If the funnies are not read they’re liable to disappear – somebody will throw ‘em out or burn them up or something. But dirty dishes? Why I ain’t never known one of them to get away!”

*Christmas with Ida Early* continues the story and again, Ida demonstrates that what’s important is what is in one’s heart, not in one’s appearance. Ida is one unique character I’d like to have as a friend. I’m always sad at the end of the story that there’s not another one about Ida. These books are appropriate for ages 5 and up. You can certainly read them to a younger child, especially if you also have older children.

It’s difficult to give hard and fast rules about how old a child should be before reading a certain book out loud. The main thing to watch for in any child is enjoyment of the story. What interests some children at 5, other children might find boring or too complex. If you find that you have chosen a book that none of your children like, stop reading it. Reading out loud should be something everyone enjoys.

As well as positive family images, I look for books that have a positive child image, where the main character overcomes various difficulties to find a positive resolution. Let me just list some of the books that we have enjoyed over the years: Pippa Mouse books by Betty Boegehold, books about Betsy and her friends by Carolyn Heywood, Anastasia Krupnik books by Lois Lowry.

I also look for books that are funny. As children grow older, the board books about Max and Ruby by Rosemary Wells become quite funny.

Excitement is something that keeps children’s interest alive in a longer read aloud story. *A Toad for Tuesday* by Russell E. Erickson is filled with excitement as an owl captures Warton, the toad. The owl will give Warton until Tuesday before he eats him. Warton plots and thinks and talks his way out of this situation. As well as excitement, there’s warmth and a general tone of regard and concern for others that I find delightful. The other books about Warton and his brother, Morton, by the same author are just as exciting. Look for them in your library as they go in and out of print. These stories are suitable for 4/5 year olds and up.

Realistic portrayal of family life is a main feature of *Molly Moves Out*. Molly’s many brothers and sisters drive her to distraction, so she comes up with a plan to do something interesting with each of her siblings. It doesn’t work out quite as she plans, so she moves out. She then finds she is lonely. It can be read to 3-4 year olds and up.

Books by Jean van Leeuwen about Oliver Pig and his sister, Amanda, also present real life family situations. There’s a number of beginning reader books about these pigs and their parents. One advantage of reading beginning reader books to your little children is that when they are ready to read, these stories will be familiar, making it easier for them to use their new found reading skills.

Another thing I look for are **books that give information** about the world in easy to understand ways. An author whose books I’ve enjoyed reading out loud through four children and over 15 years is Richard Scarry. I learned how roads are built, how airplanes fly, and lots of other things from his books such as *What Do People Do All Day* and *The Great Big Air Book*. Each of my children enjoyed his books.

Scarry’s books are filled with humor and fun illustrations. They impart information in an easy to understand format. This makes his books look deceptively simple, but if you have ever tried to explain how an airplane flies to a three year old, you really appreciate the thought that went into Richard Scarry’s books.

One of the great things about his many bigger format books is that they appeal to a wide range of children. I used to start reading *What Do People Do All Day* to my daughter when she was 2 years old, and my sons, who were 5, 8, and 10 at the time, would hear me starting to read and come and listen, too. Most libraries have Scarry's books in their collections. Try them out.

### **Age appropriate books**

Keep reading your child stories he or she enjoys even if the story seems too young. Just as we continue to eat the foods we ate when we were 2 years old without suffering, we can continue to read things to our children that they enjoyed when they were younger. As they grow older, we can introduce new material and more difficult material, always keeping in mind to make sure the child we are reading to is enjoying the story. One of the best ways to see if the book is age appropriate is to see how well the story maintains your child's interest.

When my children were young, I read books to them that had happy conclusions. That didn't mean that real life things didn't happen, but that there was a positive resolution to the problem. I felt it was important that the stories presented hope and a positive resolution.

### **Reading a book you don't like**

If your child asks you to read a book that you just can't bear to read one more time, let him or her know that you just can't read that book right now and offer to read a different one. It's OK to tell a child why you don't like a certain book. Just phrase it in age appropriate words. Your willingness to share what you don't like about a book helps your child learn that it's OK to be discriminating in one's tastes, and that each of us likes different things. It's important that you enjoy what you are reading out loud, otherwise you send a very confused message about reading.

### **Recording favourite stories for personal use**

You might want to consider recording favourite stories or longer chapter books. These can be a great resource to keep children happy and occupied while traveling, when they are ill, or when they just want to listen to a story and you haven't got the time right then to read to them. If you have relatives looking for gifts to give your children, you could ask them to purchase some of your children's favorite books, record themselves reading it, and send the books and recordings as a present to your children. Or they could check the books out of the library, record themselves reading the story and send the recording - a unique and special gift.

### **Conclusion**

Reading out loud can be a great way for you as a parent to relax and shift gears at the end of a busy day. You read about other people's problems; you can be delighted, sad, surprised, or amazed by their situations and solutions and find yourself refreshed. Your children have enjoyed the book with you, and you are all the richer for it.

- Find time to read to your children at least once a day.
- Use the library to find books that you like - beginning reading books as well as picture books and longer chapter books.
- Purchase the ones that become particular favorites so that you and your children can read them again and again without relying on availability at the library.
- Second hand shops, garage sales, and library discard sales can be great places to find children's books at relatively low prices.
- And don't forget to check out your local bookstore.

**Books provide nourishment for your child's mind and spirit.**

Following is a list of some of my favorite read aloud books. The age range is just a guide. Use your own discretion to find suitable material to read to your child. Children, like adults, vary in their tastes in literature. Children who are 5 and the youngest may be able to sit and listen to stories that children who are 5 and the oldest may not be experienced enough to understand. That's why the library is such a wonderful place. You can bring home a wide selection of books and see which ones suit you and your children, read them, return them and start the whole process over again each time you go to the library. Enjoy.

**PICTURE BOOKS:**

Ahlberg, Janet and Allen	<i>Each Peach Pear Plum</i>
Aliki	<i>Aunt Nina and Her Nephews and Nieces</i>
Barbara Bergere	<i>Grandfather Twilight</i>
Bruna, Dick	<i>Miffy, Miffy Goes to the Sea, Miffy's Birthday, etc.</i>
Burningham, John	<i>Mr. Gumpy's Motor Car, Mr. Gumpy's Outing</i>
Degan, Bruce	<i>Jamberry</i>
Dunn, Judy	<i>The Little Kitten, The Little Puppy</i>
Gundersheimer, Karen	<i>Happy Winter</i>
Hill, Eric	<i>Spot books</i>
Hughes, Shirley	<i>Alfie's Feet, All About Alfie</i>
Johnson, Crockett	<i>Harold and The Purple Crayon, etc.</i>
Keats, Ezra Jack	<i>Snowy Day, Goggles, A Letter for Amy, etc.</i>
McCloskey, Robert	<i>Blueberries For Sal, Make Way For Ducklings</i>
Pollacco, Patricia	<i>Chicken Sunday, Rechenka's Eggs, Just Plain Fancy, Some Birthday!, and more</i>
Provinsen, Alice and Martin	<i>Our Animal Friends At Maple Hill Farm</i>
Scarry, Richard	<i>Busy, Busy World, Cars and Trucks and Things That Go, etc.</i>
Spier, Peter	<i>Rain, Noah's Ark, Peter Spier's Christmas, etc.</i>
Watson, Clyde	<i>Applebet: an ABC, Father Fox's Penny Rhymes</i>
Williams, Vera	<i>A Chair For My Mother, Something Special For Me, Music, Music Everywhere</i>
Zolotov, Charlotte	<i>Mr. Rabbit and The Lovely Present</i>

**EARLY READERS that work well as read aloud books:**

Lobel, Arnold	<i>Frog And Toad All Year</i>
Minarik, Else	<i>Little Bear, Kiss For Little Bear, etc.</i>
Scarry, Richard	<i>The Best Mistake Ever! And Other Stories</i>
Van Leeuwen, Jean	<i>Tales of Oliver Pig, etc.</i>

**LONGER READ ALOUD BOOKS**

Barklem, Jill	<i>Poppy's Babies, Sea Story, Spring Story, etc. (4 +)</i>
Burch, Robert	<i>Ida Early Comes Over The Mountain, etc. (6/7 +)</i>
Clymer, Eleanor	<i>The Trolley Car Family (5+)</i>
Durrell, Gerald	<i>My Family and Other Animals (10+)</i>
Farjeon, Eleanor	<i>Elsie Piddock Skips in Her Sleep (7+)</i>
Fisher, Dorothy	<i>Understood Betsy (6/7+)</i>
Godden, Rumer	<i>The Story of Holly And Ivy, etc. (4+)</i>
Haywood, Carolyn	<i>"B" Is For Betsy, etc. (5+)</i>
Henry, Marguerite	<i>Misty, Sea Star, Stormy (5-7+)</i>

King-Smith, Dick  
Lewis, C.S.  
Lowry, Lois  
MacBride, Roger Lea  
  
McCloskey, Robert  
Milne, A. A.  
Robertson, Keith  
Robinson, Joan G.  
Seldon, George  
White, E.B.  
Wilder, Laura Ingalls

*Harry's Mad, Sheep Pig, Pigs Might Fly, The Cuckoo Child, etc.* (6+)  
The Narnia series (6+)  
*Anastasia Krupnik, etc.* (9+)  
*Little House on Rocky Ridge* and others about Rose Wilder Lane,  
Laura Ingalls Wilder's daughter (6+)  
*Centerburg Tales* (7+)  
*Winnie The Pooh, The House At Pooh Corner* (4+)  
*Henry Reed, Inc. etc.* (9+)  
*The Teddy Robinson Storybook* (4+)  
*The Cricket In Times Square* (6+)  
*Charlotte's Web, The Trumpet of the Swan* (5+)  
Little House Books (5+)

## POETRY

Milne, A. A. Milne

*When We Were Very Young*

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## The Reading Mother

by  
Strickland Gillilan

I had a mother who read to me  
Sagas of pirates who scoured the sea,  
Cutlasses clenched in their yellow teeth,  
"Blackbirds" stowed in the hold beneath.

I had a Mother who read me lays  
Of ancient and gallant and golden days;  
Stories of Marmion and Ivanhoe,  
Which every boy has a right to know.

I had a Mother who read me tales  
Of Gelert the hound of the hills of Wales,  
True to his trust till his tragic death,  
Faithfulness blent with his final breath.

I had a Mother who read me the things  
That wholesome life to the boy heart brings--  
Stories that stir with an upward touch,  
Oh, that each mother of boys were such!

You may have tangible wealth untold;  
Caskets of jewels and coffer of gold.  
Richer than I you can never be--  
I had a Mother who read to me.

This poem is in the public domain.