



Changing life stories

Storytelling tips

Children of all ages love stories, and being read aloud to can be a special treat, particularly for older age groups. We hope the following storytelling tips will help you and the children to get as much out of the experience as possible.

PRE-EVENT PREPARATION

Selecting books to read aloud

Try and ensure that the stories and activities you have planned are appropriate for the age group you will be reading to (for example, picture books with limited text are likely to appeal to children between 4 and 7, stories with short chapters to 6 to 8 year-olds, 'choose your own adventure' work with 9 to 11 year-olds). **A list of tried and tested books for reading aloud** can be found at the end of this document for inspiration, but feel free to find your own.

The most important thing to remember is that enthusiasm counts for more than experience.

Practice makes perfect

Make sure that the stories you choose are ones you yourself like and will enjoy reading. Also be sure they are good stories to read aloud. **It is essential to practice reading any books you intend to use aloud a few times in advance of the session.** This will make your reading voice more confident and improve the children's experience of being read to.

Try them out several times on your own first – how do they read? Imagine the characters, their intonations and so on. If you feel you need to differentiate between the voices of different characters, you need not change the accent or pitch of your voice, but instead might want to talk more hesitantly for a timid character, more confidently for a hero, and so on. You could try to think about yourself telling a favourite anecdote to your friends, and apply that style to the stories you're reading. Practising on friends, colleagues or younger relations will provide you with valuable feedback.

Once you start to gain your confidence in front of children, try a bit of **dramatic acting** - if there's a scary moment, try gasping and looking frightened - children will think it's funny

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if you look more frightened than they are. You could also use **silly voices** for different characters (kids will love it) or change the tone of your voice (shouting, whispering, singing) wherever relevant. This really keeps the children's attention and should be more fun for you!

As you practice reading, look for parts of the story that children can join in with – for example, **repetitive phrases** such as “There’s a shark in the park!” or “I don’t like peas!” Also, look out for **themes** you can ask questions about – for example “Who’s seen a shark?” “What’s your favourite thing in the park?” and “What food don’t you like?” (More suggestions can be found in the ‘**START STORYTELLING**’ section below).

If you have a long story and some sections seem unnecessary, it’s fine to **skip** them, but decide exactly what you’re missing out in advance. Try and find stories that are no more than **five or ten minutes long**, to keep children’s attention. It is easier to read three stories of five minutes each, than one of fifteen minutes.



ON THE DAY: SETTING THE SCENE

Make sure that there are as few as possible **distractions** around you – if inside, sit in front of a wall rather than an interesting bookshelf or a window, if outside, find a spot on the grass away from fountains, picnic benches or similar if possible. Place your chair on a level slightly above that of your audience and make **eye contact** with everyone. You should be able to see all the children from where you are sitting or standing. Move them around if necessary - ask the teachers if there are any particularly disruptive children, and sit in the front row so you can keep an eye on them. Paying them attention before you begin the story can help them to feel less like they need to compete with you for attention during it.

It is important to let children know whether and how they are expected to interact with your story. Some storytellers like to have **complete silence** before they begin, so that the children are concentrating and focused on the story and the person reading it. For small children, you can encourage them to be quiet by using imaginative props - for example, a little bell can be effective. Say that before you begin, you’d like everyone to be able to hear the story, so you’re going to try a “quiet spell”. Get children’s attention and cooperation by saying that everyone needs to concentrate for the magic to work, and once you have relative silence, ring the bell and begin the story.

Alternatively, if you prefer the children to feel relaxed, or you have a very quiet group, you can begin the session by **letting them make some noise!** This will help children to feel less shy and more confident about speaking up with questions and comments later in the session. A great opener is to introduce yourself by name, then ask the children to shout “Hello James!” (or whatever your name is). Afterwards, tell them you think they can do better, and get them to try again, louder this time. If you’re feeling very brave, you could try telling them that you have incredible hearing, and that they should all shout their name at once - count them in; one...two... three.... and prepare to be deafened!

START STORYTELLING!

Generally speaking, the more interactive you make the session, the more children will enjoy it. They will love being given the chance to speak out, and this will also help keep their attention focused. **Be as expressive as possible** – if you’re having fun, the children will too!

Don’t feel that you have to stick purely to the text on each page. Talk about the pictures, what they can see (take time to hold the book up for everyone to look), what they think is going to happen on the next page and so on before you read them the actual text. You’ll find this very easy once you get started. For example, when reading *Marvin Wanted More* by Joseph Theobald (ages **4 to 8**), you could try asking children what their favourite foods are, if they’ve ever eaten so much they felt sick, and if they can name some of the famous landmarks that appear as Marvin regurgitates the world!

Sound effects, actions and repetition

Farmyard or jungle stories are an obvious opportunity for sound effects – ask children to make the noises of each animal as they appear in the story. Other good sound effects to demonstrate for children before asking them to help are the wind (whistling and blowing), somebody or something running (stamping of feet), sudden loud noises (hand clap or shout “bang!”), aliens (high pitched beeps and gurgles) or cars (brrrm brrrm sounds) – use your imagination or even any props you might have available.

Some good books that encourage sound effects include:

Dear Zoo by Rod Campbell (ages **4 to 6**). As a small child receives various boxes of potential pets from the zoo, children can make the noise (and action) of each unsuitable offering as you lift the flaps. After trying out all the **jungle animal noises**, see if children can guess the pet that will be kept at the end of the story, and let you know just by making the animal’s noise. You can also ask children what their ideal pet would be, or ask them to draw a picture of it (if resources are available).

Books that have actions that children can join in with include:

There's a Shark in the Park by Nick Sharratt (ages **4 to 7**). Jonathon Pope goes to the park with his new telescope but each time he looks through it he thinks he can spot a shark. Repeated throughout the book is the line "He looked left, he looked right, he looked up, he looked down, and he looked all around..." accompanied by pictures of Jonathon doing just that. Get the children to make their own telescope by forming their hands into a tube they can look through, and off they go! (It helps if you do the actions too so they have something to follow.)

A lot of books for younger children contain repetition. Children will love being asked to join in with these phrases, especially if they're told to shout them as loud as they can! Books that work well for children aged **4 to 8** include:

Eat Your Peas by Kes Gray. Daisy's mum promises no end of rewards if Daisy will just eat the last few peas on her plate. Get the children to pretend to be Daisy as she dismisses each bribe with a cry of "**I don't like peas!**" You can also ask children what their favourite dinner would be, or ask them to draw a picture of it if resources are available – this works really well on a paper plate!

Good News, Bad News by Colin McNaughton. As a young boy's day turns from good to bad to worse, get the children to cheer and boo in response to each page's opening phrase "Good News" (**hooray!**) or "Bad News" (**boo!**). If the children really enjoy this book, you can show them how to make up their own version of the story called 'Lucky/Unlucky' afterwards. Begin with a first line like "One day, a little girl called Ruby woke up and found a horse staring at her from the end of her bed. Luckily, it looked like a very friendly horse..." before passing on the story to the next person, who starts their line with the word 'unluckily' (for example, "Unluckily, the horse seemed to be eating her school uniform!"). You can involve the whole group (including teachers and other adults) or children might prefer to do this in smaller groups of twos and threes.

Dirty Bertie and *Pooh! Is That You, Bertie?* by David Roberts. Bertie has a lot of nasty habits. Get the children to join in with his family's disgust as they repeatedly tell him, "**No Bertie, that's dirty, Bertie!**" or "**Pooh! Is That You Bertie?**" Be aware that some adults may not necessarily approve of the type of humour in these books (but most children love them!)

Storytellers' Top Tip:
"...any books in which the storyteller has to do funny/rude noises always go down well!"

Good books to read aloud

The following list includes a selection of titles that NYRP project coordinators have recommended, the NYRP team have enjoyed reading aloud, or titles that are recommended on the *Great Books to Read Aloud* website

(<http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/childrens/GreatBookstoReadAloud/>). Please note that all age ranges given are approximate – many children will enjoy hearing stories for younger children (or extracts of stories for older children) read aloud.

Ages 5 to 8

<i>Cinderboy</i>	Laurence Anholt
<i>Revolting Rhymes</i>	Roald Dahl
<i>Diary of a Killer Cat</i>	Anne Fine
<i>Wonder Goal</i>	Michael Foreman
<i>Eat Your Peas</i>	Kes Gray
<i>The Tiger Who Came to Tea</i>	Judith Kerr
<i>Good News, Bad News; Goal! and Suddenly</i>	Colin McNaughton
<i>Big Bad Raps</i>	Tony Mitton
<i>The Worst Witch</i>	Jill Murphy
<i>The Adventures of Captain Underpants</i>	Dav Pilkey
<i>The World Came to My Place Today</i>	Jo Readman
<i>Mixed Up Fairy Tales</i>	Hilary Robinson and Nick Sharratt
<i>Squids Will Be Squids or The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales</i>	John Scieszka
<i>Shark in the Park</i>	Nick Sharratt
<i>Horrid Henry's Big Bad Book</i>	Francesca Simon
<i>The 100 Mile An Hour Dog</i>	Jeremy Strong
<i>The Story of Tracy Beaker</i>	Jacqueline Wilson

Ages 9 to 11

<i>Awful End</i>	Philip Ardagh
<i>Seriously Silly Stories collection (Cinderboy and Rumply Crumply Stinky Pin are particular favourites)</i>	Laurence Anholt
<i>Cloudbusting</i>	Malorie Blackman
<i>Artemis Fowl</i>	Eoin Colfer
<i>Millions</i>	Frank Cottrell Boyce

<i>The Giggler Treatment</i>	Roddy Doyle
<i>Aesop's Funky Fables</i>	Vivian French and Korky Paul
<i>Falcon's Malteser, Granny and Stormbreaker</i>	Anthony Horowitz
<i>The Thief Lord</i>	Cornelia Funke
<i>Thirteen Unexpected Tales</i>	Paul Jennings
<i>The Killer Underpants</i>	Michael Lawrence
<i>Wolf Brother</i>	Michelle Paver
<i>Short and Shocking</i>	Maggie Pearson
<i>Clockwork and I Was a Rat</i>	Phillip Pullman
<i>Mortal Engines</i>	Philip Reeve
<i>The Bad Beginning</i>	Lemony Snicket
<i>The Story of Tracy Beaker</i>	Jacqueline Wilson