

GUEST COLUMN – April/May 2022

10 reasons why reading aloud matters Andy Samways

The simplest sentences are often the most impactful. That was certainly the case in Roy Blatchford's monthly column in March:

"If you read no further than the end of this sentence, please watch the YouTube video [Frank Cottrell-Boyce supporting the Essex Year of Reading - Essex County Council](#)."

So I did.

I watched, listened and have been thinking ever since. That which Roy ignited and Frank fuelled encouraged me to draw together further resource.

#1: For much of history, reading was a fairly noisy activity.

On clay tablets written in ancient Iraq and Syria some 4,000 years ago, the commonly used words for "to read" literally meant "to cry out" or "to listen". "I am sending a very urgent message," says one letter from this period. "Listen to this tablet. If it is appropriate, have the king listen to it."

#2: The ancient art of reading aloud has a number of benefits for adults, from helping improve our memories and understand complex texts, to strengthening emotional bonds between people.

Listening to someone else read can benefit memory. In a study led by researchers at the University of Perugia in Italy, students read extracts from novels to a group of elderly people with dementia over a total of 60 sessions. The listeners performed better in memory tests after the sessions than before, possibly because the stories made them draw on their own memories and imagination, and helped them sort past experiences into sequences. "It seems that actively listening to a story leads to more intense and deeper information processing," the researchers concluded.

Read more: [Why you should read this out loud \(Sophie Hardach, BBC Future\)](#)

#3: In order to understand and be able to write continuous prose, we need to spend a good deal of time immersed in it. One way to do this is to hear it read out loud.

The way we speak is very different from the way we write - especially from the way we write continuous prose. When we speak, we hesitate, we contract phrases (as with “wouldn’t’ve”), we repeat ourselves, we often leave gaps for others to fill in. Or we might just tail off. We use intonation and gesture to indicate or colour meaning. We use more pronouns than we do when we write, because we can specify who we are referring to with gesture and tone. We use a lot of ums and errs and “you knows” to give ourselves time to think or to hold a listener’s attention. And we avoid front-loading sentences with phrases and clauses that delay getting to the main point. Continuous prose flows without hesitation.

Read more: [Why reading aloud is a vital bridge to literacy \(Michael Rosen in the Guardian\)](#)

#4: Giving a child time and full attention when reading them a story tells them they matter. It builds self-esteem, vocabulary, feeds imagination and even improves their sleeping patterns.

Reading is a great habit. Like all habits, it needs repetition and regularity to establish itself. Because it needs quiet time, and our lives today are very short of this, parents need to create it for their children. This means consciously making time and keeping interruptions to a minimum.

Read more: [Reading to children is so powerful, so simple and yet so misunderstood \(National Literacy Trust\)](#)

#5: Every classroom – all grades and all subjects – could benefit from a healthy dose of Read-Aloud.

Reading aloud should be an integral part of any successful reading programme in order to expose students to texts and ideas significantly above their reading level, model fluent reading for students, and instil a love of reading and a love of literature in our students.

Read more: [Reading Reconsidered \(Lemov, Driggs and Woolway\)](#)

#6: The teacher reading aloud and expertly modelling fluency (pace, expression, volume) is likely a better bet than selecting under-practised pupils to read.

Given reading aloud in class is part of the fabric of teaching and learning, there is inevitably a legion of daily practices that attend the act of reading in the classroom. And so, we must ask, are we clear which reading practices we should do more of and which practices we should adapt or stop?

There is evidence to suggest that we should carefully adapt the common act of 'round-robin reading' (RRR). RRR describes the all-too-common act of selecting pupils at random to read aloud one after another - e.g. every pupil on the register reads that week – but no significant practice or rehearsal is involved.

Read more: [Who should read aloud in class? \(Alex Quigley\)](#)

#7: Research shows that reading aloud to your students - even long after they're reading independently - benefits learners of all ages.

All too many educators abandon read-alouds past primary school, but research shows that the practice can have a powerful impact on older kids too. From teachers modelling their thinking process while reading in front of the class to parsing academic texts in other subjects, creating a culture of reading starts with reading out loud.

Listen to/watch more: [Why Reading Aloud Never Gets Old \(2.47min Edutopia video clip and transcript\)](#)

#8: When reading aloud, it is the physical (pace, fluency, intonation) and social-emotional (audience awareness) strands of oracy which are at the forefront.

The [Voice 21 Oracy Framework](#) illustrates how the cognitive and linguistic strands are integral to reading comprehension; during booktalk, it is through the cognitive strand of oracy that students learn the predicting, clarifying, summarising and questioning skills so crucial to reading comprehension.

See more: [The Oracy Framework](#)

#9: It is a way to be creating moments of connectedness and joy.

Rebecca Bellingham speaks of the magic of reading aloud and how it creates the chance to connect and talk together, in consistent and meaningful ways ... so that children not only fall in love with books and reading, and get better at it, but they also learn to think deeply, to consider other points of view ... learning to listen and look up.

Listen to/watch more: [TedTalk - \(9mins\)](#)

#10: EEF recommendations outline how reading aloud plays a vital part in developing pupils' language capabilities and supporting pupils to develop fluent reading capabilities.

The [EEF Guidance Improving Literacy in Key Stage 2](#) highlights:

- collaborative learning activities where pupils can share their thought processes; reading books aloud and discussing them, including use of structured questioning
- extend pupils' vocabulary by explicitly teaching new words, providing repeated exposure to new words, and providing opportunities for pupils to use new words.
- develop pupils' fluency through guided oral reading instruction - teachers model fluent reading, then pupils read the same text aloud with appropriate feedback

To close, I turn to the wise words of Marc Rowland ('Addressing Educational Disadvantage in Schools and Colleges: the Essex Way') ...

'The language gap and links to socio-economic disadvantage are well documented. Every moment in school needs to be a language development and comprehension moment. The presumption of language can leave pupils isolated in the classroom. Language is key to success in addressing the curriculum, in participating in lessons, in developing background knowledge that binds learning together, and in developing relationships with adults and peers.'

As an integral element of classroom practice, reading aloud surely stands tall as a best bet to empower all pupils, impart a love of reading and set them on a path to life-long learning.

Andy Samways is Director of Teaching School Hub and Research School, Unity Schools Partnership.