



Repeated Interactive Read-Alouds in Preschool and Kindergarten

By: [Lea M. McGee](#), [Judith Schickedanz](#)



Research has demonstrated that the most effective read-alouds are those where children are actively involved asking and answering questions and making predictions, rather than passively listening. This article describes in detail a technique for a three-step interactive read-aloud using sophisticated storybooks.

Abstract

Repeated interactive read-alouds, a systematic method of reading aloud, allow teachers to scaffold children's understanding of the book being read, model strategies for making inferences and explanations, and teach vocabulary and concepts. A storybook is read three times in slightly different ways in order to increase the amount and quality of children's analytical talk as they answer carefully crafted questions. During the first reading, teachers introduce the story's problem, insert comments, ask a few key questions, and finally ask a "why" question calling for extended explanation. This is accompanied by elaborations on a few key vocabulary words. Second reads capitalize on children's

growing comprehension of the story by providing enriched vocabulary explanations and asking additional inference and explanation questions. Third reads consist of guided reconstruction of the story in which children recount information as well as provide explanations and commentary.

These techniques have shown to be effective in increasing children's engagement, understanding, and appreciation of literature in preschool and kindergarten settings.

Introduction

Research is mixed on the value of reading aloud to children aged 3 to 6. On one hand, researchers have validated that reading aloud affects vocabulary development (Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Whitehurst et al., 1999), acquisition of literary syntax and vocabulary (Purcell-Gates, McIntyre, & Freppon, 1995), story recall (Morrow & Smith, 1990), and sensitivity to the linguistic and organizational structures of narrative and informational text (Duke & Kays, 1998). Studies have shown that preschoolers make gains in expressive language even when the duration of story reading interventions are short (e.g., Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000). In contrast, researchers have found only a modest relationship between the frequency and quality of parent-child read-alouds during preschool and later first-grade reading achievement (Scarborough & Dobrich, 1994). Researchers have also found a negative relationship between the amount of time teachers spend reading aloud in kindergarten and children's decoding skills (Meyer, Wardrop, Stahl, & Linn, 1994). These studies suggest that merely reading books aloud is not sufficient for accelerating children's oral vocabulary development and listening comprehension. Instead, the way books are shared with children matters.

[Back to Top](#)

Effective read-aloud techniques

Research has demonstrated that the most effective read-alouds are those in which children are actively involved asking and answering questions and making predictions rather than passively listening (Dickinson, 2001). These read-alouds are called interactive or dialogic and result in gains in vocabulary (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000), comprehension strategies and story schema (Van den Broek, 2001), and concept development (Wasik & Bond, 2001). Merely inviting children to talk during interactive read-alouds, however, is not sufficient to accelerate their literacy development. Instead, growth is related to how frequently they engage in analytic talk (Dickinson & Smith, 1994). Analytic talk involves making predictions or inferences that explain a character's motivation or connect events from different parts of the story. Teachers prompt children to engage in analytical thinking by making comments that model such thinking and then asking thoughtful questions.

Other activities boost the value of reading aloud to young children. For example, research has demonstrated that the following activities increase comprehension and language development: inviting preschoolers and kindergartners to retell or dramatize stories (Cornell, Sénéchal, & Brodo, 1988; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982); reading several books on a similar topic and inviting children to play with objects related to the concepts or characters introduced in these books (Rowe, 1998; Wasik & Bond, 2001); reading a book repeatedly (Crago & Crago, 1976); inserting short definitions for some

words while reading aloud (Collins, 2004; Elley, 1989); and encouraging children to use these same words when they answer questions, discuss book events, (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Robbins & Ehri, 1994), or describe illustrations (Reese & Cox, 1999). Thus, effective interactive read-alouds include a systematic approach that incorporates teachers' modeling of higher-level thinking, asking thoughtful questions calling for analytic talk, prompting children to recall a story in some way within a reasonable time frame, reading a single book repeatedly, and reading books related by topic. It also involves a systematic approach to developing children's understanding of vocabulary, such as inserting short definitions of words and phrases during reading.

Two recent methods for reading aloud to children aged 3 to 6 include many of these research-based techniques. Klesius and Griffith (1996) described a technique for reading aloud to small groups of at-risk kindergartners that they claimed extended children's talk about books. Using interactive read-alouds, teachers point to details in illustrations and ask questions about vocabulary words as they read. They extend children's responses by asking them to clarify and explain. After reading, children recall a portion of, or the entire, story. Beck and McKeown (2001) developed a similar technique, called Text Talk, to help kindergarten and primary-grade children expand vocabulary. As teachers read, they draw attention to a few vocabulary words by inserting short definitions. They also ask open-ended questions in which children must provide explanations rather than one-or two-word responses. After reading, teachers discuss vocabulary words in the context of the story and in other contexts.

[Back to Top](#)

Our experiences with effective read-aloud practices

As researchers and practitioners of early literacy development, we have demonstrated and observed teachers reading aloud in hundreds of preschool and kindergarten classrooms over the last three decades. Despite the wealth of research on effective read-alouds and practical models for such approaches, we have noticed that fewer teachers seem to be attempting to read what we consider sophisticated stories and nonfiction books in preschool and kindergarten in favor of reading easier, predictable, and concept books (often in Big Book format), especially in classrooms with high percentages of at-risk children. Sophisticated picture books include, for example, stories in which readers must infer characters' motivations and thoughts and connect them to actions (i.e., causes and effects). These books have a rich repertoire of vocabulary. Examples include *Henny Penny* (Galdone, 1968), *Oonga Boonga* (Wishinsky, 2001), and *Owl Moon* (Yolen, 1987). These books can be contrasted with predictable books in which readers do not need to infer character motivation, feelings, or thoughts in order to enjoy the repeated words and actions. Examples include *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* (Martin, 1967) or *Over in the Meadow* (Wadsworth, 1992). While predictable books have a role in preschool and kindergarten literacy programs, sophisticated picture books play an additional role of expanding vocabulary and enhancing oral comprehension.

Because we were aware that fewer teachers seemed to be reading sophisticated picture books as a daily part of their early literacy programs, we worried that many children were not engaging in analytic talk. As we wondered how we could help teachers systematically promote this kind of talk, we considered Cochran-Smith's (1984) argument that effective teachers model the role of ideal reader

as they read aloud. An ideal reader is one who intuitively and unconsciously makes appropriate inferences and predictions and constantly rethinks current events in a story in relation to past events. Thus, effective teachers model what ideal readers do by explicitly talking aloud as they read, making children aware that they are predicting, making an inference, or changing their ideas about what is happening in a story. While thinking aloud is a frequently used technique to help children interpret literature in the elementary grades (e.g., Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Miller, 2002), we wanted to adapt this technique for much younger children. We wanted teachers to model making comments that would reveal implicit information that preschool and kindergarten children would not likely be able to produce on their own. Therefore, we crafted an approach to reading aloud to reflect insights drawn from current research and theories of an ideal reader as well as our own experiences. The purpose of this article is to describe what we call repeated interactive read-alouds using sophisticated storybooks.

[Back to Top](#)

Repeated interactive read-alouds: first reading of a picture storybook

The first read-aloud includes four components: book introduction, vocabulary support techniques, analytical comments and questions, and an after-reading "why" question. These techniques have been carefully selected to help children build a stronger first understanding of the story, including some of its vocabulary.

Book introductions

Research has shown that effective readers quickly begin to infer story problems and use their tentative ideas about problems to process story information (Van den Broek, 2001). However, problems present challenges for young children: They are often not directly stated in the text (Paris & Paris, 2003; Stein & Glenn, 1979), and young children are relatively insensitive to problems and goals compared to characters and actions (Benson, 1997; Stein & Glenn). Because young children are not likely to focus on the story problem, we craft book introductions to make the problem explicit.

For example, *Henny Penny* (Galdone, 1968) is about a hen who mistakenly believes that a piece of sky has fallen on her head. She is so upset by this event that she acts foolishly and rushes to tell the king about this occurrence. She does not recognize the danger posed by the fox when he invites her and her friends to take a short cut right into his cave (the actual problem of the story, which only readers and not the characters realize). In order to construct a three- or four-sentence introduction we either explicitly state or strongly imply the main problem of the story. For example, to introduce *Henny Penny* we might say,

In this story you are going to meet a silly, foolish hen who makes a big mistake. She thinks a catastrophe, a really bad disaster, is about to happen and runs to tell the king about it. A lot of her friends believe her mistake, and they all get in trouble because they are so silly.

As we give the book introduction, we show the front cover and sometimes the back cover or end papers and the title page (rather than all the illustrations as is done in a picture walk). For example, the front cover of Henny Penny illustrates the main character and the end papers depict Henny Penny running up a hill toward a castle. As we show these pages we complete the book introduction:

Here is Henny Penny running to tell the king about the catastrophe. But I have to warn you, she never makes it to the castle. Let's find out what happens to her on the way to tell the king about the catastrophe.

We do not recommend that, during a first read, teachers have children identify book parts such as the front and back cover or top and bottom of the page, tell what the author or illustrator does, or discuss the dedication page. We have found that these activities divert children's attention away from the main goal of a first read-aloud-to enjoy a good story by focusing on its meaning. As we read a book during a first read, we use expression, gestures and dramatic pauses, variations in the pace of reading, and plenty of eye contact. We have found these techniques highly effective at capturing and maintaining children's interest and enjoyment, even when reading longer and more sophisticated books.

Inserting vocabulary support

Before reading the book aloud, we select 5 to 10 vocabulary words or phrases from the book that we will highlight or define during reading. These words are critical to understanding the story and are likely to be encountered in other books or useful in nonbook contexts (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). Sometimes the book does not include specific vocabulary that ideal readers would use in their analytical thinking about this particular book, so we insert these additional vocabulary words into the book introduction and our comments as we read aloud. For example, we would insert the words mistake, catastrophe, disaster, and foolish while reading Henny Penny because these words are critical for analyzing the problem in relationship to the main character's motivations and traits. Once we select vocabulary words and phrases, we highlight the words or enhance word and phrase meanings in one or more of five ways:

1. We insert a short phrase or sentence that defines or explains a word, such as saying "Feast, that's a really big dinner."
2. We point to salient parts of the illustration that help clarify a word or phrase meaning, such as pointing to the illustration of an acorn as we read the word in the text.
3. We use dramatic gestures, such as demonstrating the meaning of shrugged by shrugging our shoulders as we read.
4. We use voice, such as making clear the fox's sly intentions by reading the text with a droll voice.
5. We vary the pacing with which we read words or phrases, such as reading more quickly what Henny Penny says to demonstrate her foolish rush.

It only takes a few moments to plan how to support children's understanding of each word, but the most effective read-alouds are ones in which we actually decide which of the vocabulary enhancers we will use for each vocabulary word. For words that are to be clarified verbally, we plan short

explanations that are "slipped" into the story reading so the definitions are part of the actual story without interrupting the flow of reading.

Comments and questions to support and extend comprehension

During reading we make comments that demonstrate analytic thinking at three or four junctures in which ideal readers would make inferences about a character's thoughts, feelings, or motivations, or we predict upcoming events. When we comment about the story, we often use language to signal our mental activity by using the phrase "I'm thinking." For example, in the scene where Henny Penny exclaims, "The sky is falling. I must go and tell the king" (unpaged), we may comment, "I'm thinking this is where the hen is doing something really foolish. She isn't even looking down to try and find out what really hit her. I think she is looking up instead of down." Then we would go on to ask, "Why does the hen think a piece of the sky has fallen on her head?" We have found that children's answers to questions following our analytical comments are more likely to be related to the story. This teaching sequence provides a deliberate and systematic approach toward expanding children's comprehension. We have noticed that most young children are not yet capable of engaging in analytic thinking and talking without teacher modeling or questioning.

After-reading questions

After reading the entire book, we ask a "why" question requiring children to make inferences about and explain several story events. Then we use follow-up probing questions to support children's ability to answer broader explanation questions. For example, after a first reading of Henny Penny, we might ask the explanation question "Why didn't Foxy Loxy just jump up and eat those silly birds? Why did he lead them into his cave?" In order to help children answer this question we might comment, "I'm thinking that even though the fox is strong and has big teeth, there are a lot of birds. How many friends were with Henny Penny?" Recalling the number of birds will help children infer that the fox may have only been able to catch and eat one of the birds and the others might have escaped. We also help children consider this question by using illustrations to support their thinking. In this version of the story, the last illustration shows Foxy Loxy and Mrs. Loxy and their seven children peering out from the cave. We turn to this illustration and say, "You know I'm remembering this illustration right here. This might give me a hint about why the fox led the birds into the cave. What is the hint?" This comment might help children infer that Foxy led the birds into the cave so that his children would also have a dinner, and his wife could help catch the birds.

[Back to Top](#)

Second interactive read-aloud

Second read-alouds occur a day or two after first reads. The purpose is to enrich children's comprehension of the story and provide further opportunities for children to engage in analytic talk. During second book introductions, we remind children that they have read this book before and that they will remember some things from the book; for example, we might say,

We read this book yesterday, and you probably remember that it is about a hen who misinterprets something that happened to her. Who can remember what she thought happened to her? What was the catastrophe, and what did she decide to do about it?

We continue to highlight the same vocabulary; however, in a second read we verbally define more words. For example, during a first read of *Owl Moon*, in which a father and a child go owling in the woods late one night, we might simply dramatize how the owl pumped his wings. During the second read, we would dramatize pumped and insert a verbal explanation (e.g., "That means he flapped his wings up and down very hard").

During the second read, we continue modeling analytic comments, but we ask more frequent questions that help children make additional inferences. In the first read, our comments focus on getting children to infer what the main character is thinking and feeling or to connect main events with their causes. Thus, our comments and questions during the second read might focus on the other characters' motivations or thoughts. Just as in a first read, we prepare children to answer analytical questions by first modeling analytic comments that make explicit some, but not all, of the information needed to adequately answer the question. For example, in *Henny Penny*, after Cocky Locky asks to join Henny Penny on her way to tell the king that the sky is falling, we might comment, "I'm thinking that Cocky Locky believes that a piece of the sky really did fall on Henny Penny's head." Later, when Ducky Lucky joins Henny Penny and Cocky Locky, we comment, "Henny Penny has now convinced two other birds that the sky is falling." Then we could ask, "If they had been with Henny Penny when the acorn fell on her head, what do you think they would have said when she shouted, 'Oh, my, the sky is falling, we must go and tell the king'?"

Like first reads, we end second reads by asking another explanation question. Sometimes we ask children about something that might happen beyond the story. For example, we might ask, "What do you think the king would have done if Henny Penny had managed to get to the castle and told him the sky was falling?"

[Back to Top](#)

Third interactive read-aloud

Third reads occur a few days after the second read when the story is still fresh in children's minds but when they must remember information across some time. This close repetition is also important for reinforcing vocabulary carefully developed during the first and second read. Third interactive read-alouds differ from first and second read-alouds because they integrate a guided reconstruction of the story with the teacher's reading of some of the story text. Reconstructions are retellings of story events along with explanations about what caused those events and what characters are thinking during the events. Therefore, guided reconstructions are more effective than mere retellings because children use analytical talk to explain why events occurred.

In third read-aloud book introductions, we again acknowledge that children are familiar with the book and its content and ask questions about the title or characters, such as "We've read this book two times before, so I know you know its title. What is it?" We usually allow children to respond together to this

easily answered question. We might continue to prompt children to reconstruct information by asking, "What other details do we see on the cover that we know are important for the story?" (e.g., prompting children to notice the acorn on the front cover of *Henny Penny*). We continue to focus on the story problem by asking, "We all remember Henny Penny's problem, don't we? Who would like to share that with us?" We are very careful with the number of questions we ask both during book introductions and during guided reconstruction. We have found that third read-alouds can become deadly when teachers overwhelm students with a barrage of questions.

We use two general prompts in guiding reconstruction of texts. Before reading some pages of the story, we point to the illustration and ask, "What's happening here?" We use this prompt as we show a double-spread illustration. Sometimes we use the second question "Do you remember what will happen next?" before turning to the next illustration. We only use this question when the next event is causally related to the event the children have just recalled. For example, in *Owl Moon* after reconstructing the event in which the characters hear the owl hoot in response to the dad's call, we might ask, "Do you remember what happens next?" because this scene provides a connection to the next event: seeing the owl.

After children reconstruct the events on one double spread, we might read the text. On longer books, we reread many pages of the text and have children reconstruct only a few pages; on shorter books, we allow children to reconstruct more of the story and read only a few pages of the text. The length of the book and children's responses guide our decisions of whether to read more or engage children in more reconstruction.

In third reads, teachers continue to insert verbal explanations of words, point to illustrations, and make dramatic motions. To further emphasize vocabulary in a third read, teachers extend some word meanings to a familiar context but not one included in the story. For example, to extend children's understanding of the word pumped in *Owl Moon*, we might say, Sometimes, when you are on the swings outside and want help we tell you to "pump your legs," and you move them back and forth to make yourself go up and back on the swing. The owl was moving his wings-pumping them up and down to fly through the sky.

Thus, each day of the repeated interactive read-aloud systematically builds and extends children's awareness and understanding of vocabulary. Table 1 presents an overview of the components for the three days of repeated interactive read-alouds.

Table 1. Components of repeated interactive read-aloud

	First read-aloud	Second read-aloud	Third read-aloud: Guided reconstruction
Book introduction	Give a few sentences introducing the main character and central problem. Use illustrations on the book cover, back, and title page as needed.	Remind children that they know the characters and some things the character does. Ask questions about the characters and problem.	Invite children to identify the problem and describe the solution. Have children recall the title of the book.

Book reading	Insert vocabulary enhancements for 5-10 vocabulary words by pointing to illustrations, gesturing dramatically, or inserting a few definitions. Make comments that reveal what the main character is thinking or feeling. Ask a few follow-up analytical questions based on your comments.	Insert vocabulary enhancements for the same vocabulary, including more verbal definitions. Make comments that reveal what other characters are thinking or feeling. Ask more analytical follow-up questions.	Before reading a double page, show the illustration and ask, "What is happening here?" Follow up children's comments by extending comments or asking for clarification. Read some of the pages of text. When appropriate, before turning to the next page, ask, "Who remembers what will happen next?" Call attention to some vocabulary in different contexts.
After-reading discussion	Ask a "why" question that calls for explanation. Use follow-up questions to prompt answers. Demonstrate how to answer the question by saying, "I'm thinking...."	Ask another "why" question or ask, "What would have happened if...?" Use follow-up questions to prompt children's thinking.	Ask another "why" question or ask, "What would have happened if...?"

[Back to Top](#)

Repeated interactive read-alouds in action

Across three days of reading the same book, the strategies used in repeated interactive read-alouds provide children with an opportunity to engage more actively in the reading experience. During a first read, teachers take a more active role by reading the text and making comments; children are actively listening and sometimes comment or answer questions. During a second read, children participate more verbally by answering questions and commenting more frequently. In the third read-aloud, children take a highly active role as they reconstruct the story with teacher guidance. The following excerpts are taken from book introductions in a first, second, and third read of a story. They demonstrate how children's participation changes across time.

First read-aloud: Book introduction

In the story *Oonga Boonga*, no one can quiet Baby Louise who is crying so loudly that pictures fall off walls, neighborhood animals flee, and neighbors come calling to help. Despite attempts by every family member, only Louise's brother Daniel can soothe her. We read this book three times to a group of 4-year-olds in a Head Start center.

Teacher: Today I'm going to read you a book called *Oonga Boonga*, and this story is about Baby Louise (points to front cover with illustration of Baby Louise and Daniel smiling at one another, then turns to the back cover and points to illustration of Baby Louise crying). Baby Louise is unhappy. She's crying and crying, and no one can stop her. I know one reason why babies cry; they cry because they're hungry. They cry when they're bored and want to see something funny. We're going to find out why Baby Louise is crying and what will help her stop crying. (Turns back to front cover) Here is Baby Louise and she's not crying is she? This might give us a hint about what stops her from crying.

In this book introduction, Lea (first author) provided reasons why babies might cry and hinted strongly at what would make Baby Louise stop crying by showing the front illustration of Daniel and Louise. She did all the talking while the children were actively listening.

Second read-aloud: Book introduction

The following day Lea read the book a second time to the children. She prompted the children to take a more active role in constructing the book introduction.

Teacher: (Holds book up)

Children: (Overlapping responses) Oonga boonga, oonga boonga, that baby was crying, her brother came back, he say oonga boonga.

Teacher: That's right, yes (making eye contact with many different children to affirm their comments about the story). Now, in this story Baby Louise has a big problem.

Child: She crying.

Teacher: She is crying. She is very upset. Now the front of this book (pointing) shows us the solution to the problem.

Child: She happy.

Teacher: She is happy. What is the solution to the problem of Baby Louise crying? (Flips to back cover)

Several children: Oonga boonga.

Teacher: (Flips to front cover) Yes, Daniel (points to him on the cover) says, "oonga boonga" and makes her feel good. We're going to read the story again today and watch and see what all the other people do to try and soothe Baby Louise. Baby Louise is very upset. She's wailing and crying. Nobody could make her stop.

Several children: Oonga boonga.

The second book introduction was jointly constructed by Lea and the children. Lea allowed and encouraged spontaneous comments and prompted the children to recall what they knew about the

story.

Third read-aloud: Guided reconstruction book introduction

In the book introduction for the third read, Lea again prompted children's active engagement by asking them to reconstruct more of the story. The children remembered much of the discussion they had during the second read-aloud and included speculations of what might have happened if Daniel had tried alternative ways to quiet Baby Louise.

Teacher:	I know you remember the title of this book.
Several children:	<i>Oonga Boonga</i> . Teacher: Yes, <i>Oonga Boonga</i> . And who can remember the problem in the story?
Children:	(Overlapping responses) Crying, brother Daniel stopped the crying, oonga boonga.
Teacher:	Yes the baby is crying and crying. Can mother stop the baby crying?
Many children:	No, no.
Teacher:	Can father stop her?
Many children:	No, no, her brother.
Teacher: Yes,	Daniel stopped the baby from crying, and he stops her crying in two ways. The first way...
Several children:	Oonga boonga.
Teacher:	Yes, he says, "Oonga boonga." The second way he stops her crying? Do you remember?
Child:	Tickles her tummy.
Teacher:	Yes, we did talk that he might have tickled her tummy when we read this two days ago.
Child:	Sings a song.
Teacher:	Yes, we did talk about that he might have sung a lullaby. But he actually whispered something else.
Many children:	Bonka wonka.
Teacher:	Yes, he said another silly thing: Bonka wonka.

Thus, across these three introductions, it is clear that the children are building a richer, more detailed understanding of the story. By the third read, the children are clearly using analytic talk to move beyond what actually happened in the story to what might have happened.

[Back to Top](#)

Analytic talk in first and third read "why" questions

In the next section, we show how children's ability to use analytic talk increases from a first to a third interactive read-aloud. Here is their response to a "why" question during the first read:

Teacher: Why was Louise crying all the time?

Child: 'Cause her brother was, her brother was gone.

Teacher: Her brother wasn't there, and why was Louise crying?

Child: 'Cause she was crying.

Teacher: But why was she crying?

She wanted her brother to say, "oonga boonga."

Child:

Teacher: She did want her brother. Did she want the words "oonga boonga" or did she want her brother?

Child: Her brother.

Teacher: Yes, she just wanted her brother.

The children were able to make explicit that Baby Louise was crying because she wanted her brother. They were beginning to grasp that the silly words her brother said had nothing to do with Louise stopping crying; it was her brother she wanted. Lea continued to explore this inference in both the second and third read with different "why" questions. By the third read, most children engaged in a more extended analytic discussion.

Teacher: Now, let's think about this. Remember I said yesterday, "What if Daniel had tickled her belly instead of saying 'Bonka wonka.'" Would Louise have stopped crying?

Children: (Overlapping responses) No, no. He whispered in her ear. Yes.

Teacher: I think she would have stopped crying.

Child: He whistled in her ear.

Teacher: You know, maybe if he would've whistled in her ear and tickled the baby, I think she would have stopped crying. Because he was her brother, and he, well, let me ask you this: What if her brother took her in his arms like this (turns to picture of the mother rocking baby) and rocked her and sang her a lullaby. Do you think she would've stopped crying?

Children: (Overlapping responses) Yes, yes, no.

Teacher: (Looks at one child) I do, too. I think she would have stopped crying. What if Daniel had taken her in his arms like this (shows illustration of grandfather) and made a funny face at her. Do you think she would have stopped crying?

Children: (Overlapping responses) Yes, yes, no.

Teacher: I think so. If Daniel played the harmonica, would it work for him?

Child: It did.

Teacher: I think it would work. What if Daniel gave the baby a bottle? Do you think it would've stopped her crying?

Child: Yes.

Teacher: She really liked it when Daniel said silly words, but I think she just likes her brother.

Child: She don't care about oonga boona. She care about her brother.

While Lea's original "why" question seemed beyond the children's understanding, turning to specific illustrations and posing alternative questions allowed children to be more successful in both understanding the questions and making the inferences needed to answer them. Most children realized that Daniel, not the silly words, was the key to getting Baby Louise to stop crying.

As shown in the excerpts from the three repeated readings of *Oonga Boonga*, our experiences suggest it is a powerful technique for extending children's vocabulary, their use of comprehension strategies, and their engagement with literature. We are consultants and directors of several Early Reading First grants currently using a repeated interactive read-aloud approach. While repeated interactive story reading is certainly not the only strategy used to enhance vocabulary and comprehension in these programs, it is the most systematic approach. The repeated interactive read-aloud approach requires that teachers study closely each book they read. They must craft effective comments and questions and be able to respond on the spot to children's answers, which often indicate misinterpretations and misunderstandings. However, it is critical that teachers use these strategies so that children engage in analytical thinking. We recommend that teachers read aloud a sophisticated picture book daily, along with many other kinds of books, including predictable books. Teachers with whom we have worked include repeated interactive read-alouds of a sophisticated storybook or nonfiction as a part of their daily whole-group literacy instruction.

[Back to Top](#)

Final thoughts

We have shown that the repeated interactive read-aloud technique is a research-based approach to comprehension and vocabulary development in preschool and kindergarten. We developed this approach to help teachers share picture books with young children, especially children with few home literary experiences, in ways that will allow them to enjoy our most sophisticated literature. It challenges both teachers and children to extend their thinking and their literary understanding in analytic discussions.

[Back to Top](#)

About the authors

McGee teaches at The Ohio State University (Ramseyer Hall, 29 W. Woodruff Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210, USA). E-mail mcgee.148@osu.edu. Schickedanz teaches at Boston University in Massachusetts.

[References](#)

References

Click the "References" link above to hide these references.

Beck, I.L., & McKeown, M.G. (2001). Text talk: Capturing the benefits of read-aloud experiences for young children. *The Reading Teacher*, 55, 10-20.

Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., & Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction. Solving problems in the teaching of literacy*. New York: Guilford.

Benson, M.S. (1997). Psychological causation and goal-based episodes: Low-income children's emerging narrative skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 439-457.
doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(97)90021-1

Cochran-Smith, M. (1984). *The making of a reader*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Collins, M. (2004). *ESL preschoolers' English vocabulary acquisition and story comprehension from storybook reading*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Boston University.

Cornell, E.H., Sénéchal, M., & Brodo, L.S. (1988). Recall of picture books by 3-year-old children: Testing and repetition effects in joint reading activities. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80, 537-542. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.80.4.537

Crago, H., & Crago, M. (1976). The untrained eye? A preschool child explores Felix Hoffman's "Rapunzel." *Children's Literature in Education*, 22, 135-151.

Dickinson, D. (2001). Book reading in preschool classrooms: Is recommended practice common? In D.K Dickinson & P.O. Tabors (Eds.), *Building literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school* (pp. 175-203). Baltimore: Brookes.

Dickinson, D.K., & Smith, M.W. (1994). Long-term effects of preschool teachers' book readings on low-income children's vocabulary and story comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 29, 104-122. doi:10.2307/747807

Duke, N.K., & Kays, J. (1998). "Can I say 'once upon a time'?: Kindergarten children developing knowledge of information book language. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 13, 295-318.
doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(99)80041-6

Elley, W. (1989). Vocabulary acquisition from listening to stories. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 24, 174-187. doi:10.2307/747863

Hargrave, A.C., & Sénéchal, M. (2000). A book reading intervention with preschool children who have limited vocabularies: The benefits of regular reading and dialogic reading. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15, 75-90. doi:10.1016/S0885-2006(99)00038-1

Keene, E.O., & Zimmermann, S. (1997). *Mosaic of thought: Teaching comprehension in a reader's workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Klesius, J.P., & Griffith, P.L. (1996). Interactive storybook reading for at-risk learners. *The Reading*

Teacher, 49, 552-560.

Meyer, L.A., Wardrop, J.S., Stahl, S.A., & Linn, R.L. (1994). Effects of reading storybooks aloud to children. *Journal of Educational Research*, 88, 69-85.

Miller, D. (2002). *Reading with meaning: Teaching comprehension in the primary grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Morrow, L.M., & Smith, J.K. (1990). The effects of group size on interactive storybook reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 25, 213-231. doi:10.2307/748003

Paris, A.H., & Paris, S.G. (2003). Assessing narrative comprehension in young children. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 38, 36-76. doi:10.1598/RRQ.38.1.3

Pellegrini, A.D., & Galda, L. (1982). The effects of thematic-fantasy play training on the development of children's story comprehension. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19, 443-452. doi:10.2307/1162724

Purcell-Gates, V., McIntyre, E., & Freppon, P.A. (1995). Learning written storybook language in school: A comparison of low-SES children in skills-based and whole language classrooms. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32, 659-685.

Reese, E., & Cox, A. (1999). Quality of adult book reading affects children's emergent literacy. *Developmental Psychology*, 35, 20-28. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.35.1.20

Robbins, C., & Ehri, L.C. (1994). Reading storybooks to kindergartners helps them learn new vocabulary words. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 86, 54-64. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.86.1.54

Rowe, D. (1998). The literate potentials of book-related dramatic play. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 33, 10-35. doi:10.1598/RRQ.33.1.2

Scarborough, H.S., & Dobrich, W., (1994). On the efficacy of reading to preschoolers. *Developmental Review*, 14, 245-302. doi:10.1006/drev.1994.1010

Stein, N.L., & Glenn, C.G. (1979). An analysis of story comprehension in elementary school children. In R.O. Freedle (Ed.), *New directions in discourse processing* (Vol. 2, pp. 53-120). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Van den Broek, P. (2001). *The role of television viewing in the development of reading comprehension*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Wasik, B.A., & Bond, M.A. (2001). Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93, 243-250. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.93.2.243

Whitehurst, G.J., Crone, D.A., Zevnbergen, A.A., Schultz, M.D., Velting, O.N., & Fischel, J.E. (1999). Outcomes of an emergent literacy intervention from Head Start through second grade. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 91, 261-272. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.91.2.261

Literature cited

Galdone, P. (1968). *Henny Penny*. New York: Seabury Press.

Martin, Jr, B. (1967). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Wadsworth, O. (1992). *Over in the meadow: An old counting rhyme*. New York: Scholastic.

Wishinsky, F. (2001). *Oonga boonga*. New York: Puffin

Yolen, J. (1987). *Owl moon*. New York: Philomel Books.

McGee, Lea M., & Schickedanz, Judith A. (2007). Repeated interactive read-alouds in preschool and kindergarten. *The Reading Teacher*, 60(8), 742-751.

Reprints

For any reprint requests, please contact the author or publisher listed.

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more you learn, the more places you'll go." — Dr. Seuss