



Dialogic Read-Aloud / *La lectura dialógica*

Summary

Reading to children is an important strategy for overall language development and fostering a connection to books. Children who are read to regularly do better in developing literacy skills than children who are not read to often. In school, teachers, most often, read a story out loud while children listen. Although it is a useful and enjoyable experience, it is a passive one for children. Merely reading books aloud is not sufficient for accelerating children's oral vocabulary development and listening comprehension. *How* we read to children is as important as how frequently we read to them. A planned oral reading of a book that engages children in talking about what is being read, or a Dialogic Read-Aloud, provides an expanded opportunity for conversation and the development of rich oral language and promotes the building of reading and comprehension skills.

Dialogic Read-Alouds are a systematic method of reading a book that increases children's participation over the course of three, or more, readings. They are shared book experiences that build vocabulary, deepen understanding of the structure of stories, and increases the pleasure of engaging with books. As the story unfolds, the teacher explicitly shares and models her own thinking process. Through this approach, children learn and internalize the practices that "good readers" use and develop skills of analytic talk. Children are also invited to make predictions and inferences, to explain and ponder a character's motivation, to make connections to their own lives, and to take on responsibility for retelling aspects of the story. Benefits include children's ability to:

- gain access to complex text and high-quality language
- increase their vocabulary foundation by hearing words in context
- build listening and comprehension skills through discussion during and after reading
- improve their memory and language skills as they hear a variety of writing styles and paraphrase their understanding
- increase their fluency and expressiveness in retelling a story
- develop imagination and creativity by visualizing the story

Implementation

Planning & Preparation

A good read-aloud starts with careful preparation that includes identification of key words, concepts, and specific points in the story to stop and reflect or ask children questions. It is important to determine the type of prompts that will be provided, as well as the gestures, props, or images, that will be used to enhance vocabulary comprehension. Part of the planning and preparation also includes thinking through the differences between and purposes for reading the book each time.

Step 1: Select a Book

The selection of books for Dialogic Read-Alouds is important. The book should connect to the thematic unit or relate to a socio-emotional skill the children are working on. The text should be a *sophisticated* story in which the reader needs to infer character motivation and have wonderful, expressive language and vocabulary. In addition, the book should also be filled with rich, detailed illustrations that support and enhance children’s comprehension and language development.

Note that while simple, more predictable books are enjoyable for children and should definitely be read as part of their “literature diet,” a good Dialogic Read-Aloud book should provide exposure to expanded vocabulary and enhanced comprehension.

Step 2: Identify Key Vocabulary

Read the book carefully and mark particularly wonderful language. Select 5 – 10 vocabulary words or phrases from the book that you will highlight or define during reading. These should be words that are critical to understanding the story and are likely to be encountered in other books or useful in other contexts.

Once you have identified the vocabulary words or phrases, decide how you will support children’s understanding of each word/phrase (use a variety):

- Point to specific parts of the illustration that help clarify a word or phrase meaning (e.g., pointing to the illustration of a cottage as you read the word in the text)
- Insert a short phrase or sentence that defines or explains the word (e.g., “delicious: something that smells or tastes really good ”)
- Use dramatic gestures
- Use a modified voice to fit the characters and the emotions
- Vary the pacing to illustrate the actions



Step 3: Write Questions/Prompts

Determine questions/prompts you will use for each reading. The goal is to increase children's participation and comprehension by having them engage in quality discussions about the book.

There are five kinds of prompts that are useful in dialogic reading. You can remember these through the acronym **CROWD**.

- **Completion prompts**: Completion prompts provide children with modeling of the structure of language, and actively engage them in the telling of the story. The teacher leaves a blank at the end of a sentence for children to fill in. These are typically used in books with rhyme or books with repetitive phrases (e.g., "He huffed and he puffed and he_____").
- **Recall prompts**: Recall prompts help children to understand the story plot and develop their ability to describe the sequence of events. These questions relate to sections in the story that have already been read. They can be used in the middle, or at the end, of a story to discuss what has already happened, or prior to rereading a story the children have already heard.
- **Open-ended prompts**: Open-ended prompts provide children the opportunity to use language. They have no right or wrong answer, and often focus on the pictures in the book. They work best for books that have rich, detailed illustrations. If the story has already been read, the teacher can point to an illustration and ask children to explain what is happening in the picture. If the story has not yet been read, the children can talk about what they see happening in the illustration and what they think the story might be about.
- **Wh- prompts**: Wh- prompts help build children's knowledge of vocabulary words. They usually begin with: *What, Where, When, Why, or How*. Similar to open-ended prompts, wh-prompts also focus on the pictures in books.
- **Distancing prompts**: Distancing prompts help children form a connection between books and their own experiences. Children are asked to relate the pictures or events in the story they are reading to experiences outside of the book. (e.g., "What do you think you would do if you were the character?")

Note: Both Recall and Distancing prompts can be more challenging for children than Completion, Open-ended, and Wh- prompts. Frequent use of these two types of prompts is more developmentally appropriate for children who are four and five years old.



Step 4: Write Book Introductions

Book introductions should be brief, 3-4 sentences. Depending on which reading it is (First, Second, or Third), they serve a slightly different purpose and should be planned and written out accordingly.

- First reading: introduce the main character and state the problem in the story.
- Second reading: have children recall some of the events from the first reading.
- Third reading: invite children to identify the problem and describe the solution.

Step 5: Write After-Reading Discussion Questions

End each reading with a “why” question that calls on children to make inferences about and explain several of the story events.

The following description for each reading of a Dialogic Read-Aloud is largely based on the Reading Rockets article, [Repeated Interactive Read Alouds](#) (2007), by Lea McGee and Judith Schickedanz.

In Dialogic Read Alouds, a book is read several times, in slightly different ways. Through carefully crafted prompts, children’s level of participation and engagement in analytical talk increases over the course of each reading.

First Reading: In the first reading, the goal is to capture and maintain children’s interest and enjoyment of the story. The teacher takes an active role by reading the text, thinking out loud, and making comments. Children are actively listening and sometimes comment or respond to questions.

During the first reading, the teacher 1) introduces the story’s “problem”, 2) models higher-level thinking through her own “think aloud” process, inserts comments, asks a few key questions, prompts predictions, and 3) ends by asking a “why” question that calls for extended explanation.

- **Book Introduction:** Offer a short 3 – 4 sentence introduction to the story that states the main problem. Show the front cover of the book and discuss clues from the illustrations. Set the purpose for reading by briefly explaining the “dilemma” of the story and end with “Let’s find out what happens.”
- **Book Reading:** Use expression, gestures and dramatic pauses, varying the pace of the reading to dramatize the action, and use plenty of eye contact with the children. Insert vocabulary development as you read through the book with children. Determine 3-4 stopping points in which ideal readers would make a connection or prediction about a character’s thoughts, feelings or motivations. Use think-alouds to model analytic thinking. Use language and gesture to signal mental activity (e.g., *put your finger to your temple and say “I’m thinking that....” or “I’m wondering if....”*). Use **Completion** and **Wh-** prompts to support children’s understanding of vocabulary and comprehension of the story.



- After-reading discussion: Ask a *Why* question requiring children to make inferences about and explain several story events. Use follow-up probing questions to support children's ability to answer broader explanation questions.

Second Reading: Read the book again one or two days after the first reading. The purpose is to enrich children's comprehension of the story and provide further opportunities for them to engage in analytic talk. The second read capitalizes on the children's growing comprehension of the story. Children participate more verbally in answering inference questions and commenting more frequently. The teacher is able, during this reading, to pause at key phrases of wonderful language and to emphasize and elaborate upon some key vocabulary.

- Book Introduction: Reminds children that they have heard this book before and that they will remember many things. Ask some recall questions.
- Book Reading: Highlight the same vocabulary as in the first reading, but this time verbally define more words. Continue modeling analytic comments. Deepen children's comprehension of the story by using **Recall** and **Open-ended** prompts. With guidance, have children begin retelling parts of the story and making inferences about other characters in the story.
- After Reading Discussion: Ask another *Why* question or ask children about something that might happen beyond the story.

Third Reading: The third reading differs from the others because it is a guided reconstruction of the story. With teacher guidance, children take a highly active role as they reconstruct the story and make deeper sense of the story. The teacher reads some of the text and invites the children to say what happens next. Children recount information as well as provide explanations and commentary. Through specific prompts, children are encouraged to make connections beyond the text.

- Book Introduction: Ask children to identify the problem and describe the solution. Have children recall the title of the book. *"We've read this two times before. What is the title?"*
- Book Reading: Continue highlighting the same vocabulary, but have children explain the meaning of words, or, extend word meanings to other familiar contexts. Provide **Recall** and **Open-ended** prompts and have children reconstruct the story, retelling & explaining story events in their own words. Point to illustrations, *"What is happening here?"*, *"Do you remember what will happen next?"* Continue reading sections of the text and asking reconstruction questions. Follow up children's comments by extending their comments or asking for clarification. Use **Distancing** prompts that encourage children to make connections to their own lives.
- After Reading Discussion: Ask another *Why* question or *"What would happen if...?"*



Extensions:

After you've read the book multiple times, create opportunities for children to retell the story or dramatize the book, engage in dramatic play with objects related to the concepts or characters introduced in the book, and encouraging children to use the vocabulary from the book when they are in conversations related to the topic or theme. Use a story map or flow chart graphic organizer to sequence events in the story.

RESOURCES

Jim Trelease, [The Read Aloud Handbook](#)

Mem Fox, [Reading Magic: Why Reading Aloud to our Children will Change their lives forever](#)

Notes on Strategy



CROWD Planner

Create at least 2 prompts for each category. Write the page number next to each prompt.

Title:		Author:		
		Illustrator:		
Completion Prompt invites children to complete/fill in the blank.	Recall Prompt calls on children to remember what happened in the story.	Open-ended Prompt encourages children to describe what is happening on a specific page in the story. Focus on illustrations.	Wh- questions Prompt begins with what, where, when, why, & how. Focus on illustrations.	Distancing Prompt asks children to make connections between events that happened in the story & their own experiences.



Dialogic Read Aloud Planner

First Reading
Goal: To enjoy the story, introduce vocabulary, & model analytic thinking

Vocabulary Words - 5-10 words or phrases - Type of support: <i>illustration, short phrase/sentence, TPR, voice, pacing</i>	Page	Word or phrase	Type of support

Analytic Comments & CROWD Prompts - 3-4 stopping points, use think alouds to model analytic thinking - Focus on making inferences about the main character's thoughts, feelings, or predict upcoming events - Completion & Wh- prompts	Page	Comment or Prompt	Sentence Frame for Children	



Second Reading
Goal: To enrich comprehension of story & vocabulary & have children engage in analytic talk

Vocabulary Words	Page	Word or phrase	Type of support
- Highlight same words or phrase, provide verbal definitions - Children participate with gestures & orally repeat words			

Analytic Comments & CROWD Prompts	Page	Comment or Prompt	Sentence Frame for Children
- Continue modeling analytic thinking - Recall & Open-ended prompts that have children begin retelling parts of the story & making inferences about other characters in the story			



Third Reading
Goal: To guide children’s reconstruction of the story & make connections beyond the text

Vocabulary Words - Highlight same vocabulary, but have children explain the meaning of words. - Extend word meanings to other familiar contexts.	Page	Word or phrase	Type of support

Analytic Comments & CROWD Prompts - Model analytic thinking as needed - Using the illustrations, provide Recall & Open-ended prompts; have children retell & explain story events. - Use Distancing prompts that encourage children to make personal connections	Page	Comment or Prompt	Sentence Frame for Children



	First Reading Goal: To enjoy the story, introduce vocabulary, & model analytic thinking
Book Introduction - 3 – 4 sentences, introduce the main character, state the problem - Show cover, title page, & back cover - End with “Let’s find out what happens.”	

	Second Reading Goal: To enrich comprehension of story & vocabulary & have children engage in analytic talk
Book Introduction - Reminds children that they have heard this book before & know the characters/events - Ask Recall questions	

	Third Reading Goal: To guide children’s reconstruction of the story & make connections beyond the text
Book Introduction - Ask children to identify the problem & describe the solution. - Have children recall the title of the book.	