

Resources for Caregivers: Reasons to Read

Nurturing readers and reading from a young age is one of the most important, rewarding gifts we can give our children—and the world.

What makes reading such a SUPERPOWER?

Reading is the foundation of all other learning, in school, and in life! **The benefits of reading at every stage of a child's development are well documented.** Time spent reading is linked to higher academic performance across the board, better jobs, and stronger social-emotional skillsⁱ. Reading books has even been associated with living longer!ⁱⁱ Less measurable but no less important are the bonds and memories fostered along the way.

Reading aloud is especially powerful. In 1985, the Becoming a Nation of Readers report found that the single most important activity for building knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children.

Reading increases vocabulary

Reading aloud develops listening vocabulary, which is necessary for speaking vocabulary, which flows into reading vocabulary, and is then used in writing vocabulary. Reading aloud starts it all.



Speaking to kids is important, though the words we use in everyday conversation tend to be basic and functional. Vocabulary found in books is much richer. Reading or being read to for 20 minutes every school day means being exposed to thousands of words a year. A broader vocabulary means students can process and comprehend more of what's being taught at school and fosters deeper thinking, crisper writing, and more effective communication overall.

Reading builds connections in the brain

Understanding language and identifying with characters in a story requires many regions of the brain to work together. Using fMRI technology, doctors can see that kids who are read to exhibit more brain activity when listening to a recorded story. Reading aloud helps neurons in a child's brain grow and connect in a way that benefits the child in future reading.ⁱⁱⁱ

Reading to young children shapes social-emotional development

A study published in *Pediatrics* showed that kids 0-5 who were read to displayed significantly better behavior, attention, and concentration, and were less likely to be aggressive.^{iv} Reading time tends to be unhurried time that is focused on the child. The strong connections we build during this time can lead to better cooperation and behavior.

Reading aloud strengthens relationships

Reading together is a bonding experience at any age. Pre-readers connect books with the familiar, cozy sound of a caretaker's voice and the physical proximity reading together entails. These things help create a positive association with books.^v And many studies show that reading with kids who

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already know how to read helps them feel close to caretakers. When you read *with* your kids, conversations about things that are confusing, new, or unfair can unfold in organic, meaningful ways.^{vi} Chatting about the characters, events or plot twists in a book can pave the way for all manner of rich discussions.

Reading grows empathy

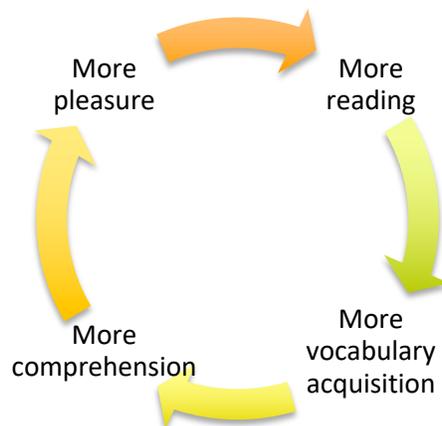
Neuroscientists have found that when reading a story, a person's brain is literally living vicariously through the characters at a neurobiological level. (Wow!) It's like the visualization an athlete does during a mental rehearsal of their sporting event.^{vii} Thus, reading builds empathy and worldliness by connecting readers to different types of people, families, values, and ways of living. It builds social/emotional skills, allowing us to role play complex events and emotions before confronting these things in real life. We can gain an awareness of how the world works and learn by example, before making certain choices ourselves.

Reading provides windows and mirrors

In the 1990s, Scholar Rudine Sims Bishop introduced the terms windows and mirrors to describe different types of books: Those that are "windows" cultivate empathy by revealing others' experiences, values, and perspectives. Books that are "mirrors" reflect our own experiences, showing us we are not alone and what we're capable of.

Reading creates a snowball effect

Just like playing a musical instrument, success in reading comes from practice.^{viii} Reading every day (working up to 20 minutes or more) creates a hunger for reading. Readers who read every day are more engaged and find reading easier. To help find time to read, consider bundling it with another must-do activity. (I often read my favorite magazine while brushing my teeth!)



Reading is essential to democracy

As parents, we are almost as overscheduled as our kids. But taking the time and energy to nurture reading is invaluable. Ideally, we will help our young people become:

- **Lifelong readers** who are engaged in the world around them
- **Critical readers** who consider, analyze, and evaluate what they read
- **Empathetic readers** who respect others' experiences and points of view and are collaborative problem solvers
- Curious, confident, kind, capable, involved **citizens** who leave the world a better place

Reading is a **SUPERPOWER** we use to navigate everyday life!

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For more information...

“Want to Raise Smart, Kind Kids? Science Says Do This Every Day”

<https://happyyouhappyfamily.com/raising-smart-kids/#teachers>

“How to Raise a Reader”

<https://www.nytimes.com/guides/books/how-to-raise-a-reader?module=inline>

“Why We Should Continue to Read Aloud to Older Children”

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-we-should-continue-to_n_13775602

“Read Books With Your Children. The More Diverse the Better”

<https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2019/02/01/why-diverse-books-are-important-laurie-edwards>

“The Secret Power of the Children’s Picture Book”

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-secret-power-of-the-childrens-picture-book-11547824940>

“Making Room for Graphic Novels”

http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/book_whisperer/2011/08/making_room_for_graphic_novels.html

“I want my students to learn what life readers know: reading is its own reward. **Reading is a university course in life**; it makes us smarter by increasing our vocabulary and background knowledge of countless topics. Reading allows us to travel to destinations that we will never experience outside of the pages of a book. Reading is a way to find friends who have the same problems we do and who can give advice on solving those problems. Through reading, we can witness all that is noble, beautiful, or horrifying about other human beings. From a book’s characters, we can learn how to conduct ourselves. And most of all, reading is a communal act that connects you to other readers, comrades who have traveled to the same remarkable places that you have and been changed by them, too.”

- Author and 6th grade teacher Donalyn Miller, *The Book Whisperer*

ⁱ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/16/well/family/reading-aloud-to-young-children-has-benefits-for-behavior-and-attention.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27471129/> This study by Yale University researchers, published online in the journal *Social Science & Medicine*, concluded that “book readers experienced a 20 percent reduction in risk of mortality over the 12 years of follow-up compared to non-book readers.”

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.cnn.com/2015/08/05/health/parents-reading-to-kids-study/index.html>

^{iv} <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/141/5/e20173393>

^v Paul, Pamela and Maria Russo. *How to Raise a Reader*. New York: Workman Publishing, 2019

^{vi} <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2017/02/16/why-its-important-to-read-aloud-with-your-kids-and-how-to-make-it-count/>

^{vii} <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201412/can-reading-fictional-story-make-you-more-empathetic>

^{viii} Trelease, Jim. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, 7th edition. New York: Penguin Books, 2013