

THE ART and MAGIC of the READ-ALOUD

Nurturing Young Minds Through Words

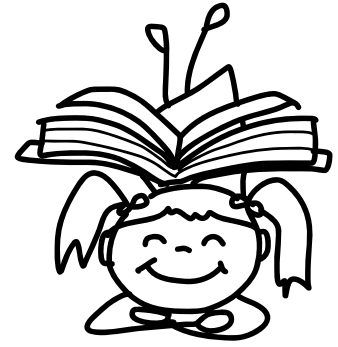


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INTRODUCTION

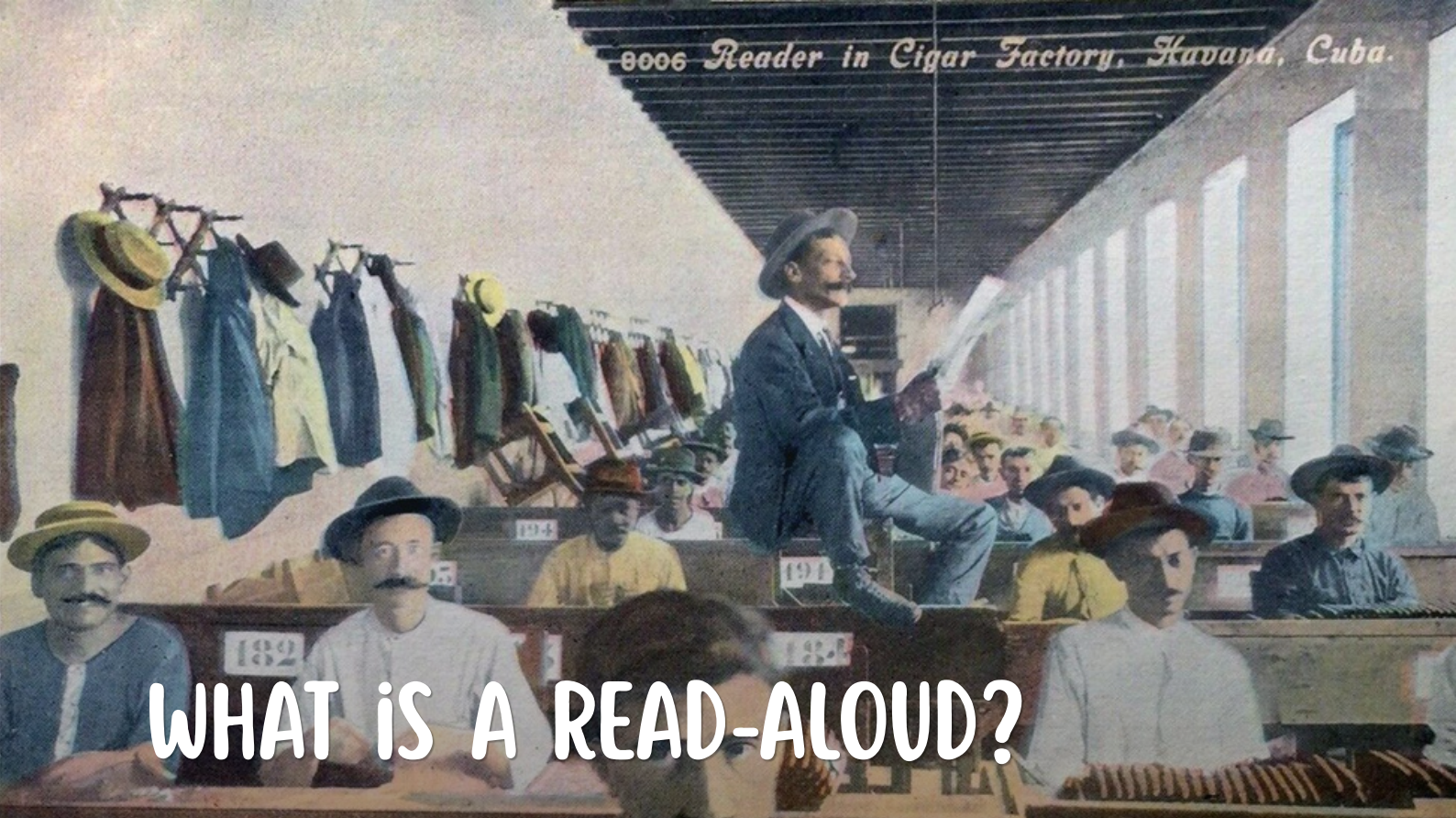
What are your earliest memories of being read to? Perhaps it was a parent reading you a story, a grandparent reading to you from a religious text, a teacher reading a poem to you. Or, perhaps, like many children in our country, you have never experienced the joy of having a book read to you by a caring adult who makes the book alive with their voice and expression.

Generally, adults stop reading to children once they feel the child can read on their own. They feel the child will become lazy and will lose the motivation to read on their own. They could not be more wrong. Reading aloud to children is one of the best ways to get children to fall in love with books and reading. Not only that, it creates a special bond between the child and the reader because they both travel into a story together and experience its marvels in unison.

Rebecca Bellingham, author of the book, **The Artful Read-Aloud**, goes as far to say "...It's no secret that reading aloud to children ... is one of the most important things any teacher, parent, or grown-up can do to help children become better readers, thinkers, and frankly, better human beings."

This manual has been designed to help anyone who would like to learn the art of reading aloud to children – you may be a teacher at a school (and, mind you, not just a teacher of young children), a librarian, a parent, a caregiver, grandparent or, indeed, just someone who enjoys reading and wants to get kids interested in books.

Like anything else, that is worth learning, reading aloud requires practice. But the good news is that you don't need any expensive equipment or special tools. All you need is a good book and your voice – two simple low-cost ingredients for an unimaginable amount of magic.



WHAT IS A READ-ALLOUD?

A read-aloud is, to put it simply, a practice where the reader reads texts aloud to children. The reader incorporates variations in pitch, tone, pace, volume, pauses, eye contact, questions, and comments to produce a fluent and enjoyable delivery.

This practice has been widely accepted all over the world as one of the essential components of a literacy curriculum. The National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN) Bharat Mission, a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy, has included 'Read aloud' under Pedagogies for enhancing language and literacy development. It affirms that "Reading aloud develops their listening skills along with their interest in understanding the story." and recommends that "This session should be followed up by conversation with children and writing/drawing task."

Likewise, the National Curriculum Framework – Foundational Stage that was released in 2022, states: "Because reading and writing does not come naturally the way oral language does, there must be plenty of 'handholding' through meaningful contexts." It adds, "Read-alouds are opportunities to introduce children to good literature, and familiarize them with vocabulary, language use, and making meaning." It places great value on storytelling as a pedagogical strategy.

However, reading aloud is not just a practice that should happen at school. Every child, from infancy to adolescence should experience this magic. Today, many adults too find great joy in audio books. In Cuba, there is a time-honoured tradition of appointing a reader in cigar factories. This person reads literary works, magazine and newspaper articles and essays to the women employed in these factories to roll cigars.



BENEFITS OF THE READ-ALoud

Mem Fox, a prolific writer of children's books and a firm believer in the power of the read-aloud, has written in her book, **Reading Magic**: "Reading aloud and talking about what we're reading sharpens children's brains and helps develop their ability to concentrate at length, to solve problems logically, and to express themselves more easily and clearly. The stories they hear provide them with witty phrases, new sentences and words of subtle meaning." Moreover, being read to frees the child from the tedious process of decoding words and struggling with unfamiliar words. They can focus on really listening to make sense of the story and think instead.

Among the many benefits of the read-aloud, these are the ones that stand out:



PHONEMIC & PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Children become conscious of phoneme-grapheme association and develop phonological awareness through books that use rich language and have rhymes and alliteration in them.



VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

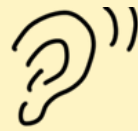
Books contain many more new and uncommon words than the vocabulary used in spoken language. Children develop a better vocabulary and learn new phrases and expressions through books.





COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Children learn the important skills of narration and retelling when they listen to stories. They also learn how to read using expression and develop prosodic skills.



LISTENING SKILLS

Listening to stories helps children listen attentively and focus.



THINKING SKILLS

Children's comprehension skills, their ability to predict, visualize, make connections, summarise develop as they can focus on making meaning rather than on decoding.



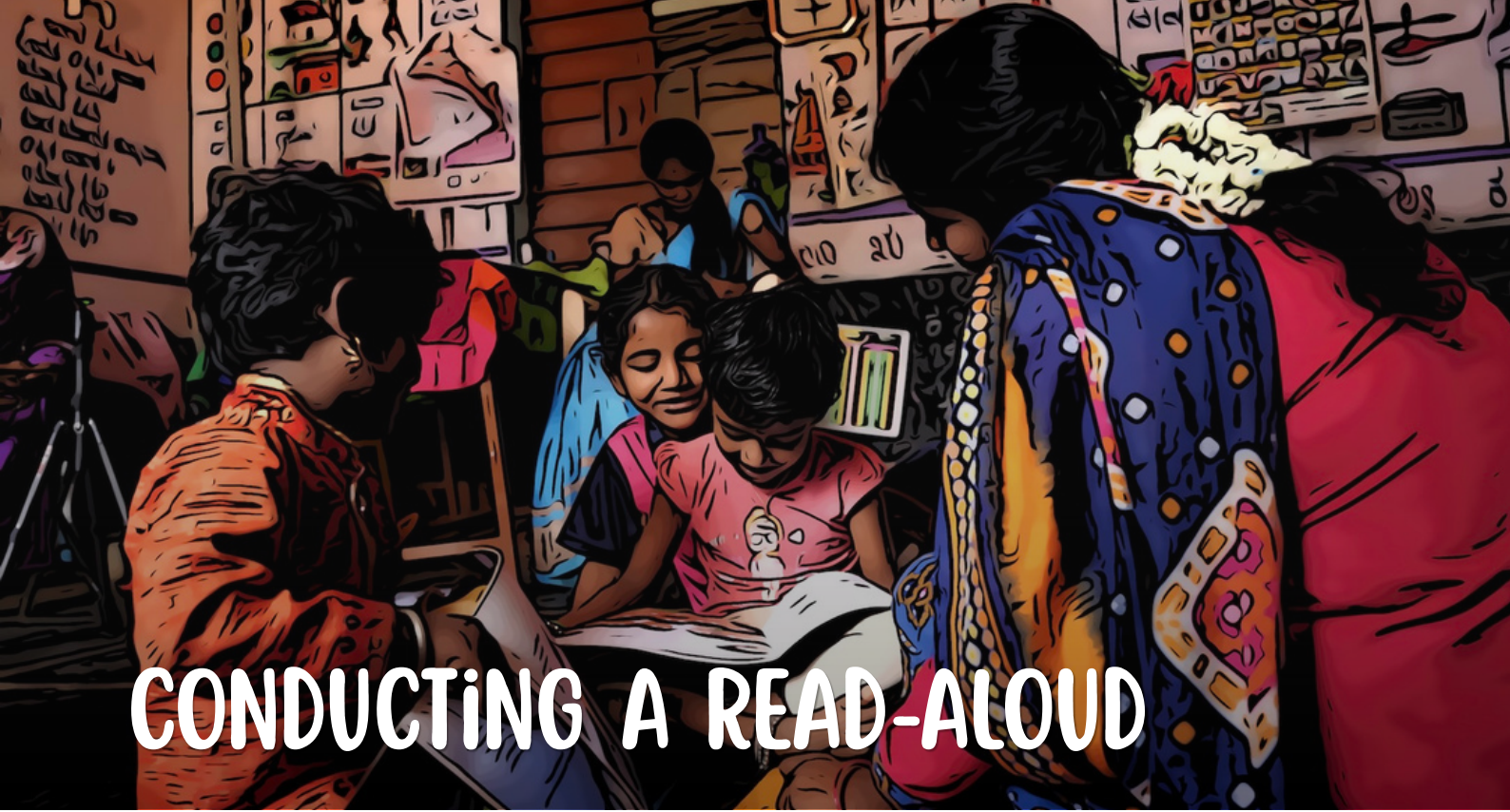
DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE, IMAGINATION AND CREATIVITY

Books are windows, mirrors, flying carpets and sliding doors. With books, children learn about different worlds, cultures, people. Their imagination and creativity is stimulated.



PRINT MOTIVATION

One of the most important benefits is that reading aloud to children creates in them a love for books and reading which is a fundamental early literacy skill.



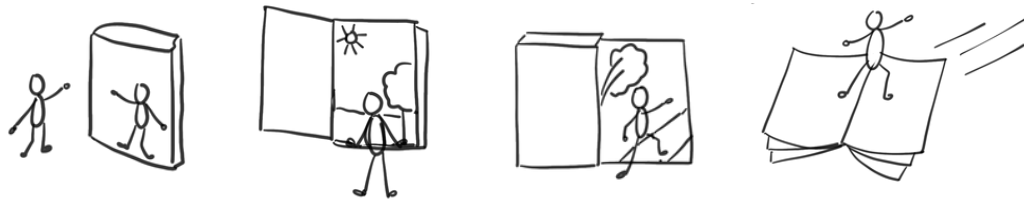
CONDUCTING A READ-ALLOUD

While the process of reading aloud to children requires nothing more than an interesting book, an enthusiastic reader, and a willing audience, it does take more than motivation to make the session a true success. While each person will have their own individual style to reading a book, there are some basic principles that need to be followed.

SELECTING THE RIGHT BOOK

This will depend a lot on the age group you are reading to but there's no hard and fast rule. For babies and very young children, the best books are those that have very few words and have attractive pictures of objects you can point to. Some books for toddlers have features like lift-the-flap which they absolutely love and never get tired of. Books with simple rhymes or songs are also appropriate as they learn how to repeat the words.

Once children reach a stage where they can speak in sentences, they enjoy picture books with a storyline. These days, there is an abundance of picture books that one can choose from. There is no longer a need to depend on books written by western authors (although many of these books are wonderful and have been translated). Instead, one can find books written by Indian authors for Indian children and they can relate to these stories. It is important for children to see characters that they can relate to. Also, when children have an understanding of the context, it aids in comprehension. This is not to say that children should not be exposed to books from different cultures.



Books should sometimes be mirrors but they should also sometimes be windows where they can peep through and see something beyond their own little world, or even sliding doors so that they can step into other worlds. Books should also be flying carpets that take them on flights of fancy. A good picture book will be enjoyed even by older children and even adults.

As children reach the double digits in age, they enjoy being read to from novels and short stories which may or may not have pictures. By this time, their vocabulary is sophisticated enough and their imagination has developed to be able to see in their mind's eye the pictures being painted by the words of the author. Don't shy away from exposing children to injustice, sadness, tragedy, horror, war, and death as long as the book is not disturbing or inappropriate. These are all a part of life too and can, in fact, be used to build empathy in children and also to spark discussions on ethics.

One cardinal rule is do not read aloud a book that you have not read prior to the session.



PRIOR PREP

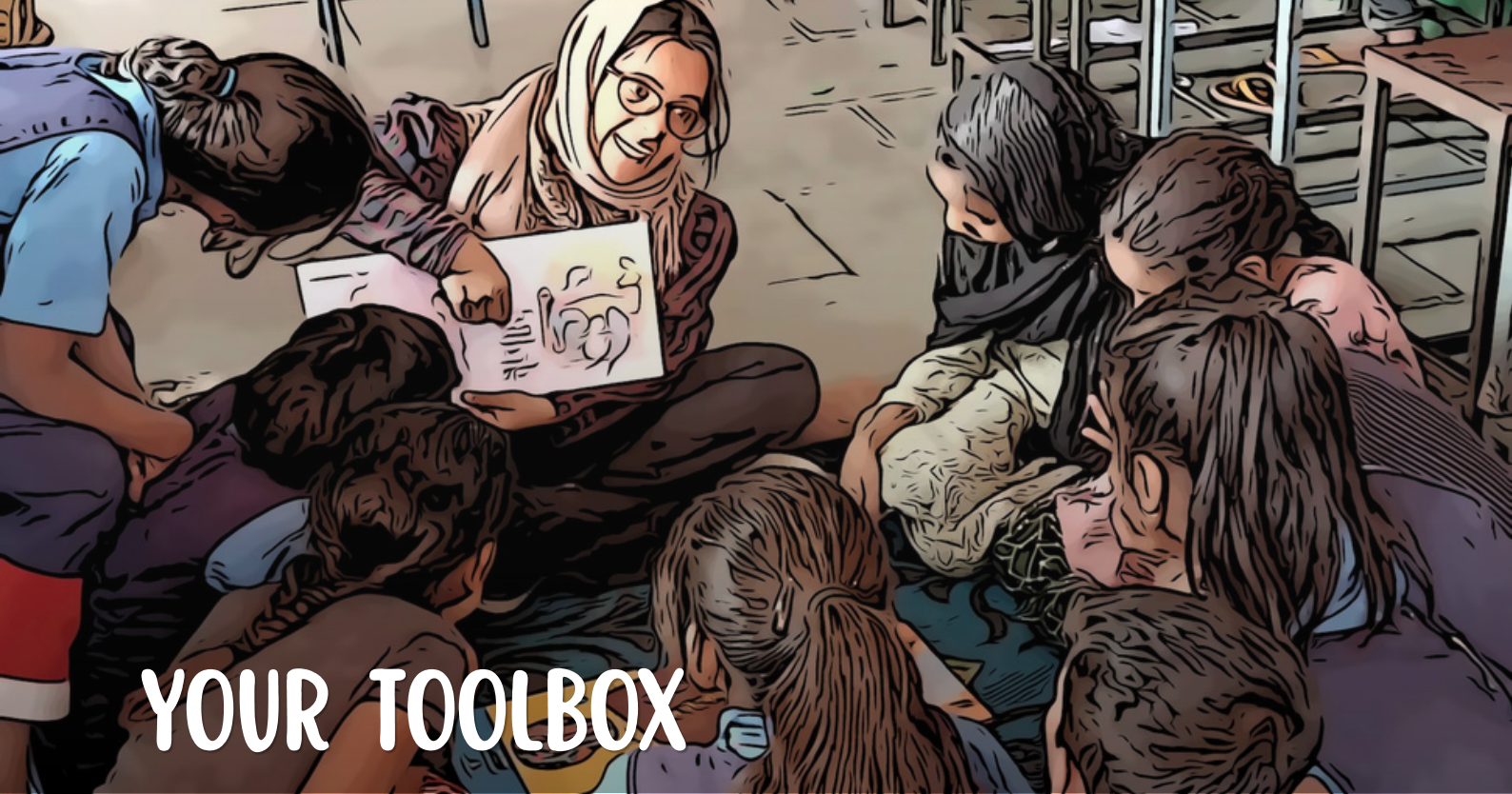
Read the book beforehand. Get familiar with the story – the ebbs and flows of the plot. If the book is set in an unfamiliar context, do some research and go prepared to answer questions. Get familiar with the meanings and pronunciation of any new or foreign words.

If it is a picture book, look at the illustrations carefully. Is there something you want the children to notice? It could be a visual clue that will help the child use their thinking skills and make connections or even the colour palette used. For instance, books set in warm tropical countries usually use bright colours and books set in cold countries tend to use more muted colours. Has the illustrator used a particular technique – watercolours, collages, or been inspired by some form of traditional art like Madhubani, Warli, Gond, etc.? Bringing children's attention to these details will help them develop an appreciation for the effort made by the illustrator and also increase their interest and curiosity about different styles of illustration. There may be some pictures in the book that can lead to rich discussions or spark curiosity. Don't miss these opportunities.

If the author or illustrator is somebody famous, look up their lives. If you can find out anything about their childhood, tell the children about what they were like as kids. This helps the children understand that books are written and illustrated by real people and that, maybe one day, they might also become writers or illustrators.

When reading the book beforehand, think of what questions you might want to ask at different points. Also, make a note of telltale words that let you know what expression to use. For instance, if the sentence says, "I don't want to go to the zoo," Mini wailed, you know you have to say this as if you are crying loudly and the children will automatically learn that the word 'wail' means to cry loudly and plaintively.

If you are an educator, you may also want to think of some activities related to the book that you can do before and after the session. The pre-session activities focus on getting the children curious about the book (more about that on page 11).



YOUR TOOLBOX

You have three invaluable tools that you have at your disposal that are absolutely free: your voice, your face and your body. Use these well and any story can come alive.

YOUR VOICE

You can do so much with your voice – a change in volume, pitch, pace, tone can make your reading of the book so lively and engaging. When you want to emphasise something or if the character is a particularly large or dominating person, you can raise your volume. When you want to say something that is just between you and your reader, you might lower your voice to a stage whisper.

Use different voices for the different characters in the book. This takes practice or you might forget which voice you used for which character. You can use a deep low pitch for male characters and a shrill high pitch for a small whiny child or an animal that squeals (like a pig). When you want to create excitement, you can read fast and when you want to create suspense, you can slow down and emphasise each word. Sometimes, you might just pause at a particular place for dramatic effect.

Your tone and expression will also change depending on the verbs being used.

For example, if the sentence is:

"What do you know about jewels?" she laughed mockingly
you will laugh with sarcasm.

But if the sentence is:

"I can't believe my luck!" she laughed heartily
your expression will be completely different.

Paying attention to the punctuation as well as to the verbs and adverbs used is important so that you know how the sentence should sound. And lastly, being audible and enunciating clearly is a must.

The one thing to avoid though is being over-expressive or unnecessarily melodramatic.



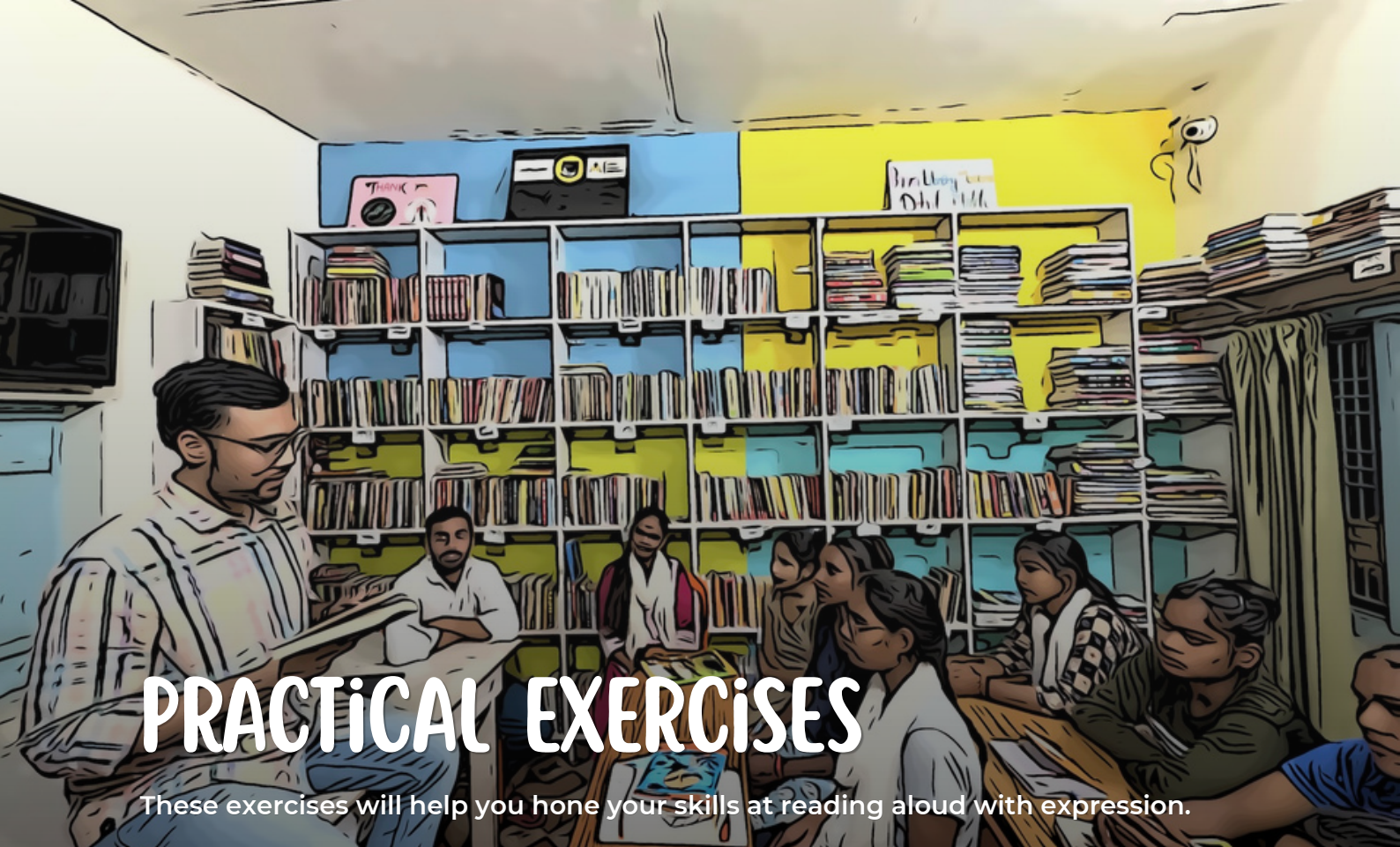
Your facial expressions, especially how you use your eyes, can be used for added effect. You can raise your eyebrows and widen your eyes in surprise, or narrow your eyes to show suspicion or anger. Your eyes can express fear, thoughtfulness, joy, and so many more emotions. Similarly, your mouth can show shock when you open it wide or irritation when you purse your lips. Your mouth can burst into a wide smile or turn into a frown.

Even though you are reading from a book, you must frequently lift your eyes from the page to make eye contact with your listeners.



Generally, when reading aloud, one is seated but that doesn't mean you cannot use your body. The way you hold your shoulders – for instance, you might droop them to indicate sadness, or hold yourself straight and tall to show pride or anticipation. You may bend forward towards your readers to involve them or sway your body if your character is dancing or to describe a gentle breeze. You may stomp your feet to imitate the walk of a giant or use your fingers to show that someone is tiptoeing across a room. While reading aloud is not a theatrical performance, one can use some elements from drama to engage your readers.

In the following pages, we will do some practical exercises to help you read aloud more effectively.



PRACTICAL EXERCISES

These exercises will help you hone your skills at reading aloud with expression.

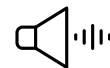
EXERCISE 1

ABC! DEFG? HI, JKLM. NOP? QR, ST. U? VWX. YZ!

AB, CD. EFG! HI? JK, LMNOP! QRS. TU, VW, XYZ?

ABC? DEF! G, H, I, JK! LMN. OPQ? R, S, T, UV? WXY. Z!

ABCDE! F, GH? IJK? L, M, N, O, PQR? ST, UV! W, XYZ.



scan the code to hear
these being recited



For example, in the first line, because ABC ends with an exclamation mark, say it like you are surprised. The next four letters are followed by a question mark, so say it like you would ask a question. There's a comma after the next two letters so add a small pause before you read out the next four letters. There's a period after those letters, so pause for a little longer and so on. Your expression can keep changing. Some exclamations can be happy, some can sound surprised or incredulous, some excited. Likewise, the expression associated with the questions can also change from the kind of happiness you feel when you meet a friend after a long time, or the kind of annoyance you feel when you're wondering what someone is up to, or curiosity.

EXERCISE 2

Read the following sentences placing emphasis on the word that is underlined. Note how the meaning changes depending on which word is being emphasised.

Raja said he didn't steal Rani's pencil.

Raja said he didn't steal Rani's pencil.

Raja said he didn't steal Rani's pencil.

Raja said he didn't steal Rani's pencil.

Raja said he didn't steal Rani's pencil.

Raja said he didn't steal Rani's pencil.

Raja said he didn't steal Rani's pencil.



In the first sentence, when the emphasis is on the first word, it will sound like it was Raja who said this.

In the second sentence, it sounds like Raja said this and we should believe him.

In the third, it sounds like he said that he didn't do it, someone else did.

In the fourth, it sounds as if he is protesting because he is being accused.

In the next one, it sounds like he is saying he didn't "steal" it, maybe he borrowed it (without intending to return it).

In the sixth, it sounds like he didn't still Rani's pencil but someone else's.

And in the last, it sounds as if he didn't steal her pencil but perhaps he stole something else of Rani's.

Listen to the audio recording of these sentences and repeat.



And now, it's finally time to read aloud. This delightful story called **A Book for Puchku**, written by Deepanjana Pal and illustrated by Rajiv Eipe, can be accessed from the StoryWeaver website.

The book is about a little girl called Puchku who loves to read. One day, she runs out of books to read and is desolate. Most stories follow a similar pattern. There is the beginning in which you are introduced to the protagonist. In the middle of the book, the protagonist usually has to face some kind of problem. The problem gets solved and, in the end, the protagonist is usually happy. It is nice to introduce children to this structure so that they can incorporate it into their own creative writing.

The main character of this book is called Puchku – in some parts of India, children are given pet names. You can discuss this with the children while reading the story so that they can make connections to the story.

When reading the first few lines, say each line with a different expression – the first one can be said cajolingly, the second, firmly, the third, as if you are exasperated, and the fourth, with a sense of urgency.

Use a different voice for each character – Puchku can have a girlish voice, her friends, Boltu and Dodla can have different voices, one slightly cartoonish and the other, a little hoarse. Use a mature calm voice for the Very Tall Librarian. Also, you may want to emphasize the words Very Tall and sit up tall in your chair every time you say those words.

Create curiosity and wonder by asking questions as you read. On the following page, there are suggestions for the kinds of questions you can ask.



Watch the recording
of this story being
read aloud



A Book for Puchku on
storyweaver.com



QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK

The purpose of asking questions during the narration is to get the children to engage with the story and deepen their understanding. It is not to check their memory. The questions should either spark curiosity, wonder, or get them to feel empathy and sharpen their problem-solving abilities.

BEFORE YOU START READING

What do you think this book's going to be about from the title/cover picture?
Where do you think the story is set? (if it is a book from a different place)

DURING THE READING

What do you think _____ is thinking about?
What would you have done in _____'s place?
How do you think _____ is feeling?
Have you come across this word before? What do you think it means?
Why do you think _____ said this?
What do you think is going to happen next?
Has something like this ever happened to you/ in another book you have read?
What can you see in this picture?
Did you notice ...?

AFTER THE READING

What was your favourite part of the story? Why?
Who was your favourite character? Why?
What did you learn from this story?



SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES

If you are an educator, librarian, or volunteer working with young children, you may want to conduct some activities before the read-aloud. Conducting post-session activities is useful for any age group.

The purpose of the pre-session activities is to get the children warmed up and ready to focus on the story. If the children were doing some quiet work before the read-aloud, you may want to get them energised and do some movement activities like a quick game or an action rhyme or song. If instead, they were doing some active work before the read-aloud, you may want to get them to do some calming and centering activities like deep breathing.

Before starting the read-aloud, always talk to the children and introduce them to the story, show them the book cover, and hook them with your questions.

AFTER THE READ-ALOUD, YOU COULD PLAN ANY OF THESE ACTIVITIES:

- an art or craft activity based on the book
- sequencing the events in the story in pictures
- role plays based on the books or a dramatization of the story
- retelling or summarizing the story
- songs that might be thematically linked to the story
- a discussion on what they liked the most about the story, which character they liked
- word games with the new words they have learned
- retelling the story from the perspective of another character from the book
- rewriting the story using a totally different setting or time period
- writing an alternative ending to the story
- writing their own dialogues for the characters





We hope this manual has helped you understand the basics of how to read-aloud. Remember, like everything else, one gets better with practice.

Here are some final pointers for you to help you prepare for the read-aloud:

- Be alert and watch the children's expressions – are they engaged or are they looking bored or uncomfortable? If they are looking bored, change tack and maybe pick another book or do another activity. If they are looking restless or uncomfortable, ask them what's bothering them and take action accordingly.
- Ask questions and explain things but, sometimes, the children just want you to get on with the story without interruptions. Honour that.
- Encourage the children to share their thoughts, opinions and questions.
- Some books use specific catch phrases or chants that are repeated throughout the story. Get the children to chant with you.

Always remember, the read-aloud is for the children – they should enjoy the experience and not feel intimidated or scared during the session.

ONLINE SOURCES OF BOOKS FOR CHILDREN



STORY WEAVER
storyweaver.org.in



EPIC BOOKS
getepic.com



INTERNATIONAL
CHILDREN'S DIGITAL
LIBRARY
childrenslibrary.org



This manual has been put together using the vast body of knowledge created by experts on the read-aloud like Mem Fox, Donalyn Miller, Jim Trelease, Rebecca Bellingham and, from closer home, Heeru Bhojwani and Rajyashree Dutt.

The idea for this book came from our supporters, EkStep Foundation who encouraged us to compile this so that all children could be introduced to stories — one of the eight wonders of childhood.

Our deepest gratitude to the teachers of Goa and librarians of Karnataka who showed such willingness to learn how to read aloud and have made this programme such a huge success. They are the torchbearers who are leading thousands of children on their way to become lifelong readers and learners.

We hope you will use what you have learned in this manual to spread the joy of reading in children wherever you go.

APPENDIX 1

READ-ALOUD SESSION & ACTIVITY

A BOOK FOR PUCHKU



MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Copy of book of Puchku, online or print
- Drawing sheets
- Color pencils and crayons

- Prep time: **90 mins**
- Story reciting: **Practice many times loudly till you are confident**
- Activities: **Feel free to use your creativity**

PREPARATION

- Choosing the book is the first step to start a Read-Aloud session. Since we have already chosen a book, our first step is complete.
- Read the story 3–4 times aloud to know the story and be confident with yourself and the language used in the book.
- Pay attention to the author, illustrator and the translator of the book. This gives the children a deeper understanding of the story.
- Knowing the background of the character helps engage the listener. Mark out difficult words and their meaning also highlight expressions that you find interesting to share.
- Who are the characters? Where is the story set? Is there a problem introduced? Are there real-life connections the children can relate to? Think about these as you read.
- Use different voices for different characters to make the story more interesting and capture the children's attention.

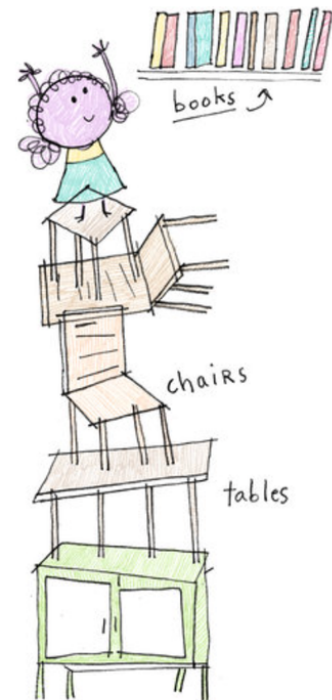


PREPARATION CONTINUED...

- Practice facial expressions while you read the story. Practice in the mirror helps you see what you are doing.
- Ensure your body language is open and leaning towards the children rather than away and distant.
- Ask questions like - Why do you think that? What will happen now? Which character is this? Can you see the pictures? What did you learn? Who was your favorite character? What did you like?
- Remember to enjoy the reading. Your authentic self is what the children will observe and respond to.

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE STORY

- Drawing the characters, the landscapes, the props used in the book.
- Enact the story with the group by assigning different characters to each child.
- Have a discussion about the story book and ask them what they like to do so much? Ask them if they could change the ending of the story? Add new characters?
- Spend time outside reading in the garden if there is availability of space.
- Ask them to write down their daily routine like the tasks Puchku has to do every day, e.g., bathe, eat food, go to school, finish homework.
- Draw or write about their favourite books and share this with their friends.





APPENDIX 2

READ ALOUD SESSION RUBRIC

Read-Aloud Facilitator: _____

CRITERION 1: VOICE AND PRESENTATION

CLARITY OF SPEECH

1. Difficult to understand, unclear pronunciation and inaccurate pausing at punctuation and phrasing.
2. Generally clear, but occasional mispronunciations. Some words may need to be clarified at times with almost accurate punctuation and phrasing.
3. Clear and understandable throughout the session. Pausing at punctuations accurately with correct phrasing of sentences to support understanding of the text.

VOLUME AND EXPRESSION

1. Monotonous or singsong tone, difficult to engage. Little variation in volume or expression.
2. Modulated well and not unnatural or jarring. Some expression used. Limited variation in tone and expression.
3. Engaging tone, appropriate volume, and good expression. Expressive and engaging delivery.

PACING

1. Very slow or rushed, difficult to follow. Inconsistent pace, challenging for students to keep up.
2. The pace is mostly consistent with minor issues. Generally maintains an understandable pace.
3. Well-paced, allowing students to absorb the content. Appropriate and consistent pace.

CRITERION 2: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT - COMMUNICATION

EYE CONTACT

1. Reads from the book and does not connect with the audience. No eye contact with students. Rarely looks at students while reading.
2. Occasional eye contact with some students when reading from the book. Makes some effort to connect visually with students.
3. Regularly makes eye contact and connection with students while reading from the book. Establishes eye contact with various students, fostering engagement.

GESTURES, VOICE & BODY LANGUAGE

1. Limited or no use of gestures. Little to no body, voice or language is used to enhance the story.
2. Some appropriate gestures were used. Utilises some gestures and voice modulation to complement the narrative.
3. Purposeful and effective use of gestures. Engages students through purposeful and expressive gestures, including varied tone, pitch and volume per the story.

CRITERION 3: CONTENT UNDERSTANDING -BOOK SELECTION, DISCUSSIONS, VOCABULARY & COMPREHENSION SKILLS

BOOK & STORY SELECTION

1. Inappropriate or challenging for the age group. Book choice does not resonate with students. Lacks illustrations.
2. Moderately engaging and age-appropriate. The book partially captures students' interest. Includes illustrations.
3. Highly engaging and age-appropriate. The book captivates students and is suitable for their age. Illustrations are highlighted when needed.

DISCUSSIONS: COVER PAGE, ILLUSTRATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

1. Fails to describe the cover page and illustrations and does no translations for students understanding.
2. Sometimes, the title and author information is shared, and the story is translated with vagueness.
3. Cover page discussion is clear. The title & author is included, and the picture book illustrations are visible and well-translated.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. No questions asked or questions that are literal and not open-ended or are unrelated to the story. Fails to check students' understanding effectively.
2. Some relevant and thought-provoking questions. Asks some questions related to the story.
3. Thoughtful and varied questions to assess understanding. Asks meaningful questions to deepen comprehension.

CRITERION 4: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT - LISTENING SKILLS AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

ATTENTION AND PARTICIPATION

1. Students are disengaged or not participating. Students show limited interest and involvement.
2. Most students are attentive and participate. The majority of students engage to some extent.
3. Actively engaged students throughout the session. Students are actively involved and participate enthusiastically.

BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

1. Lack of control and disruptive behaviour. Difficulty managing students' disruptive behaviour.
2. Generally well-managed, occasional issues. Manages most behaviour challenges effectively but could border on a disciplinarian approach.
3. Effectively manages behaviour with a positive approach. Utilises gentle humour and positive strategies to maintain a conducive learning environment.

CRITERION 5: OVERALL IMPACT - KNOWLEDGE, ACTIVITIES & CREATIVITY

ACTIVATION OF BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

1. No attempt to provide context or activate children's background knowledge to enhance comprehension.
2. Some effort to check whether children have contextual understanding and/or may tend to provide lengthy and unnecessary explanations.
3. Ensures that children are provided with context and have sufficient background knowledge to comprehend the story and, at the same time, does not spoon-feed the story to the children

CONNECTION TO REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCES

1. No attempt to relate the story to students' lives. Fails to connect the story to students' experiences.
2. Some effort to relate the story to real life. Attempts to relate the story to some extent.
3. Meaningful connections made to students' lives. Establishes significant connections between the story and students' experiences.

ACTIVITIES

1. No activities and visual aids to illustrate new vocabulary and comprehension skills
2. Engage students in activities to illustrate meaning through repetition and translations
3. Makes meaningful connections through illustrations, visual aids and meaningful activities for comprehension.

SCORE INTERPRETATION

It's important to note that this rubric is designed to provide constructive feedback and support the teacher's growth in their read-aloud skills.

Scores falling in the "Needs Improvement" or "Developing" range must be seen as opportunities for professional development and improvement, while a "Proficient" score signifies a strong performance.

Regular feedback and self-assessment can help teachers continue to enhance their read-aloud sessions and promote effective learning experiences for their students.

SCORE	INTERPRETATION
8-19	Needs Improvement
19-25	Developing
26-39	Proficient



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