

SEPTEMBER 2010

Best  
Ever

# Literacy Survival Tips for New Teachers!



*By Lori Oczkus*

INTERNATIONAL  
Reading  
Association  
[www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)



**The Power of Reading Aloud  
to Your Students: Guidelines  
and TOP 5 Read-Aloud Strategies**

# Welcome to “Best Ever Literacy Survival Tips for New Teachers!”



As I stood at the doorway of my very first classroom peering in, the empty room stared back at me with its not-yet-decorated, bare green walls, pint-sized tables, and little blue plastic chairs perfect for toothless, wiggly first graders. My heart filled with pride as I imagined what the classroom would look like in a few short days when the buzz of activity filled its walls. Then the panic began to set in, and my mind raced with questions:

- Was I prepared to teach reading?
- Was I ready to administer the assessments the district required?
- What about writing—how would I know how to begin and meet every child’s needs?

Slowly my myriad questions turned into serious, haunting doubts, and I wondered if I was qualified to do this job at all. Perhaps as a new, or fairly new, teacher you share these same fears as you embark on your first few years of teaching.

Whether you are a first-year teacher or still feeling a bit green in your third year, or if you are a mentor or principal supporting new teachers, this brand-new, special monthly column is written just for you. Over the course of the next year, we will tackle important topics in literacy and provide you with quick, super practical, proven, research-based, easy strategies and suggestions for making the most of your literacy instruction.

Here are just a few of the critical topics to look forward to:

- Tips for creating the best silent sustained reading program in your classroom
- Practical ideas for keeping students busy so you can meet with small groups
- Proven suggestions for teaching writing effectively
- Using literacy to teach students to care about others through literacy
- Suggested book titles for mentor texts, read-alouds, and much, much more

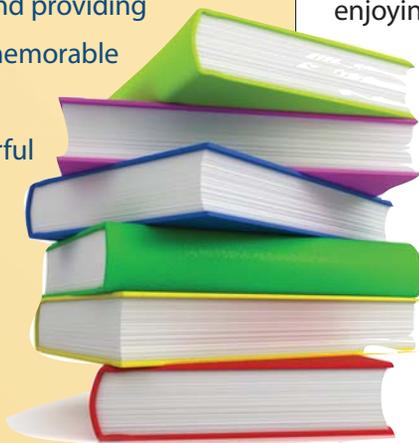
Enjoy!

—Lori Oczkus  
Author and National Literacy Consultant  
[www.lorioczkus.com](http://www.lorioczkus.com)

**R**eadng aloud every day to your students is a research-based, proven way to motivate your students to read on their own, model good reading, promote critical thinking, and create a sense of community in your classroom.

Perhaps you recall being read to as a child. Maybe you hold precious memories of a special adult at home sharing books with you every night for a bedtime story. Or maybe you remember filing into a classroom in elementary school after lunch recess, settling onto the rug or into your desk and chair, and losing yourself in a great book as the teacher's soothing voice transported you into the characters' lives and wove delicious stories that made read-aloud your favorite part of the school day.

When you read aloud to your class, perhaps for some of your students it will be the only time in their childhoods that someone reads aloud to them. You are helping all of your students develop a lifelong love of reading and providing them with memorable experiences with wonderful books!



## Why Reading Aloud Is Your Secret Weapon for Inspiring Your Students to Read

The importance of reading aloud to children on a daily basis can't be overestimated. The U.S. Department of Education Commission on Reading took into account over 10,000 studies and found that the most important activity for building the skills and background for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children (see Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Children who are read to are usually the very best readers in the classroom, and they acquire large vocabularies, write well, and do better in other subject areas, as well.

## Guidelines and Practical Tips for Great Read-Alouds

*Select books YOU like to read aloud.*

Be sure to choose books that you enjoy sharing with your class, and make sure to expose your students to modern classics as well as the old standbys. (See Suggestions for Read-Alouds as well as the Online Resources and References for recommendations.) When you are passionate about the read-aloud book, the students sense it and begin to share your enthusiasm for reading. If you begin reading a book and notice that your students are not enjoying it, abandon the book and explain that sometimes that is what readers do when they are not enjoying a particular title.

*Set aside a consistent place and time slot of 15–20 minutes per day to read aloud.*

Try never to give up your read-aloud time, even if some days you need to switch the timing of your read-aloud or even cut it short a bit. Make reading aloud such an ingrained habit in your classroom that the students beg you not to skip it. When my husband and I read aloud to our children when they were young (we still read aloud to the 12-year-old!), they simply could not fall asleep without their read-alouds and begged if we tried to skip reading to them.

*Go under the spell of a good book.*

Noted author and respected educator Lucy Calkins (1997), in *Raising Lifelong Learners: A Parent's Guide*, says that read-aloud is the time to go under the "spell" of a beautiful book and laugh, cry, and get lost in the flow of the story and the language.

*Refer to your rich read-alouds artfully during reading and writing lessons.*

In their book *Learning Under the Influence of Language and Literature*, Lester Laminack and Reba Wadsworth (2006) describe six types of read-alouds: books that (1) address standards, (2) build community, (3) demonstrate the craft of writing, (4) enrich vocabulary, (5) entice children to read independently, and (6) model fluent reading. For example,

- You may select a particular book to demonstrate a comprehension strategy from your district standards, such as making connections. When reading the short story "La Bamba" from Gary Soto's *Baseball in April and Other Stories* to fifth graders, we asked the students to watch for personal

connections during the read-aloud. Afterward they discussed their connections to the story that included their experiences with talent shows.

- You might read aloud from a book like *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen that is dripping with descriptive language, then refer to it again during a writing lesson to model rich vocabulary usage.
- The nonsense words from a Dr. Seuss read-aloud later seep into a phonics lesson when creating rhyming words.

Keep the read-aloud experience “pure” without too much direct instruction; however, it is quite natural to selectively draw on examples from your read-alouds during other reading and writing lessons.

### *Select books that cover some of the content.*

You can choose books that take place during a time period in history that you are teaching about, or a particular topic in science.

### *Use good reading strategies before, during, and after reading.*

Before reading, encourage students to help you predict what the day’s reading may be about based on visual clues. Review the events that happened in the portion of text you read the day before. During reading, ask students to enjoy the book, but ask them to watch for something such as connections they make or clues to solve the problem in the story. After reading, students may wish to discuss points they wondered about or favorite parts of the text. Make the discussion feel as natural as a chat among friends rather than a teacher-directed “quiz”!

### *Break the rules.*

As your students become hooked on your read-aloud time together, be sure to occasionally go over time and read more. You’ll find that often when read-aloud is over, the students will whine and ask you to read on. Sometimes just do so! Your students will love it.

## Lori’s Top 5 Surefire Strategies for Reading Aloud

*Try these proven read-aloud strategies and watch your students’ interest in reading and comprehension soar!*

### 1 *The Read-Aloud Challenge: Read 5–7 Times a Day*

This sounds like a crazy idea, but it really works and students absolutely love it. Try reading aloud 5–7 times per day and choose the amount of time that works for you.

- One of the read-aloud sessions is longer to build attention, comprehension, and stamina: around 10–15 minutes. The rest of the read-alouds are fast: 1- to 3-minute “quick reads” that you squeeze in at different times throughout the day.
- Open the day with a quick read-aloud, do one again right before recess and lunch, or read aloud as you transition between subjects or when students are lining up.
- Include poems, nonfiction, newspaper articles, how-to books or directions, jokes, menus, online material, and short stories. Keep a bin in which to store a variety of read-aloud materials.
- Assign a student the task of selecting the quick reads for the day and checking off the allotted number of read-aloud hits throughout the day.
- Ask students to turn to partners and discuss the reading by making up questions to quiz each other, or have



them discuss what they are wondering by posing open-ended questions.

## 2 Senses Alert (Oczkus, 2009)

As your students listen during read-aloud, ask them to be on the lookout for sentences, words, and phrases that require them to use their senses to really experience and comprehend the book.

- Throughout the reading, ask questions like, Did you see that? Did you hear that? Can you taste that or feel that?
- Ask students to turn and talk to partners after you read a portion of text and give examples of one or more senses depending upon the text.
- Ask students to make movies of the book in their heads. Even when reading a picture book, the illustrator leaves some of the action up to the reader to formulate in his or her head.
- After a read-aloud session, students may quickly sketch a scene they imagined during the reading. Students share sketches with one another.
- Discuss how visualizing and using other senses helps good readers comprehend text.



## 3 Partner Talk/Discussion Starters (Oczkus, 2009)

Before and after reading aloud, to deepen student comprehension, allow students to quickly turn and talk to partners for just a minute or so about their questions, confusions, and ideas related to the text. You might try using discussion starters such as these to guide and direct the interactions (select one at a time for younger students or put this list on a chart and allow the students to select their own discussion starters):

- Something new I learned was....
- I liked the part where...because....
- I realize now that...because....
- This reminded me of...because....
- I was surprised by...because....

## 4 Literacy Mystery Boxes (Pearman, Camp, & Hurst, 2004)

This is a very clever idea that some educators developed and then shared in an article in *The Reading Teacher* journal. The authors suggest bringing in a box that holds several items that relate in some way to the story. So, for example, to help students predict what *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White is about, the teacher pulls out of the box a plastic spider, a plastic rat or pig, a spider web, or a blue ribbon. For *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, the authors suggest bringing in a stuffed caterpillar, green leaf, apple, and lollipop. The possibilities for mystery boxes are endless, even for students in middle school and high school. Mystery boxes make reading aloud memorable for students and provide discussion prompts and opportunities for rich vocabulary instruction. Have students bring in mystery boxes to go with the books they are reading, as well.

## 5 Interactive Engagement (Oczkus, 2009)

You can easily make your read-alouds a bit more interactive by inviting students to turn and talk to partners before and after the reading. Discussion alone has been shown to deepen comprehension (Lapp, Flood, Ranck-Buhr, Van Dyke, & Spacek, 1997). Sometimes that is all it takes to grab your students and focus their attention. You may also choose from these interactive engagement ideas after a read-aloud:

- Drama—Ask students to make faces to demonstrate the emotions of the characters in various parts of the reading. Or ask volunteers to come forward and act out portions of the text. Students may also turn to a partner and “interview” each other, taking turns role-playing as characters.
- Art—Students can quickly sketch a favorite part or character, or what they've learned, and share with a partner.



## Suggestions for Read-Alouds

### Picture Books

*Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman

*Charlie Anderson* by Barbara Abercrombie

*The Great Kapok Tree:*

*A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest* by Lynne Cherry

*Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* by Virginia Lee Burton

*Rikki-Tikki-Tavi* by Rudyard Kipling

*The Story of Ferdinand* by Munro Leaf

### Chapter Books

*Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo

*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by Roald Dahl

*Harriet the Spy* by Louise Fitzhugh

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis

*Stone Fox* by John Reynolds Gardiner

*Stuart Little* by E.B. White

*Winnie-the-Pooh* by A.A. Milne



## Common Questions

*Many of the teachers in my building skip reading aloud because our school is under fire to bring up test scores immediately. How do I justify taking the time to read aloud to my students?*

You can't afford to *not* take the time to read aloud to your students.

The benefits of read-aloud are many, as students develop background knowledge, comprehension, robust vocabularies, and critical thinking skills. If you throw in discussions about the read-aloud, students develop oral language and deeper understandings.

*Because I am a new teacher, I am not sure what books make good read-alouds for my grade level. Any suggestions?*

See the Suggestions for Read-Alouds, Online Resources, and References provided here, for a start. You do *not* need to purchase books to read aloud to your class. You can rely on your school librarian or public librarian for suggestions. One of my favorite online resources is a website sponsored by Jim Trelease, author of the best-selling book *The Read-Aloud Handbook* (2006). Pam Allyn (2009), teacher and staff developer, suggests books by ages and themes in *What to Read When: The Books and Stories to Read With Your Child—and All the Best Times to Read Them*.

**Lori D. Oczkus** is a literacy coach, author, and popular speaker across the United States. Tens of thousands of teachers have attended her motivating, fast-paced workshops and read her practical, research-based professional books, including *Interactive Think-Aloud Lessons: 25 Surefire Ways to Engage Students and Improve Comprehension* (Scholastic & International Reading Association, 2009) and *Reciprocal Teaching at Work: Powerful Strategies and Lessons for Improving Reading Comprehension* (2nd edition; International Reading Association, 2010). Lori has extensive experience as a bilingual elementary teacher, intervention specialist working with struggling readers, staff developer, and literacy coach. She works regularly with students in classrooms and really knows the challenges that teachers face in teaching students to read! You can contact Lori through her website at [www.lorioczkus.com](http://www.lorioczkus.com).

## Online Resources

### International Reading Association Choices Reading Lists:

[www.reading.org/resources/Booklists.aspx](http://www.reading.org/resources/Booklists.aspx)

Featuring annual Children's Choices, Teachers' Choices, and Young Adults' Choices reading lists.

### Jim Trelease's Home Page:

[www.trelease-on-reading.com](http://www.trelease-on-reading.com)

Read-aloud expert Jim Trelease provides many suggestions for reading aloud to children of all ages.

### Read Aloud America Recommended Books:

[readaloudamerica.org/booklist.htm](http://readaloudamerica.org/booklist.htm)

Suggested read-aloud titles for infants through high schoolers.

### Storyline Online:

[www.storylineonline.net](http://www.storylineonline.net)

Celebrities read children's books aloud.

## References

- Allyn, P. (2009). *What to read when: The books and stories to read with your child—and all the best times to read them*. New York: Penguin.
- Anderson, N.A. (2007). *What should I read aloud? A guide to 200 best-selling picture books*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Anderson, R.C., Hiebert, E.H., Scott, J.A., & Wilkinson, I.A.G. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Education.
- Calkins, L. (with Bellino, L.). (1997). *Raising lifelong learners: A parent's guide*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.
- Laminack, L.L., & Wadsworth, R.M. (2006). *Learning under the influence of language and literature: Making the most of read-alouds across the day*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Lapp, D., Flood, J., Ranck-Buhr, W., Van Dyke, J., & Spacek, S. (1997). "Do you really just want us to talk about this book?": A closer look at book clubs as an instructional tool. In J.R. Paratore & R.L. McCormack (Eds.), *Peer talk in the classroom: Learning from research* (pp. 6–23). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Oczkus, L. (2009). *Interactive think-aloud lessons: 25 surefire ways to engage students and improve comprehension*. New York: Scholastic; Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Pearman, C.J., Camp, D., & Hurst, B. (2004). Literacy mystery boxes. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(8), 766–768.
- Trelease, J. (2006). *The read-aloud handbook* (6th ed.). New York: Penguin.