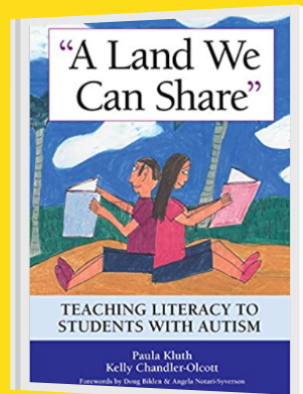


20 ways to adapt the read aloud



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Adapted from Paula Kluth & Kelly Chandler-Olcott's "A Land We Can Share": Teaching Literacy to Students with Autism

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The read aloud helps teachers build and experience a sense of community in the classroom, provides common ground for discussion, entertains, requires little formal student response (giving all learners a time to feel confident and competent), and connects the group to reading and to books as a way to learn and enjoy. For all of these reasons, it is heartbreaking to see students excluded from the read aloud.

Learners may be left out because the teacher believes the activity will be of little benefit or because the student cannot participate in a typical way. One teacher told me she asked her student to be pulled from the read aloud because “he doesn’t even look up at the book.” Others may be excluded because it is believed there are other more important skills to develop during that period of time. One of my former co-teaching partners once asked if we should pull a student from the read aloud so we could address “functional skills” during that time. In both of these scenarios, the teachers described may not have appreciated the potential power of the read aloud.

Including all students—including those with the most significant disabilities—in the read aloud is one of the easiest ways to promote language learning as the development of literacy skills in those with disabilities is associated with being exposed to models of individuals using printed materials (Koppenhaver, Coleman, Kalman, & Yoder, 1991) and having opportunities to interact with others around written materials (Koppenhaver, Evans, & Yoder, 1991). In addition, reading to students can improve their fluency (Blau, 2001), help them access content they could not access on their own (Crossley & McDonald, 1984; Blackman, 1999; Mukhopadhyay, 2000), and expose them to a range of genres, especially those they would not choose on their own. And, to respond to my former co-teacher who thought other skills might be more important to develop, we should also consider that no skill is potentially more functional than reading.

Because of the relatively low demand on the learner during the read aloud, most students will require nothing but a space to sit and listen. Others, however, may need adapted roles, materials, strategies, or expectations to participate in a meaningful way. Consider these twenty ideas for including all students in the read aloud.



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These suggestions may work for students who need to fidget during whole-class instruction, those who need materials to keep focused, those who profit from having an active role in lessons, those who benefit from collaborative learning, and those who require alternative ways of demonstrating attention, engagement, and interest. A few of them work best for younger children but most will be appropriate for students in grades K-12:

20 ideas that can help you support diverse learners in your classroom are offered here:

1. Give the student the same book so they can follow the story as the teacher reads;
2. Give the student an adapted version of the book (e.g., one with extra pictures, large type, or laminated pages) so they can follow along;
3. Give the student a related book (one that has interesting images perhaps) that will help them focus on the content and stay interested in the subject area (e.g., when the teacher is reading a passage on the Berlin Wall, the child can be paging through the picture book, *Talking Walls* [Knight, 1995]);
4. Give the student something text-related to fidget with as the story is read (e.g., the student fidgets with a train car as the teacher reads a chapter about transportation);
5. Let the student explore a “story kit” filled with objects related to the story (e.g., the kit for *A River Ran Wild* [Cherry, 1992] could be filled with a map of the Nashua River, a little vial of water, a pressed wildflower, and a small plastic frog);



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6. Give the student a puppet to hold during the story and let him perform parts of the book on his own or to the class;
7. Give a student a copy of the text to highlight words or phrases of interest as the teacher reads;
8. Give a student a copy of the text to doodle on or code with symbols (e.g., for “I agree”, for “I don’t understand”) as the teacher reads;
9. Give the student cards to hold up during key passages (e.g., every time the bad wolf is mentioned, the child holds his picture up or every time the teacher says “respiratory system”, the student holds up a photo of the lungs);
10. Give the student a job (e.g., a smaller child can help turn the pages of a big book and an older child can advance PowerPoint slides with the pages of the text displayed on it);
11. Have the student read the book to the class (alone or with a partner) instead of listening to the teacher read it;
12. Have the student co-teach the book by asking key questions (prepared on cards or programmed into a communication device) throughout the read aloud (e.g., “What do you think will happen next?”);
13. Have the student participate by reading the first sentence (verbally or via a communication device), the last sentence, and/or repeating or important passages;
14. Stop reading at designated points and have the student act out impromptu scenes from the text with classmates;



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15. Give the student a notebook to draw images that come to mind as they listen to the story or passage (this may help to boost memory and comprehension);

16. Give the student a notebook to write key words or ideas they hear as they listen to the story or passage (this may also help to boost memory and comprehension);

17. Give the student a note card to jot questions about the text that they might ask the teacher later;

18. Give the student a story-related coloring page or worksheet to complete as they listen to the story;

19. Have the student play “read aloud” bingo and cross off words or phrases that he or she hears; and/or

20. Give the student a special “book listening space” to use during the read aloud (e.g., a special chair).

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