

Ten Tips for Reading Aloud

1. How to Choose a Book

- Make sure you marry the right reading style w/ each book: Roddy Doyle's the Giggler Treatment (about dog poop) asks for a wry, arch, playful style - lots of enthusiasm; Scott O'Dell's Island of the Blue Dolphins suggests a quieter, deadpan style - it's a story about Nature, so let the prose do the work.

2. How to Make the Time

- If reading aloud is important, you must Prioritize: Sometimes this means doing something else (say, the dishes) later; sometimes it means not doing something else (Monday Night Football isn't that good this week); and sometimes it means making something boring - say, waiting at the doctor's office - interesting.

3. Punch Vocabulary

- Make the language in a story more interesting to both you and your listener by choosing the most interesting word in each sentence, and doing something more w/ it: emphasize it, italicize it, underline it, enunciate it, whisper it, elongate it - bring it out to some (subtle) place of prominence and enliven the prose.

4. Pause

- One of three tips that help Re-set your child's attention span and can be used to heighten drama or suspense or emotional impact; in this case, pay special attention to every mark of punctuation: every comma and period, hyphen and parentheses - one word sentences are written that way for a reason.

5. Slow Down

- Also Re-sets attention span; and heightens drama, suspense, and emotion; but not the same as pausing; slowing down means the pace of a sentence; or a paragraph; your listener will notice immediately.

6. Whisper

- Everyone knows the whisper effect, when you want to make someone pay even closer attention; so this one also Re-sets the attention span; heightens drama and suspense and - especially - can make the most malevolent characters even more malevolent.

- Taken together, I'd even go so far as to say these three represent the heart of effective reading aloud.

7. Accents and Voices

- Borrow indiscriminately and shamelessly from everywhere to mimic different voices; you kids don't care how perfect they are, only that the voices in a dialogue are different and distinct, bringing the characters alive; Also: give each character who talks a lot some identifying trait or mannerism to make it easier for you to trigger the voice (e.g. Draco Malfoy lords it over everyone - perhaps he drawls; Hermione Granger is a goody-goody - perhaps her voice is a little prissy.)

8. Ask Questions

- Use the opportunity and pace reading a book give you to ask questions before, during, and after a reading; to serve multiple purposes: rehearse or remember characters or plot developments; explore moral or ethical questions; make associations w/ other books and media - film and otherwise.

9. Give 'em a Quiz.

- Not to make reading like school, but as a memory cue; kids love showing off their knowledge, having a reason to pay even closer attention, owning a book or story thoroughly and in detail - pretty soon, they'll be asking you questions.

10. Permit an auxiliary activity.

- Kids will get distracted - for a good reason: because they've made an association and are pursuing it; when pausing and whispering and slowing down aren't enough, it's OK to let 'em color or draw or doodle - or braid their hair or wash the dishes - to let their restless minds re-focus on your story.