



Supporting Family
Engagement To
Promote Literacy

Prekindergarten

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Read Alouds for Prekindergarten

A Resource for Educators

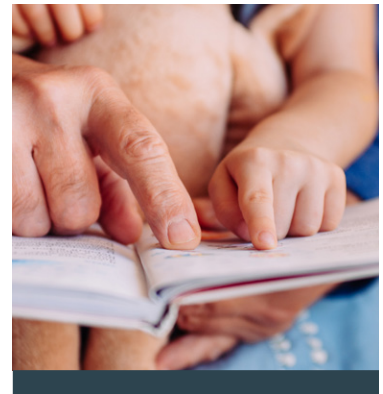


Introduction

This resource is intended to support educators in building family partnerships to enhance children’s literacy development at preschool and at home. The goal is for schools, child care providers, and families to effectively partner to engage children in literacy-based activities. By providing practical ideas and resources for families, schools and child care programs are better able to bridge literacy instruction from classrooms into homes, giving children more literacy opportunities in multiple contexts.

The Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) General Education Leadership Network (GELN) Michigan Early Literacy Task Force (ELTF) created *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten* to improve children’s literacy.¹ The Michigan Department of Education endorses the use of the Essentials as quality, research-informed instructional practices. The evidence supporting the family literacy practices is informed by research that meets rigorous standards established by the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) in classroom settings. These evidence-based classroom practices were adapted for home use; however, research has not investigated the efficacy of all of these practices in home contexts.

These practices include conducting read alouds with reference to print, which involves pointing out the printed words in a storybook, poem, informational text, or other reading material. When the adult shows the child the forms, functions, and features of print, the child gains interest in the text and comes to understand that print has meaning. References to print can include both verbal and nonverbal strategies.² You can share these strategies with families to help them support literacy at home.



Sharing Why the Read Aloud Is an Essential Practice With Families

Not only is reading aloud together a bonding experience that nurtures the love of the written and spoken word, it promotes inquisitiveness and imagination.³ Research shows the impact of reading aloud on young children’s future literacy success.^{4,5} For example, an oft-cited quote sums up the significance of reading by stating that “The single most important activity for building these understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children.”⁶

Read alouds support many aspects of children’s literacy development over time and are a key strategy in helping children become successful readers. It is essential for young children to develop the critical skills of print and book reading knowledge (e.g., left-to-right directionality of print and book orientation), concept of word (e.g., matching written words with spoken words), and alphabetic knowledge (e.g., recognition of the letters of the alphabet), as print knowledge is one of the strongest predictors of early reading success.⁷ For prekindergarten children, read alouds also provide an opportunity to develop their expressive and receptive language skills, and listening comprehension and background knowledge. Listening comprehension can later lead to reading comprehension.⁸

It is important for the young child to be actively involved during the read aloud. The adult should ask the child open-ended questions,* allow the child time to answer, and help the child make predictions about what might happen next in the text (e.g., story or informational text) or connect previous parts of the text to later aspects of the text.⁹ As the adult reads to and with the child, the more the child engages and interacts with the text, the more knowledge the child will gain from the experience. Read alouds are powerful because they can be done by teachers and families alike. The adult can focus on different information and literacy skills depending on the child’s needs, the adult’s comfort level, or the reading purpose.

*An open-ended question is a question that results in more than a one-word response. For example, an open-ended question about *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* might be, “Tell me how you might feel if you were Alexander.” If the child answers with one word, such as “bad,” the adult should try to draw out a longer response from the child.



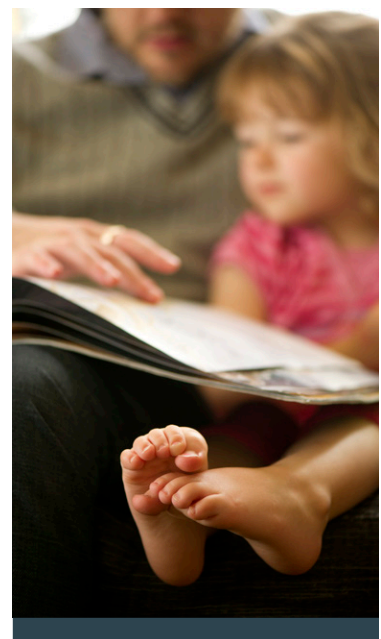
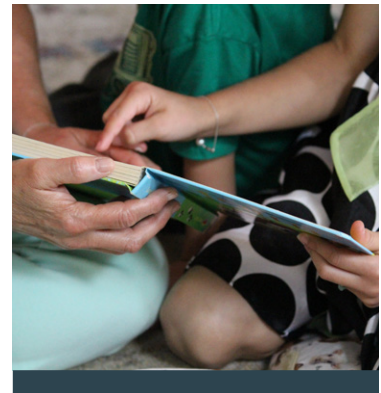
When reading aloud daily, adults can include both verbal and nonverbal strategies that will draw the child’s attention to print material. Nonverbal strategies include pointing to objects in pictures and running a finger under the words while reading them aloud. While doing so, the adult can verbally point out specific characteristics of the print or the letters. For example, to call attention to letter identification, the adult might use the excerpt below from Judith Viorst’s *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, and say to the child, “This is the letter ‘A’ in Anthony, like the letter ‘A’ in your name, Adam.” The adult might then ask the child to find other “A’s” in the sentence, and the child might find the “A” in Agent.

*At breakfast Anthony found a Corvette Sting Ray car kit in his breakfast cereal box and Nick found a Junior Undercover Agent code ring in his breakfast cereal box, but in my breakfast cereal box all I found was breakfast cereal.*¹⁰

When reading aloud, the adult might also ask the child where to start reading. This draws the child’s attention to the print, as does counting out words. In the sentence above from Viorst’s book, the adult can show the child the letter “b” or word “breakfast” and then, together, they can play “I Spy” and search for all of the “b’s” in the sentence or the word “breakfast” in the sentence, counting the number of times that letter or word is “spied” in that sentence.

Finally, adults can point out print within pictures during book reading or in other daily activities. This will help the child become aware of print and start to experiment with the letters and words they see as the adult points out print. Pointing out print helps the child learn that it is the print and not the illustrations in a book that tells the story. Further, pointing out print helps the child to understand that letters have names. Collectively, these strategies help a child start to learn how print functions. On the next page are some ideas for families to use while reading aloud with their child, or you can suggest others.

To develop print awareness, and to increase comprehension and knowledge, young children need to be exposed to and engaged with print in multiple forms.¹¹ Reading aloud daily with an engaged adult exposes young children to print. Adults can read storybooks, cereal boxes, magazines, instruction manuals, signs, and so much more to show young children that print has meaning.



Suggestions for Families To Use Before, During, and After Reading a Book Aloud With Their Children

BEFORE READING

- Ask where the front and back of the book are and where the text starts, and point out the title page;
- Point out the title of the book;
- Talk about what might happen or what is already known about the topic;
- Draw attention to the name of the author and illustrator; and
- Point out the first word of the book.

The concepts in this box are examples of print and book reading knowledge.



DURING READING

- Point out the first word of the book;
- Point to individual words as you read;
- Point out and say words that are within the illustrations;
- Point out a specific letter or word and have the child search for that letter or word on the page;
- Ask questions about letters and words; and
- Ask open-ended questions about ideas in the book, including questions about characters.

The last three suggestions in this box are examples of print knowledge.

AFTER READING

- Retell the text or ask the child to “read” the text back to you;
- Ask open-ended questions and make connections to the child’s life; and
- Compare that book to another book with which the child is familiar.

The suggestions in this box provide examples of reading comprehension strategies.

Supporting Families in the Essential Practice of Read Alouds

The *Essential Instructional Practices in Early Literacy: Prekindergarten* also includes collaboration with families in promoting literacy. There are several ways that schools or child care programs can partner with families to learn more about how to read aloud at home, such as introducing families to the “Read Aloud” infographic that accompanies this brief during reading conferences, at parent nights, or with a weekly newsletter, and providing families with a list of great read aloud books, including those in their first language. The MiFamily Engagement Framework¹² outlines several high-impact strategies that teachers can use to help support student achievement and family engagement, including:

- Modeling read aloud strategies to support families’ at-home practices (during classroom visits or home visits);
- Allowing families to ask questions and practice the strategies with one another (during classroom visits or home visits, after modeling the strategies); and
- Providing short videos to families, via email or text, that show teachers modeling the read aloud strategies.



Resources

The following resources provide more information about and examples of read alouds with prekindergartners:

Great Books To Read Aloud:

- [Reading Rockets: Great Read Alouds for Preschoolers](#)

Tips and Resources:

- [Read It Again! Benefits of Reading to Young Children](#)
- [Selecting and Using Culturally Appropriate Children’s Books in Languages Other Than English](#)
- [Strengthening Emergent Literacy and Oral Language](#)
- [Practice Guides for Use With Parents](#)
- [Reading Rockets: Launching Young Readers](#)

Videos:

- [Reading Rockets: From Babbling to Books](#)
- [Interactive Read Alouds: Learning From Books Together](#)



Endnotes

- ¹ Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, General Education Leadership Network, Early Literacy Task Force. (2016). *Essential instructional practices in early literacy: Prekindergarten*. https://literacyessentials.org/downloads/gelndocs/pre-k_literacy_essentials.pdf
- ² Zucker, T., Ward, A., & Justice, L. M. (2009). Print referencing during read-alouds: A technique for increasing emergent readers' print knowledge. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(1), 62–72. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RT.63.1.6>
- ³ Beauchat, K. A., Blamey, K. L., & Phillapakos, Z. A. (2012). *Effective read alouds for early literacy: A teacher's guide for PreK-1*. Guilford.
- ⁴ Massaro, D. W. (2016). Two different communication genres and implications for vocabulary development and learning to read. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 47(4), 505–527. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X15627528>
- ⁵ Roberts, K. L. (2013). Comprehension strategy instruction during parent-child shared reading: An intervention study. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 52(2), 106–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19388071.2012.754521>
- ⁶ Neuman, S. B., Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (2000). *Learning to read and write: Developmentally appropriate practices for young children*. National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- ⁷ National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). *Developing early literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel*. National Center for Family Literacy.
- ⁸ McGee, L. M., & Schickendanz, J. A. (2007). Repeated interactive read-alouds in preschool and kindergarten. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(8), 742–751.
- ⁹ Garner, J. K., & Bochna, C. R. (2004). Transfer of a listening comprehension strategy to independent reading in first-grade students. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32, 69–74. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-004-1071-y>
- ¹⁰ Viorst, J. (1972). *Alexander and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day*. Atheneum Press.
- ¹¹ Neuman, S. (2011). The role of knowledge in early literacy. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 36(4) 468–475. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.36.4.6>
- ¹² Michigan Department of Education. (2020). *MiFamily: Michigan's family engagement framework*. https://www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/MIFamily_Family_Engagement_Framework_683447_7.pdf

Acknowledgments

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