

11 Tips to Make Reading Aloud More Fun

(for you AND your child or grandchild)



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About the Author

Helena Long, mother of five and grandmother of two, has been reading children's stories non-stop since she first learned to read! For many years she also enjoyed listening to her father read nightly bedtime stories. Helena first started sharing her love of stories at about the age of 12, both telling made-up stories and reading other authors' stories to her younger brother, and later to children lucky enough to have her for their babysitter.

Through high school and university, Helena continued to read. In addition to course textbooks, she read biographies, self-help books, novels old and new, and always found time throughout the years to escape to a Dr. Seuss book, Arthur Ransom's *Swallows and Amazons* series or the Prince Edward Island so eloquently described by Lucy Maud Montgomery. When she started having children of her own, she discovered Robert Munsch and the Berenstains.

And once grandchildren came along, it was time to put pen to paper and finish a book of her own!

Helena's grown-up children credit much of their own school success to the fact that their mother read to them regularly. Brenna, illustrator of *The Underwater Mystery* and now a successful university student herself, still remembers how her vocabulary grew by leaps and bounds when she was a pre-teen, listening to her mother read *Anne of Green Gables*.

Helena still reads to children regularly as she is currently sharing the stories of pioneer life written by Laura Ingalls with her youngest child, who is in public elementary school. Helena also reads to her young grandchildren (who are both still under two!) when she has an opportunity and looks forward to sharing many old favourites and her own new stories with them as they grow older.

TIP 1: Start early.

I truly believe that it is never too early to introduce a child to the words and rhythms of our languages.

I started reading to my own children some twenty-seven years ago when my first child was six months old. She probably didn't understand much of the stories but we read Dr. Seuss and she loved the rhythm! Sometimes she would actually chuckle and chortle out loud when I was reading.

Listening to the more formal sentence structure of the written word is terrific for language development at any age.

TIP 2: Read often.

If possible, set aside a regular reading time with your child or grandchild. Make it part of the routine and it will become part of the day's or week's events that he or she most looks forward to.

TIP 3: Quality, not quantity.

Make no mistake about it. Reading to a child is quality time! You don't need to spend an hour reading, but what time you do spend, even if it is only 10 minutes, you can make even more special by allowing time for cuddling either during the story itself or afterwards as you discuss the events or characters of the story.

TIP 4: Different voices.

Use different voices for different characters when reading dialogue. Please don't worry, be self-critical, or self-conscious. Chances are nobody else can or will hear you and you can be sure the children won't be critical. They'll love it!

TIP 5: Fast and slow.

As well as using different voices for different characters, you can keep the story lively and interesting by varying the pace of your reading. Read extra slowly when time is dragging in the story – for example, perhaps a character is waiting anxiously for his birthday.

You can speed up your reading when exciting events are happening quickly, one after another. This technique reinforces the excitement of the story itself.

TIP 6: Quiet and loud.

Changing the volume of your reading is another way to keep the kids on the edge of their seats (or the edge of your lap, as the case may be!).

Is someone – a child, a dog, a cat, a baby – sleeping in the story? Is a character telling another character a secret? Whispering is very effective and actually draws more attention from children than when you yell.

On the other hand, sometimes a loud voice is appropriate and fits the story better.

TIP 7: Ask questions.

“Interactive” is a buzzword we all hear nowadays. Did you know you can make reading aloud into an “interactive” activity?

Stop at key points in the story, especially where a character needs to make a choice as to what they are going to do next. Ask your child, “What would you do?” This draws the child into the story and stimulates imagination and creativity.

And remember to share your own ideas about what you might do if you were the character. You might even want to share what you would have done when you were your child’s or grandchild’s age versus what you would do now that you’re mature and experienced!

TIP 8: Share the reading.

If your child is old enough, let him or her do some of the reading. Perhaps one of the characters always speaks in his/her voice, or perhaps there are captions under the pictures.

(Please don't, however, make the mistake of thinking that because your child can read, you can stop altogether. Part of the joy for the child is having you do something just for them. And your child will never read or benefit from some of the more difficult books you might choose if you're not there to choose them and read them.)

TIP 9: Easy and hard.

Every child has his or her favourite read-aloud story or stories, but it's important to also sometimes expose them to new ideas, characters, sentence structure, plots, etc.

Sometimes you will want to read something that's a little above or below the child's comprehension level. Reading something difficult builds language and vocabulary skills. On the other hand, reading an old favourite from his preschool days to an 8-year-old can be a fun break from the regular reading routine for both of you.

TIP 10: Keep reading.

Don't stop too soon. I still read aloud on a regular basis to my ten-year-old. In our busy lives, she appreciates that dedicated daily time I spend with her. If daily doesn't work for you, then set aside a weekly or twice weekly time that's just for you and your child to sit down together to enjoy a good book.

TIP 11: For absentees

This tip is for grandparents and non-custodial parents who may not live close to the child or children they would like to read to. Today's technology makes it very easy to record yourself. Buy a book you'd like to read to your children, record yourself reading it, and then send the tape or CD, together with the book, to the lucky recipient. (Kids LOVE to get mail!)

You could even give your child or grandchildren your own version of a "Book of the Month" club. For Christmas or a birthday, you send them a nice home-made membership certificate with their first book and tape or CD and then send a new book and recording every month for the rest of the year.

P.S. Need ideas for books for your children and/or grandchildren? Check out our website, www.best-loved-kids-books.com