

Planning for an Interactive Readaloud with Children in Pre-K, Kindergarten, or 1st Grade¹

As parents and teachers consider how to enhance schooling for children at home, there are many ways that reading books aloud can support reading development. *Interactive* readalouds — which involve not just listening to the words of the book, but ask children to answer questions along the way — can support children’s literacy development, extend their understanding of language, and build their comprehension skills. Re-reading the same book multiple times provides children multiple opportunities to practice using academic language and to express their thinking.

This planning guide contains instructions for how you can conduct readalouds while students are at home. The content of this guide is geared towards students who are pre-kindergarten or in kindergarten or grade 1. The readaloud process in this guide looks the same at different grade levels, but caregivers and teachers should select books with more complex language and themes for older children. The guide can be used in-person by parents and caregivers, or by teachers when interacting with students online.

The guide includes the following:

- Pages 2–3: Preparation and instructions for Readaloud #1, where you stay on the surface of the story.
- Page 4: Preparation and instructions for Readaloud #2, where you go below the surface of the story.
- Page 5: Preparation and instructions for Readaloud #3, where you go deeper into the meaning of the story.
- Page 6: Frequently asked questions.

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Readaloud #1 – Stay on the surface of the story

Preparation:

Read through the book and add sticky notes to pages where you can:

- » Identify the key theme of the book — the moral or the big message.

Theme/message/moral:

- » Prepare definitions of 3–4 key words that are important to the story, but may be challenging for the child.

Key words and child-friendly definitions:

- » Pause to ask 3–4 “on-the-surface” questions about the plot, the characters, or the setting. This type of question helps children clarify the basics of the story (e.g., who the characters are, how they relate to one another, where the story is set, the major events, etc.). On-the-surface questions also help children to understand the importance of the details that contribute to understanding the story.

Examples of On-the-Surface Questions:

- *What is this part mostly about?*
- *What is happening?*
- *Who is involved in what’s happening?*
- *When and where does the story take place?*

Your on-the-surface questions for this book:

Instructions:

1. **Read:** Read the book cover to cover.
 - As you read, define a few key words:
 - Explain what the word means in child-friendly terms. Use the word in complete sentences (e.g., “surround” means all around).
 - Provide a few examples of how the word can be used (e.g., “the friends surrounded the birthday cake”).
2. **Talk:** Pause during reading to ask 3–4 on-the-surface questions about the setting, the plot, and the characters.
3. **Write/Draw:** After the book has been read and discussed, have the child write about and/or draw a picture of one or more of their responses.

Readaloud #2 – Go below the surface of the story

Preparation:

Read through the book and add sticky notes to pages where you can:

- » Choose specific sections of the book to read again. Select parts that are central to the theme of the book (the moral or the big message).

Page #s:

- » Prepare 3–4 “below-the-surface” questions for the sections that emphasize the theme. This type of question helps children think about what the text infers. These questions probe the child’s thinking to get to the deeper meanings that the author doesn’t explicitly state.

Examples of Below-the-Surface Questions:

- *How does the author let us know _____? What words in the book make us think this?*
- *Why does _____ happen? How do we know?*
- *What if _____? How do we know?*
- *Would _____? How do we know?*

Your below-the-surface questions for this book:

Instructions:

1. **Read:** Read select parts of the book aloud, pausing to ask some below-the-surface questions that build toward understanding the theme of the story.
2. **Talk:** Pause during reading to ask below-the-surface questions. Encourage the child to respond in complete sentences.
3. **Write/Draw:** After the book has been read and discussed, have the child write about and/or draw a picture of one or more of their responses.

Readaloud #3 – Go deeper into the meaning of the story

Preparation:

Read through the book and add sticky notes to pages where you can:

- » Choose specific sections of the book to read again that allow the child to think about the theme of the book (the moral or the big message).

Page #s:

- » Prepare 1–2 “deeper-dive” questions. These types of questions support children in thinking more deeply about the meanings the author is trying to convey in the text, such as the author’s purpose, how the author conveys the theme, or how illustrations enhance the story.

Examples of Deeper-Dive Questions:

- *What do you think the author wants us to understand about _____?*
- *How does the author use this picture to show us _____?*
- *How does the main character change? What do you think made them change?*
- *What do you think the author wants us to learn about _____?*
- *What does the author want us to know about _____?*

Your deeper-dive questions for this book:

Instructions:

1. **Read:** Read the selected parts of the book aloud, pausing to ask 1–2 deeper-dive questions that target understanding the theme (moral or message) of the story.
2. **Talk:** Pause during reading to ask deeper-dive questions. Encourage the child to respond in complete sentences.
3. **Write/Draw:** After the book has been read and discussed, have the child write about and/or draw a picture of one or more of their responses.
4. **Optional extension:** Have the child write about or draw a picture of their own personal connections to the theme (moral or message) of the story.

How to adapt the readaloud plan for informational books

Informational books do not have a theme, like storybooks do, but include facts and descriptions of actual people, places, or things. You want to make sure that the child understands that informational books are different from stories, and that they become familiar with the specific vocabulary of the book. The questions would differ from storybooks, for example:

On-the-surface questions:

- What is the topic of this book? Who or what is this book mostly about?
 - *Who is involved?*
 - *What is happening?*
 - *Is the section telling what _____ is, has, does, or is like?*
 - *When and where is it happening?*
- How does this picture help us to understand _____?

Below-the-surface questions:

- *Why does _____ happen? How do we know?*
- *What if _____? How do we know?*
- *Would _____? How do we know?*

Deeper-dive questions:

- *What do you think the author wants us to understand about _____?*
- *Why is _____ important?*
- *How does this book connect to the bigger idea of _____?*