

Launch Young Readers into Literacy Through Shared Reading (Grades K and 1)

By Ann Stewart | Categories: Being a Reader, Implementation, Being a Reader Program

Without a doubt, Shared Reading is one of my favorite parts of the literacy teaching day! Can something so fun and interactive be powerful in supporting young students as they develop as readers and writers? The answer is YES! As classroom teachers and coaches, we continually wrestle with time constraints. As a coach, one of my jobs is to help teachers understand the *why* behind the various components of the *Being a Reader* program so that they can fully implement it with confidence that time is being well spent and see the connections between the instructional contexts.

Shared Reading is an integral part of the grades K and 1 *Being a Reader* program because it supports young readers in developing the attitudes, skills, and strategies they need to become successful readers. In Shared Reading, teachers and students come together to read, discuss, and learn from and about texts. The prime objective is to make meaning of the written text as part of a multi-text approach to expanding children's literacy learning (Fountas and Pinnell, 2018). While the teacher makes reading strategies visible and explicit for students, the Shared Reading time also helps students and teachers develop a bond as they partner together in an enjoyable experience. In other words, Shared Reading is FUN!

Based on research by Don Holdaway (1979), the Shared Reading experience aims to replicate and build on students' experiences with bedtime stories and/or couch/lap reading. The benefits of reading to children have been extensively researched. Case studies (Baghban 1979; Holdaway 1979; Doake 1981) show that children who are read to frequently at home learn book and print conventions and exhibit reading-like behaviors. A study of kindergarten children (Sulzby 1985) produced evidence that children move from forming stories in oral language to forming stories in written language. However, the research around the power of re-reading books provides some of the best evidence for why Shared Reading is so powerful for enhancing children's literacy. Repeated readings of the same stories by the same readers never turn out the same way (Sulzby 1987; Martinez and Roser 1985; Parkes 1990). As children request and reread favorite books, their questions and comments increase and become more interpretive and evaluative. Many times, the students attempt to read the stories on their own, thereby internalizing the role of reader. The language of books becomes internalized into their everyday play and talk. And research has also shown that discussions that make connections among print, pictures, and audience, which are key features of Shared Reading, are critical for making meaning (Holdaway 1979; Dombey 1983).

Here's how Shared Reading works in *Being a Reader*. Teachers and students gather together to read an enlarged text collaboratively. Unlike a read-aloud, Shared Reading is interactive, with the students and teachers participating together. The setting is relaxed, with all students participating fully regardless of their ability level (some may be at listening level, others at participation level). Children experience reading poems, songs, chants, and works of fiction and nonfiction. "The books and poems in Shared Reading have been carefully selected for their attention to pattern, repetition, rhythm and rhyme, print clarity and simplicity, genre, and appeal as the student's enjoyment of the text is paramount" (taken from the *Being a Reader Teacher's Manual*, "Understanding the Program"). In Shared Reading, books read in advance of students' reading abilities help to expand their competencies through the introduction of

more advanced vocabulary, more developed characters, and more sophisticated plots.

The first reading of the text is all about enjoying a great book/poem as teachers and students talk through it together, working collaboratively to negotiate meaning. In the second and further readings, the teacher focuses on teaching specific skills and reading strategies appropriate for the age group. In the *Being a Reader* program, children in grades K and 1 learn about and practice concepts of print and book, phonological awareness and decoding, comprehension strategies, author's craft, and fluency. The learning is direct and explicit as well as incidental (see Appendix D, Scope and Sequence, in the *Being a Reader Teacher's Manual* for grades K and 1).

Further readings also invite students to participate in a deeper way through the use of simple retellings; the creation of wall and bulletin board stories; the incorporation of drama, movement, and music; and the recording of stories. Students are invited to recreate the story by mimicking the writing structure of the original but using different characters, settings, and/or situations to create class books for use during independent work time. Parodies of songs or poems may also be used as opportunities for independent reading and writing. Children may rebuild the text of a familiar story in a pocket chart with the purpose of maintaining meaning through semantic and syntactic information as the text is rebuilt. In each of these examples, children work with continuous text and are able to incorporate the use of meaning, structure, and visual cues. And each experience provides an authentic reason for using the new language structures and vocabulary and to articulate sounds clearly. Students are learning to orchestrate multiple sources of information (see Independent Work Connections features in the *Being a Reader Teacher's Manual*, Shared Reading). As we observe students working with these types of activities, we note their increasing independence but also the development of the specific skills the activities are designed to support. *Do we see transfer in our small group lessons as well as in independent reading?*

Since the teacher is doing much of the work during the Shared Reading process, what can we observe so that we know students are making progress in their behaviors and understandings? Here are some suggestions:

- Are students joining in with the group? Are they listening, following along, and beginning to join in and predict the patterns of the story?
- Note if students are enjoying the reading experience. Do they want to reread the book, talk about the book, or enjoy repeating the familiar patterns of the text?
- Can students use the title and pictures to predict what the story will be about? Can they use the text pattern and pictures to predict and understand the text?
- Do they read with expression—varying their voice and pitch and demonstrating phrasing—as they read aloud?
- Do they listen with comprehension? Can they retell the story? Can they describe the main ideas in an informational text?
- Are they able to recognize book and print conventions? Do they read the written text from left to right and from top to bottom? Are they beginning to recognize punctuation marks?
- Can they recognize high-frequency words and recognize them in a variety of texts?
- Can they match the oral vocabulary with the illustrations and photographs?
- Note if students are developing phonemic awareness and phonics skills. Are they beginning to notice and name some letters? Can they hear sounds in words? Do they notice how letters and sounds match? The data gathered during Shared Reading become talking points with teachers as we dive into lesson study with them and note students' behaviors and understandings.

Our literacy day is packed and the pressures are many but 20 minutes a day for Shared Reading becomes the gift that keeps on giving! The opportunities to return to books over time through Shared Reading in the *Being a Reader* program, both with a responsive adult and independently, will lay the foundation for a love of books and learning. Let's launch young readers into literacy through Shared Reading . . . and let's have fun while doing it!

References

- Baghban, M. 1984. *Our Daughter Learns to Read and Write: A Case Study from Birth to Three*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Doake, D. 1981. "Book Experience and Emergent Reading in Preschool Children." PhD Diss., University of Alberta.
- Domby, H. 1983. "Learning the Language of Books." In M. Meek, ed., *Opening Moves*. London: Bedford Way Papers.
- Fountas, I., and G.S. Pinnell. 2018. *The Literacy Quick Guide: A Reference Tool for Responsive Literacy Teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Holdaway, D. 1979. *The Foundations of Literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Martinez, M., and N. Roser. 1985. "Read it Again: The Value of Repeated Reading During Storytime." *The Reading Teacher* 38: 782-786.
- Parkes, B. 2000. *Read It Again! Revisiting Shared Reading*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Routman, R. 2000. *Reading Essentials: The Specifics You Need to Teach Reading Well*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Sulzby, E. 1985. "Children's Emergent Reading of Favorite Storybooks: A Developmental Study." *Reading Research Quarterly*, 20: 458-481.