



# Shared Book Reading: A Great Way for Teachers to Boost Young Children's Vocabulary

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Shared book reading is an interactive way to read to young children, particularly children birth through 8 years old. Adults and children share the reading experience and explore books together. This helps build children's brains and get them ready to learn to read on their own. It also encourages a love of reading.<sup>1,2</sup>

Shared book reading can be done with one child, small groups of children, or a whole classroom. Below are three steps to shared book reading.<sup>1,2</sup>

## Shared Book Reading: Before, During, & After Reading<sup>1-3</sup>

### Step 1 - Preview Together First

- **Preview the cover.** Read the title and author. Ask children what they think the book will be about.
- **Look through the book with children before reading.** Point out characters and interesting pictures.
- **Point out words children may not be familiar with.** Ask children to talk about what they think the word

means. Use a kid-friendly definition using words they already know.

- **Use props or examples that help children understand new words.** For example, take children outside and show them a real tree, or hold up your hands to teach right and left.

### Step 2 - Interact During Reading

- **Ask children open-ended questions.** This helps them think more deeply and talk about each part of the story.
- **Get into character.** Ask children how they think each character might sound. Ask them to join in using different voices.
- **Ask children to help you read.** When a book repeats the same words and phrases, ask children to say them with you while you read.
- **Ask children to make predictions.** Stop after reading an exciting part of the story. Ask what they think will happen next.

- **Stop to answer children's questions.** Encourage questions - they show that the children are trying to connect with the story.

### Step 3 - Review After Reading

- **Ask children open-ended questions.** Ask how their predictions matched the story. Ask why characters acted or felt the way they did.
- **Review new words.** Ask them where they heard each word in the story. Ask them to explain or show you what the word means.
- **Read the same book multiple times.** This helps children build stronger connections and learn new words.
- **Talk about the story again later.** While children are playing, help them make connections back to the story and the new words they learned.



## Helpful Tips

### Choose Developmentally Appropriate Books<sup>4</sup>

- **Choose books that are just right for their age.** Choose books that have many familiar words and a few new words. Librarians, teachers, parents, and children can help you find new and interesting books to read.
- **Find books that match children's interests.** Reading books about topics children are interested in helps keep their attention. It also helps you build relationships with children.
- **Look for books with diverse characters.** Find books with characters from different cultures, languages, and types of families. Make sure that all children have a chance to see a positive character that is like them, as well as those who are different from them.

### Teach New Vocabulary Words<sup>2,3</sup>

Look through the pages of the book by yourself first. Find words that will be helpful and fun for children to learn:

- **Key words** - words that will help the children understand the story.
- **New words** - words that the children do not hear or use regularly.
- **Rich words** - words that sound interesting or are fun to say. These are often words that authors use to describe things such as slimy, topsy-turvy, or hefty

### Ask Open-Ended Questions<sup>1,2</sup>

**Open-ended questions** let children answer with more than just one word like "yes" or "no". Use open-ended questions to help children practice using new words and explain their thoughts.

After you ask an open-ended question, give children time to think. Think time helps children prepare what they want to say and not feel rushed. Nonverbal children may respond with a facial

#### Try open-ended questions like these:

- Why do you think the girl did not want to eat the tomato? (Instead of: Did the girl eat the tomato?)
- How did the boys find their lost dog? (Instead of: Did the boys find their dog?)
- What do you think the team is going to do after losing their game? (Instead of: How many points did the team score?)

### With mixed age groups:<sup>3</sup>

- **Find a comfortable space.** Make sure everyone can all hear and see well.
- **Make sure everyone gets to talk.** Model respect and turn-taking. Even infants have important things to "say" when they smile, giggle, and move their bodies.

- **Mix it up.** Take turns between books that have no words, storybooks, books with poems, books with photographs, etc. This helps build their brains!
- **Be flexible.** Not every book will keep every child's attention every time. Read in a space where a child who is not interested can find something quiet to do while you read. They may join in the conversation later!

## References

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For more information and resources, check out this website: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu/>



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