



READING #7

Bringing Children and Books Together



Mary Renck Jalongo

Reprinted from *Young Children and Picture Books*, chapter 3, 2004

CATEGORIES:

Curriculum: Literacy
All Ages

naeyc

National Association for the Education of Young Children
www.naeyc.org

No permission is required to excerpt or make copies for distribution at no cost. For academic copying by copy centers or university bookstores, contact Copyright Clearance Center's Academic Permissions Service at 978-750-8400 or www.copyright.com. For other uses, email NAEYC's permissions editor at lthompson@naeyc.org.

1. Begin with a quality book. Identify some possibilities using one or more of the many resources available. Among these resources are the list of outstanding authors and illustrators in Appendix A; bimonthly reviews of picture books in *Early Childhood Education Journal*; “Children’s Editors’ Choices” published by the American Library Association annually in *Booklist*; and “Teachers’ Choices” and “Children’s Choices,” published in *The Reading Teacher* and available online (www.reading.org/choices). Make a list of several books that sound interesting after reading their descriptions in the various annotated bibliographies. Then go to the library.

2. Review several books. Begin by locating several of your choices. Skim through each book, first looking at the pictures. This visual impression is what children will see, so it is important. If the pictures of a book appeal to you, go back through and read the text. If the text of the book also is appealing, go back through and read the text and pictures together. Imagine presenting the book to the intended audience of young children and try to anticipate what their responses are likely to be.

3. Select books the children will enjoy. Sometimes we assume that the stories we enjoyed as children are still the best selections. But many books published before 1970 include stereotypes about women and minorities (Chambers 1983). Or maybe the books you heard as a child were selected for you more on the basis of availability than on the basis of quality. Or your childhood favorites, though excellent, may not be well suited to the developmental level of the children in your group. Even though *Charlotte’s Web* (White) is a children’s classic, it is too sophisticated for most preschoolers and many first-graders. Introducing a book too early can sometimes ruin it for children. If they miss much of its meaning, they might decide they do not like the book and refuse to give it another chance later.

4. Select books that suit your curriculum. Look for books such as *Wolf’s Favor* (Testa) that are suitable for storytelling and dramatization; seasonal books such as *The Polar Express* (Van Allsburg); books that tie in with specific content, such as *Sophie’s Bucket* (Stock) for a unit on the seashore; and books that support emergent reading such as the cumulative rhyming book *The House That Jack Built* (Taback).

Make notes about when and how to share these stories with children. Discuss several of your long-term projects with the librarian and ask for recommendations. Many resources are available for teachers to quickly locate stories on a particular topic or theme (see, e.g., Gillespie 2001; Lima & Lima 2001; Appendix B in this volume).

5. Keep language and literacy development in mind as you choose picture books and read them to children. Clearly the language an author uses is part of what sets a great book apart from a mediocre one. Many of the books that engage children do delightful things with sound. So you won’t find it difficult to select books rich in sounds and sound patterns such as rhyming, alliteration, and coined words that play with sound (as in Dr. Seuss’s *The Lorax*: “‘Once-ler!’ he cried with a *cruffulous* croak. ‘Once-ler! You’re making such *smogulous* smoke!’”). As you read aloud books such as these, you will find countless opportunities to heighten children’s phonological awareness.

You'll also want to consider vocabulary: Does the book use words that will be new to most of the children? Children enjoy learning new words and benefit in many ways from expanding their vocabulary. At the same time, if a book has so many unfamiliar words that children can't understand the story, you should choose a different book.

Of course, all the things we do as teachers to expand children's book knowledge and appreciation contribute to their becoming eager and competent readers. Examples of the sorts of questions teachers can ask (see #7 below) show other ways that we can enhance children's literacy and language development by sharing books with them.

6. Prepare your audience and yourself. Presenting picture books effectively also involves making decisions about what to emphasize as children listen to a story. The adult sets a focus for listening, which considers the background that children need before they can "get" the point of the story. For example, consider Janet Stevens's book *Tops & Bottoms*. The astute teacher notices that to appreciate the tricks that the enterprising sharecropper rabbit plays on a landowner bear, the children have to know something about how plants grow. The gist of the story is that a poor but hardworking and intelligent creature (Rabbit) outsmarts a wealthy but lazy and foolish one (Bear). Rabbit strikes several deals with Bear and always manages to get the better of him. First, Rabbit offers to plant crops and share profits. He gives Bear the choice: tops or bottoms? After Bear agrees to tops, Rabbit plants root vegetables such as carrots and beets. Next time, Bear insists upon bottoms, so Rabbit plants cabbage and lettuce. Then Bear gets furious and demands *both* tops and bottoms; Rabbit plants corn and takes the middles.

Teachers I know who love this book have gone to great lengths to help their students be in on the joke. One teacher actually planted the mentioned vegetables in a clear plastic container so children could see them growing. Another made flannel-board cutouts for each vegetable. Still another went to a farm to get the vegetables, roots and all, to show to the children. Still another used the historical notes about the story in the book with her third-graders, many of whom were the children of migrant farmworkers, and devised a theme about less powerful characters outwitting those with more power.

Even if there is no "joke" to prepare for, still consider how you will introduce each book to the children. One teacher showed her preschool class several eggs of different shapes, sizes, and colors before reading *Chickens Aren't the Only Ones* (Heller). Another teacher used a real hermit crab to introduce *Is This a House for Hermit Crab?* (McDonald).

When reading aloud to children, remember that your voice is an important tool. It can be used to differentiate among characters or to emphasize an important story element. An adult reading *Chicken Little* (Kellogg) can give Chicken Little a squeaky little voice and make Fox sound sly and gruff. Sometimes adults who read to children get overly dramatic. After a 3-year-old heard a particularly chilling rendition of "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," she handed the book to her mother and said, "Here, burn this." It is possible for adults to get carried away and "perform" a book rather than share it. A manner of presentation too flamboyant can become distracting or overshadow the book.

The human voice can be used far more subtly and effectively. To appreciate how slight those changes might be, try this experiment: Read a sentence while smiling, then read the same sentence with a neutral expression on your face. Notice that you can actually hear the smile in your voice; it softens your consonants. Practice reading the book aloud so your voice communicates effectively.

7. Develop questioning skills. Although children need to understand that during book sharing time the book is the focus of the conversation, recognize that a child's "agenda" usually differs from an adult's. When the adult-child interaction about a book becomes stilted and predictable, the adult likely is being too directive. What follows is a less effective way of talking about books exemplified by this father's conversation with 2½-year-old Joshua about the book *ABC* (Szekeres). Notice that the child's question "What ate this?" is ignored.

Father: And what's this over here?

Joshua: It a bunny.

Father: And what's that?

Joshua: That gwasses.

Father: Glasses, okay, . . .

Joshua: What ate this?

Father: . . . and what is that?

Joshua: It's a bagel.

Father: It's a bagel, too. Okay.

Compare that less effective approach with the following dialogue between 33-month-old George and his dad. Here, the parent follows the child's lead more as they look at a picture book that shows animals in their homes: a kitten in a basket, a bird in a nest, and a frog in a pond:

George: (*pointing to the picture of the kitten*) Him sleeps on soft pillow.

(*pointing to the picture of the bird*) Birdy.

Father: Where does the bird sleep?

George: Nest! (*imitates bird opening mouth for food*)

Father: Do you eat worms?

George: No! Yuk! Gross! (*looking at the picture of the frog*) Frog swims on water. Ribbet, ribbet.

Father: Does George like to swim in the water?

George: I kick, kick, kick. I go swim in baby pool, not big pool.

Here, the conversation is focused on the book, but the parent manages to make the book "all about George," a practice that is supported by the research on reading aloud to very young children (see Lonigan & Whitehurst 1998; Rabidoux & MacDonald 2000).

When teachers share stories with groups of children, there is a limit to the amount of discussion that can transpire before a story begins to lose momentum. Expert teachers use professional judgment to decide when the children's attention needs to be redirected to the book. As children acquire additional

A Sample Interactive Storytime with *Too Many Tamales*

1. Build interest and define key vocabulary

Teacher: I stopped at a restaurant today and bought some tamales. Let's look at them to see if we can figure out how they might have been made. After we look, I'll cut them in small pieces so you can taste them if you want to.

2. Set the children's expectations for the story

Teacher: Has anyone here eaten a tamale before? Did your tamale look like these? Does anyone here know how to make tamales? How are they made? Even if you have not made tamales before, you probably have seen bread dough, and tamales are a type of bread that is made out of corn. This book is called *Too Many Tamales*. Look at the children's faces in this picture on the cover. What might cause them to look this way?

3. Help children to construct the essential message of the story

Teacher: Have you ever tried to play with something belonging to your mom or dad or other family member and accidentally wrecked it? Did you ever make such a big mistake that you got really scared, wanted to cry, and felt your heart pounding hard and fast? There's a word for that feeling. It is *panic*. It's the way we feel when we make a mistake so bad that we want to run away or hide or pretend it did not happen. Well, that's what happens in this book to Maria. But, instead of running away, she tries to figure out a way to solve her problem with the help of her cousins.

4. Read the book

Teacher: As I read, think about Maria's problem and how she solved it.



5. Interject questions that extend children's understandings of the book

Teacher: Was it wrong to try on the mother's ring? What makes an engagement ring important? I wonder why the children were so worried about losing a ring. What might Maria's mom do if her ring is lost and cannot be found? If they are sure the ring is inside one of the tamales on that big plate, what could they do to find it? They're going to have to be careful!

6. Relate the story to children's experiences

Teacher: That big plate of tamales reminds me of when my grandmother used to make ravioli. There were so many of them and it took a long time to make them. I brought a food wrapper that shows a picture of what ravioli look like—sort of like little pillows with meat and cheese inside. Is there a food that your family makes that is stuffed or rolled up like this? What is it called? What does your family put inside? What are your favorite fillings? Is there anyone in this story who reminds you of yourself? Who? Why?



7. Revisit the story theme

Teacher: What did you think of Maria's solution to her problem? If you could talk to the children in the book, what do you think they might say about what happened? Let's have somebody pretend to be Maria and say what she would say. Now let's have someone pretend to be her cousin and tell about the problem with the ring. Did you ever get a big scare like this one and then figure out a way to solve your problem?

From *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto, illustrated by Ed Martinez, copyright © 1993 by Gary Soto, text. Copyright © 1993 by Ed Martinez, illustrations. Used by permission of G.P. Putnam's Sons, A Division of Penguin Young Readers Group, A Member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. All rights reserved.

experience with literature, they will become more skilled at focusing discussions on the story rather than on their personal experiences unrelated to the story.

Effective questioning strategies can capitalize on the learning potential inherent in experiences with books. Fisher (1995) suggests that teachers use questions at various times to accomplish the following, plus make storytime more interactive:

- Check on children's knowledge and understanding (e.g., "What does [*insert a vocabulary word that is critical to understanding the text*] mean?")
- Link with a previous work (e.g., "How is [*insert book title*] different from yesterday's story?" "What other stories do you know where a little character outsmarts a bigger, stronger one?")
- Encourage prediction (e.g., [*when using a repetitive text*] "What do you think the next words will be?")
- Focus attention on particular features of the text (e.g., "Is the [*insert character's name*] good or bad? How do you know? What made you think so?" "How do you know the monster is not really mean?")
- Encourage children to think about how they know something or how they managed to figure it out (e.g., "Did that ending surprise you?" "What clues did you have about how the story would end? Can you go back and point out the hints the author gave?")
- Invite comparison of one text with another (e.g., "How is this story like [*insert title of another story*]?" "How were the words of this song a little different from the one that we usually sing?")
- Make links with writing, especially for wordless books (e.g., "What words would you write for this book?" "What would you have this character say?")
- Encourage evaluation of the text (e.g., "If you could change this story in any way, how would you change it?" "What did you find out [*when using an information book*] that you did not know before?")

The box **A Sample Interactive Storytime with *Too Many Tamales*** is an example of an interactive storytime that would be suitable for most children in first or second grade. *Too Many Tamales* (Soto) is the story of Maria, who tries on her mother's engagement ring while mixing the masa dough for the corn tamales. Not until after the relatives arrive and a huge plate of tamales is prepared does Maria discover that her mother's ring is gone. Maria confides in her cousins, urging them to eat the entire plate of tamales and find the ring. Notice how the introductory activity is designed not merely to grab children's attention but also to help them arrive at a deeper understanding of the story. Notice, too, how the questions are focused on fostering children's listening comprehension and encouraging them to respond to the story's central message.

Talking about picture books becomes far more pleasurable when adults ask questions that do not have obvious right-and-wrong answers, questions that challenge children's thinking. When teachers use open-ended discussion techniques, children have opportunities to talk about literature in more meaningful ways (Conrad et al. 2003; Hoffman & Knipping 1988; Paley 1981).

Getting Books in Children's Hands and Homes

Book format. Paperbacks often are one-third to one-fourth the price of a hardbound book, particularly if they are ordered through teacher book clubs such as Scholastic or Trumpet. Thus, you may want to rely primarily on inexpensive paperbacks when building a lending library. That way, if a paperback book is accidentally ruined, the loss will not be as substantial. You may want to keep certain books, such as those with moving parts or copies signed by the author, on a teacher's shelf, reserved for supervised use with young children.

Book use. Teaching and demonstrating the proper care of books, rather than expecting children to know automatically how to handle books, is important. For toddlers who are just learning about books, sturdy cardboard, plastic, or cloth pages that will withstand hard use are best. For young preschoolers, show them how to turn a page, then offer some guided practice with a book that will not cause too much upset if a page gets wrinkled. Demonstrate how to operate the pull tabs or pop-ups in a book without ripping them. Give children a chance, with gentle coaching and supervision, to operate books with moving parts. Be aware, also, that even older children may not have much book-handling experience.

Book lending. A good idea is to invest in some heavy plastic bags with zipper-type closures and have families use them for carrying books back and forth between the early childhood program and children's homes. This practice can be an effective way to keep the books clean, dry, and out of mud puddles. If you are creating *book packs*—small collections of books and accompanying activities that are centered on a particular theme—inexpensive waterproof containers such as tote bags, backpacks, or small plastic bins make good containers for carrying these collections to homes and around the classroom or center.

Book care and repair. A book whose cover is rather worn can sometimes get some additional use if a plastic book cover is placed over it. Book covers usually are easy to find in stores right before school begins in the fall. If a book page tears, use high-quality invisible tape to fix it. If stray pencil or crayon marks appear, try using an art gum eraser to remove them. If the cover is falling off, duct tape placed carefully along the edge where it won't obscure the pictures might keep it together long enough to circulate a bit longer. When books get sticky or need to be sanitized, try this method: Begin with a clean, dry cloth or sponge. Spray it with disinfectant mixed at the ratios specified on the bottle. Gently wipe the book's surfaces and allow to air dry thoroughly before closing the pages.

Book loss. If a book is never returned despite efforts to get it back, take the attitude that losing a few books is unavoidable, and hope that the book is being loved and used.

Dialogue about a book is not the same as quizzing children about the story's details. Rather, when it is skillfully done, dialogue about books can and should be a window on each child's thought process, a means of developing children's communication skills, and a way for teachers and families to glimpse children's growth in literacy.

- Chambers, B. 1983. Counteracting racism and sexism in children's books. In *Understanding the multicultural experience in early childhood education*, eds. O. Saracho & B. Spodek, 91-105. Washington, DC: NAEYC.
- Conrad, N.K., Y. Gong, L. Sipp, & L.D. Wright. 2003. Using text talk as a gateway to culturally responsive teaching. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 31 (3): 187-94.
- Fisher, R. 1995. *Teaching children to learn*. Cheltenham, England: Stanley Thornes.
- Gillespie, J.T. 2001. *Best books for children: Preschool through grade 6*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Hoffman, S., & N. Knipping. 1988. Learning through literature. Paper presented at the Meeting of the Association for Childhood Education International, April, Salt Lake City, Utah.
- Lima, C.W., & J.A. Lima. 2001. *A to zoo: Subject access to picture books*. 6th ed. New York: Greenwood.
- Lonigan, C.J., & G.J. Whitehurst. 1998. Relative efficacy of parent and teacher involvement in shared-reading intervention for preschool children with low-income backgrounds. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 13 (2): 263-90.
- Paley, V.G. 1981. *Wally's stories*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rabidoux, P.C., & J.D. MacDonald. 2000. An interactive taxonomy of mothers and children during storybook interactions. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology* 9 (4): 331-44.

Mary Renck Jalongo is a teacher, writer, and editor. As a classroom teacher she taught preschool, first grade, and second grade. She worked in a parent cooperative nursery school for the children of migrant farmworkers, and taught preschoolers in the laboratory school at the University of Toledo. Currently, she is a professor at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

As a writer she has coauthored and edited more than 20 books, many of them textbooks in the field of early childhood education, including *Early Childhood Language Arts* (3d ed., Allyn & Bacon), *Creative Expression and Play in Early Childhood* (4th ed., Merrill/Prentice Hall), and *Major Trends and Issues in Early Childhood Education: Challenges, Controversies, and Insights* (2d ed., Teachers College Press).

Mary Renck Jalongo also is the editor in chief of the international publication *Early Childhood Education Journal*, published by Kluwer Academic Publishers.



Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)

In order to receive your Registry Tier 2 credit: 1-Read the materials, 2-Answer and return the following summary questions within 10 business days. **Materials are Free. There is a \$10.00 per course administration fee for reviewing, processing due prior to posting training on the Registry**

Name: _____ Registry# _____

Phone# _____ Email _____ **Circle: Family/Group Center**

7-Bringing Children and Books Together.

Although the material you just read is a major part of DAP. Remember it is through close observation and interaction with the individual children in their classrooms that skilled teachers assess where children are and thereby know how to best guide them.

Use the Table Below to Fill in the Blank

1. Keep language and literacy _____ in mind as you choose picture books and read them to children.
2. A manner of presentation too flamboyant can become ____ or overshadow the book.
3. When reading aloud to children, remember that your _____ is an important tool.
4. Help children to construct the _____ message of the story
5. Encourage children to think about how they know something or how they _____ to figure it out
6. Give children a chance, with gentle coaching and _____, to operate books with moving parts.

1	managed	2	essential
3	supervision	4	distracting
5	development	6	voice

List three ways you will use this information:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Mail to: Child Care Providers' Helper 7819 W Potomac Ave. Milw. WI, 53222 or scan and email to gcoggs@gmail.com
When we receive your original or scanned completed worksheets and evaluation, we will email you a Certificate of Completion



Course Evaluation (return this evaluation with homework)

Please take a few minutes to evaluate this training. Your input will be very helpful to us.

Name: _____ Registry# _____

Course Name: 7-Bringing Children and Books Together Email: _____

Date you Completed Course: _____ Circle: Family or Group Center

Phone#: _____

Training Evaluation Survey

Please circle your response here

The presentation consisted of hands on training, questions and answers, and lecture.	1 2 3 4 5
Overall effectiveness of training (I feel the training was clear and easy to understand)	1 2 3 4 5
The interactive classroom and homework assignments were helpful learning materials	1 2 3 4 5
This subject was useful and I have incorporated the information into my childcare environment	1 2 3 4 5
Overall effectiveness of training	1 2 3 4 5
The method used to present this information was in step with my learning style	1 2 3 4 5
I would recommend other providers to attend this training	1 2 3 4 5
The materials used in this training were valuable and relevant (i.e. handouts, books, homework assignments, etc.)	1 2 3 4 5

Please share your comments. We want to include you in our evaluation process

What did you like best about this training/topic?

What did you like least about this training session/topic?

How can this training be improved?

My learning style is: (please check one)

- ☐ Visual Learner- You learn by seeing and looking.
- ☐ Auditory Learners - You learn by hearing and listening.
- ☐ Kinesthetic Learners - You learn by touching and doing.

What class/topics would you like for us to present as it relates to this training session?

Was the information presented difficult to understand?	Yes	No
Would you like access to monthly childcare updates?	Yes	No
The course materials were well organized?	Yes	No
I received the materials in a timely fashion?	Yes	No
The information will be helpful to me in my position?	Yes	No
Would you consider taking another training offered by Child Care Providers' Helper?	Yes	No

Thank you for allowing us to serve your training needs.