

# Ezra Jack Keats Award

## Read Aloud Tips



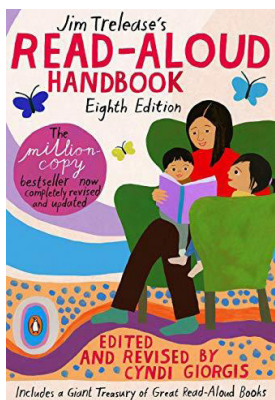
Sharing a story aloud, either with one child or with a group of children, can be a transformative experience for everyone involved. It all begins when we read with babies – and reading aloud continues to be just as valuable for children who have learned to read independently.

In looking back with new parents and grandparents or with people who are studying to become teachers and librarians, we often ask:

- ▶ What are your favorite memories of a read-aloud?
- ▶ What do you remember about the books and about the shared reading experience?

These questions lead to wonderful reminiscences and often serve as motivators for people to share stories aloud at home, in communities, and in educational settings.

This tip sheet is focused on reading picture books aloud with children who cannot yet read independently and with children who are reading up to—or even beyond—a 5th grade level. It is designed for adults who are fairly new to reading aloud with children, and it can be a refresher for experienced story sharers. We hope you are inspired to continue reading with the children in your lives for many years to come.



*Jim Trelease's Read-Aloud Handbook, Eighth Edition* features two EJK Award recipients in its "Treasury of Recommended Read-Alouds": *Shh! We Have a Plan* and *Crown: An Ode to the Fresh Cut*.

### The benefits of reading aloud include:

- ▶ Developing a delight in stories and a love of reading,
- ▶ Inspiring curiosity, imagination, and critical thinking skills,
- ▶ Enhancing the bond between the reader and listener(s),
- ▶ Increasing vocabulary, comprehension, and visual literacy skills,
- ▶ Modeling different writing, illustration, and design styles,
- ▶ Building genre and content knowledge,
- ▶ Demonstrating fluency for emergent readers, and
- ▶ Promoting conversations about books, stories, and life.

### The toolkit is divided into four sections:

- ▶ Section 1: Basic tips for reading aloud to a group of children in person
- ▶ Section 2: Tips for reading remotely via an online platform
- ▶ Section 3: Tips for reading to an individual child (In-person and Virtual)
- ▶ Section 4: Suggested social media posts and resources to learn more about the best practices and benefits of read-alouds

### Contributors

Ramona Caponegro  
Eastern Michigan University  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Jacqueline LaRose  
Eastern Michigan University  
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Evan Michael Bush  
Athens Regional Library System  
Athens, Georgia

Elise Bogdan  
Ann Arbor District Library  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

If you have additional tips and strategies, particularly for sharing Ezra Jack Keats Award books aloud, we'd love to hear from you! Please email Jocelyn McCarthy at [jmccarthy@ezra-jack-keats.org](mailto:jmccarthy@ezra-jack-keats.org).

# Ezra Jack Keats Award: Read Alouds

## Section 1: Tips for Reading Aloud to a Group



### Plan Ahead for your Read Aloud

Consider the following questions when selecting a book for your read-aloud. Think about your purpose, audience, and context. It always helps to choose a book that you LOVE to read aloud. Your natural enthusiasm for the story will shine through.

- ▶ Why do you want to read a story aloud?
- ▶ Who are you reading the story to?
- ▶ In what environment are you sharing the story?
- ▶ How much time do you have to devote to the read-aloud and discussion of the book?

Read the book for content before you start. Become familiar with all aspects of the text and illustrations before you share the book with an audience.

Practice reading the book aloud just as you plan to do with an audience knowing that your read-aloud may not go exactly as planned.

- ▶ Don't be afraid of making mistakes.
- ▶ Prepare to adapt to an unexpected mishap or spontaneous moment of audience participation.
- ▶ Show your listeners that making mistakes and correcting them are part of the learning and reading processes.

Decide if you're going to read the book performatively or interactively.

- ▶ Will you read the book from start to finish without stopping, or will you pause periodically to engage your audience members in discussion?
- ▶ How will you let your listeners know when to ask questions and share observations about the story?

Decide how and when you'll share the illustrations with your audience. Consider what resources may be at your disposal, as well as the size of your audience.

- ▶ Will you show the pictures while you're reading the text or show the illustrations before or after you read the text?
- ▶ Instead of sharing the books by holding them in your hands, might you use a projector or document camera (doc cam) or share digital text through a smartboard?

Consider using props or storyboards, to enhance your delivery. These items can extend the story but not carry it. Some ideas include:

- ▶ Wear hats or costumes relevant to the story.
- ▶ Create a display that features characters or items from the story. These can be supplied by the reader or children, may be created by the children, or could be copied from the book.
- ▶ Ask children to re-enact the story using two or three dimensional character cut-outs.

### While reading the book

Start by identifying the author and illustrator. This reminds the listeners that the text and illustrations are created by specific people and helps the children build a repertoire of favorite authors and illustrators for future reading.

Introduce the endpapers, title page, and any additional front and back matter. You may choose not to read all of the front and back matter, but you can inform listeners about the contents and share interesting and relevant tidbits, as well as stories, information or background from the jacket flap.

Pace your delivery. You know the book, but your audience members may not. Give them time to process the story and view the illustrations. If you want to prepare discussion questions to prompt their thinking, please refer to the themed [Book Discussion Guides](#).

Make eye contact with individual listeners as you read the story. Look up periodically while you're reading. Using facial expressions as reactions to what you're reading will help keep your audience engaged with you and the book.

# Ezra Jack Keats Award: Read Alouds

## Section 2: Tips for Reading Aloud Remotely

---



### Plan Ahead for Your Remote Read Aloud

Many of the tips for reading aloud in person apply to reading aloud remotely, but practice is much more important. You'll need to adapt your delivery to your technology and recording environment, as well as your audience.

*Selection:* As mentioned above, it always helps to choose a book that you LOVE to read aloud. Your natural enthusiasm for the story will shine through to your audience, even from a distance.

*Test your technology:* Technology is always changing, so practice with your tools several times prior to going "live" or when creating a pre-recorded virtual storytime event. It's important to know the ins and outs of any social media platforms you'll be using, as well as your phone and/or camera.

*Look at what is being recorded:* Dealing with glares on book pages is a real struggle when reading to remote audiences. The camera and lighting can obscure the illustrations so check the view on the camera frequently to be sure the viewer has a clear picture.

*If filming by yourself, use a tripod if possible.* Many tripods now come with a remote control that can be used with your phone/device to start the camera from a distance, eliminating the need to lean over to start or stop the recording.

*If making a pre-recorded storytime, create an opening and closing to your read-aloud.* With simple video editing software, you can add the cover or images from the book as an introduction and conclusion to your storytelling session.

*Talk and read directly into the camera lens, not the preview screen.* This will make your viewers feel like you are talking directly to them. As with any read-aloud, it's a good practice to look up from your book and make eye contact with your audience.

### While Reading

*Watch your pace:* This is important for any storytelling, but especially remote storytelling. Reading to a camera can be awkward, and it's easy to forget that you have young listeners out there. It's natural to want to go at a faster pace but resist this urge. Make a concerted effort to slow down your narration to a gentle, conversational speed.

*Identify the publisher:* Just as you would do in person, take a moment to acknowledge the author, illustrator and the publisher, who has granted permission for their book to be shared via social media or a recording. Most publishers have copyright policies for remote readings on their websites. See the Resources Section for a document that includes a list of publisher requests and permissions during the COVID shelter in place restrictions.

*Connect with your audience:* Even though you are not physically together, it's still important to engage with your viewers/listeners.

- ▶ Welcome them to your virtual storytime.
- ▶ Introduce yourself and the book before diving right into the read-aloud. Doing so gives you an opportunity to set up the story by giving background information and context.
- ▶ Ask the same questions and make the same observations you would if they were in a room with you, so the read-aloud experience is as interactive as possible.

*Show the illustrations:* Your video is more engaging if you effectively share the illustrations. You can do this by having the camera pointed at you holding the book facing outward or with the camera pointed down at the open book on a level surface. It's also possible to highlight certain nuances in the illustrations after you've finished a page by holding the book up closer to the camera or by bringing the camera closer to the book.

# Ezra Jack Keats Award: Read Alouds

## Section 3: Tips for Reading Aloud to One Child



Many of the tips for group read alouds also apply to reading aloud to one child, though reading to one child is often a spontaneous event.

*Book selection:* Letting the child select the book for reading aloud gives them greater agency and investment in reading. However, if the child selects a book at random and you haven't already experienced the book, you'll want to at least skim it before you begin reading aloud.

*Adapt your style:* With an audience of one, you can modify the pacing and the incorporation of questions based upon the needs and preferences of the child at that moment.

*Think about the purpose, audience, and context.* Consider these questions to determine how much you need to plan ahead for this read-aloud.

- ▶ Why are you sharing the story?
- ▶ How well do you know the child?
- ▶ Where are you reading together?
- ▶ How much time do you have?

One-on-one reading can be a very special bonding experience for families and care-givers as well as providing educational enrichment.



### **Megan Dowd Lambert**

EJK Award Honor recipient and author of *Reading Picture Books with the Children: How to Shake Up Storytime* and *Get Kids Talking About What They See*.

"In my work... I make the distinction between reading picture books with children and reading picture books to children. Firmly situating myself on the with side of this equation has led to countless storytimes in which I've seen kids' hearts and minds in action as they've embraced, interrogated, enjoyed, and resisted what they've found in the picture books we've shared."

# Ezra Jack Keats Award: Read Alouds

## Additional Resources

---



### Additional Resources for Reading Aloud

The benefits and best practices of reading aloud are widely discussed among educators, librarians, parents and others who work with children. While we've offered you some of our favorite tips in this toolkit, you can learn more about successful reading aloud practices through the following books and websites:

- ▶ *Reading Picture Books with the Children: How to Shake Up Storytime and Get Kids Talking About What They See* by Megan Dowd Lambert in association with The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. Charlesbridge, 2015.
- ▶ *Jim Trelease's Read-Aloud Handbook, Eighth Edition*, edited and revised by Cyndi Giorgis. Penguin, 2019.
- ▶ *In Defense of Read-Aloud: Sustaining Best Practice* by Steven L. Layne. Stenhouse, 2015.
- ▶ [Virtual Storytime Services Guide \(http://www.ala.org/alsc/virtual-storytime-services-resource-guide\)](http://www.ala.org/alsc/virtual-storytime-services-resource-guide). Association for Library Services to Children. American Library Association.
- ▶ ["Hints on How to Read Aloud to a Group." \(https://www.readingrockets.org/article/hints-how-read-aloud-group\)](https://www.readingrockets.org/article/hints-how-read-aloud-group) American Reads at Bank Street College of Education. Reading Rockets.
- ▶ [Publishers Adapt Policies To Help Educators \(https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=publishers-adapt-policies-to-help-educators-coronavirus-covid19\)](https://www.slj.com/?detailStory=publishers-adapt-policies-to-help-educators-coronavirus-covid19), School Library Journal. March 2020