

Reading with Children, Part 1—Reading To Children

By Linda Butler

Right now, with the closure of schools, parents are required to do a lot more schoolwork and reading with their kids. It's not easy. You've already spent the last six weeks thrust into the role of homeschool teacher. After dealing with language arts, math, science, and history with your kids, opening a book to read a story may be the last thing you want to do. But, a little effort to read aloud to your kids can help your kids feel the joy and connection that comes from reading and the magical journeys that you can take when you enjoy a book together.

As a homeschooling mom, I read hundreds of books out loud to my children. Thousands, if you include picture books. I read everything from "Winnie the Pooh" to "Lord of the Rings." [This annotated list](#) of some rather far-ranging titles may give you some ideas for books to share with your children.

Benefits of Reading Aloud Together

- Most important, reading aloud is a fun way to spend quality time with your kids. It's a human connection without the distraction of screens, electronic gadgets, and other distractions.
- Reading together helps children build their vocabulary, their attention span, and their intellect. You are bringing new words, thoughts and experiences into their lives.
- Reading aloud helps children with literacy and language development. Reading to your children is showing them that you value literacy and learning.
- Hearing various stories helps develop a child's imagination, thinking, and social skills.

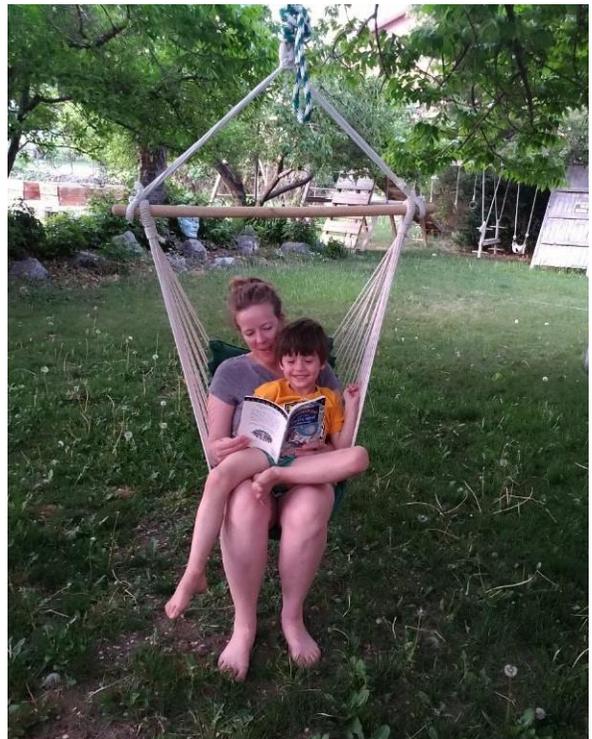
Find Special Places

Special venues can make reading time a memorable activity. These are some of the unique places my kids remember:

- Reading together on a picnic blanket under a large tree
- Reading wherever they chose in the back yard
- Reading in a swing; in a hammock
- Taking pillows and blankets on—or beneath--the trampoline and reading there
- Reading in a blanket fort under the kitchen table
- Reading inside a large cardboard box
- Taking a book up the canyon. After hiking and playing outdoors, we'd gather to a picnic table and share a snack and a book.

Going to a movie or show is a special family activity. What if you were to make reading aloud together a special event like going to the show? Consider having a "reading show" in your home. Put a blanket on the floor, pull out some treats, pop some popcorn, and start reading to them.

Or, take a book, the kids, and the treats and load them into your car. Sit in the driveway and have a "drive-in" reading session.



Make Special Times

Reading together can be a great way to wind down from an active day before transitioning to bed.

Bedtime stories are a fun way to read a story to an individual child or to a group. Snuggling together on



the couch can be good bonding time.

Many fathers enjoy spending time reading to their children at the end of the day.

Each night, one mom of six children would put her kids into their various beds, then sit in the hallway and read aloud to all of them.

Lunchtime reading: I loved reading to my children during lunch. The kids sat still, listened and ate. We also could briefly discuss the things we had read. Some of our more challenging books, such as “Tom Sawyer” and “Huckleberry Finn” were read at the kitchen table.

Reading a book together before a midday rest or nap time also helps establish a quiet time for children and a break time for mom. After a peaceful storytime together, the littlest children may have a nap time. Slightly older children can rest—either by listening to a book on CD or by quietly looking at or reading picture books. Older children can quietly read in their rooms. It’s helpful to corral all electronic devices before the reading/resting time.

Make Special Efforts

What you read to your children is important. Very young children thrive on the personal attention and interaction of picture books. Reading is more than just vocalizing the words on each page. Talk about the pictures; have your child contribute to the story by telling about the pictures. Sometimes older children enjoy picture books, too. Hearing an old favorite can be a fun reminiscence.

When reading to older children, it’s good to stretch them a bit. Find a book that’s beyond their reading level. Even fluent readers benefit from the camaraderie of family reading time. Read one of your childhood favorites or a classic to your children.

If children get restless during reading time, you may want to encourage them to draw while you read. Reading the entire “Lord of the Rings” trilogy aloud was a huge venture; drawing helped the younger children stay engaged, but soon even the teens were also creating wonderful drawings of elves, hobbits, wizards, and ents.

How you read is important. Since you’re sharing something good with those you love, be enthusiastic. Change your voice slightly for different characters. One of my favorite read-alouds is “The BFG” by Roald Dahl. Making different voices for the quirky characters and especially for the goofy, naïve BFG was delightful. Even if you don’t feel that you have any showbiz talent, your kids will think you’re a star when you make the setting and characters come alive through enthusiastic reading and different voices. Have

fun with it—some books lend themselves to expressive reading, and some books are fine when simply read by a caring parent.



Talk about the chapter(s) or the book you've read. You'll learn about how and what your kids are thinking. Here are a few questions that could lead to good discussions: What does _____ (the character) want? What's the obstacle? What's she/he most afraid of? What does this story remind you of? What would you change about the main character or setting if you could? What surprised you the most? What's something you want to don't want to forget from this book?

Think about the camaraderie, discussion and sharing that occurs in a Book Group. Bring some of these aspects to your family reading. In addition to talking about the book, you could serve a special treat that's related to the book—this can be a memorable ending to your shared experience. It doesn't have to be extravagant—serve bread and honey after reading "Winnie the Pooh;" some porridge after reading "The Three Bears." Chocolate covered marshmallows can become Fudgemallow Delights when paired with "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." Peaches pair well with "James and the Giant Peach." And what child hasn't wanted gummy Turkish Delight (in Utah, we used Aplets and Cotlets) after reading "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." And gummy worms are always a welcome treat for your developing bookworms.

In this article we talked about reading to children. In Part 2 we'll talk about helping your kids improve their reading: Reading *With* Children – Ideas to help your beginning and experienced readers grow and develop.