

## Reading Aloud to your Children

It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of reading aloud to pupils of all ages.

**Substantial evidence indicates that reading aloud to children improves their vocabulary, word knowledge, language patterns and story structure while instilling a love of books.**

Reading aloud is most influential when it occurs on a daily basis. However, how we read to children is as important as how often we read to them. When reading aloud to children it is critical that the children are encouraged to be as interactive as possible by asking them to respond to questions, discuss pictures in the books, and make associations with the book. Children will get the most from a read aloud if it is an interactive process. Activating prior knowledge of a text will improve their understanding of that text.

An established strategy is called a picture walk (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996), which involves showing the children pictures and asking them to predict how the story will go. This helps children anticipate or predict what's to come, and establish a personal incentive to see if their predictions come to pass.

Here are 2 lists if you are looking for inspiration:

List 1: Classics

List 2: Best of 2018

### List 1: Classics:

#### Picture Books

**1 Curious George by Margret Rey and HA Rey** (Houghton Mifflin). The first book of seven, from 1941, about a monkey who is kidnapped by the man in the yellow hat.

**2 Where the Wild Things Are by Maurice Sendak** (Red Fox). One of my favourites as a child, this has gone on to inspire a generation of illustrators – and a very poor film.

**3 Father Christmas by Raymond Briggs** (Puffin). The best book about Christmas by some margin, featuring an extremely grumpy Santa. Narrowly beat The Snowman for a place on this list.

**4 Gorilla by Anthony Browne** (Walker). A beautifully drawn story from the former children's laureate about a lonely girl who finds company in a gorilla.

5 **The Mick Inkpen Collection** (Hodder). This edition contains seven stories, including my son's favourite, Billy's Beetle. You have to find the beetle hiding somewhere on each spread.

6 **There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly** illustrated by Pam Adams (Child's Play). This edition has holes.

7 **The Babar Collection by Jean de Brunhoff** (Egmont). Here are five of the classic French stories, including the first, The Story of Babar, from 1931.

8 **Jim by Hilaire Belloc**, illustrated by Mini Grey (Jonathan Cape). The poem is reproduced at picture book length with Grey's striking illustrations and paper engineering. You could go, if you prefer, for a collection of Belloc, such as Cautionary Verses (Red Fox).

9 **Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear?** by Eric Carle (Puffin). This charming verse story about how different animals behave is less well known than The Very Hungry Caterpillar, but more fun.

10 **What Do People Do All Day?** by Richard Scarry (HarperCollins). Scarry's immensely detailed books about everyday life can lead to some good conversations, and are great for children who need to know how things work (more or less all of them).

11 **The Story of the Little Mole Who Knew It Was None of His Business** by Werner Holzwarth and Wolf Erlbruch (Chrysalis). This may not be to everyone's taste, but there's no escaping the lavatory when it comes to children's humour, and this book manages to be educational too.

12 **Green Eggs and Ham** by Dr Seuss (HarperCollins). Or another of the vast number of books Dr Seuss wrote from the Forties onwards. Excellent fun in verse, and great for learning to read too.

13 **Lost and Found** by Oliver Jeffers (HarperCollins). First published in 2006, this is already a modern classic.

14 **The Adventures of Mrs Pepperpot by Alf Proysen**, illustrated by Hilda Offen (Red Fox). This edition contains two abridged versions of these well-loved Norwegian stories about the woman who shrinks.

15 **The Gruffalo** by Julia Donaldson, illustrated by Axel Scheffler (Macmillan). It may now be over-familiar, but it's hard to imagine a library without one of Donaldson's catchy rhyming tales.

16 **Monkey and Me** by Emily Gravett (Macmillan). Or anything by Gravett, really: an exceptional new(ish) writer and illustrator.

17 **Goodnight Moon** by Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd (Macmillan). A perfectly soporific bedtime story. Ditto the following.

18 **Time for Bed** by Mem Fox and Jane Dyer (Houghton Mifflin). You'll read these books so many times, it's important to have more than one.

19 **Operation Alphabet** by Al MacCuish and Luciano Lozano (Thames & Hudson). My favourite book about the alphabet.

20 **Hippos Go Berserk** by Sandra Boynton (Simon & Schuster). A jolly counting book that goes down as well as up.

## **List 2: Best of 2018:**

### **I Say Ooh You Say Aah by John Kane (Templar Books)**

Created by Dubliner John Kane to hold his lively son's attention, this interactive picturebook is a clever blend of words and pictures that will cause hoots of laughter in any household. It opens 'When I say OOH you say AAH as loudly as you can. Are you ready? OOH!' Simply brilliant. (Picturebooks, age 0-5)

### **2 Oi Duck-Billed Platypus by Kes Gray and Jim Field (Hodder Children's Books)**

A clever picturebook full of ridiculous rhymes involving animals, perfect for reading out loud. What rhymes with duck-billed platypus? Why truck-filled flappy goose of course! The jaunty, brightly coloured illustrations make this a joy to share with both toddlers and older children. (Age 3+)

### **3 Anseo Atá Muid by Oliver Jeffers, translated by Máire Zepf (Futa Fata)**

The Irish-language version of Here We Are: Notes for Living on Planet Earth, a book written by Jeffers to explain the world to his son, Harland has been beautifully translated by Zepf. Each double page spread is carefully designed and majestically coloured. Stunning. (Age 0-5)

### **The President's Cat by Peter Donnelly (Gill Books)**

The President is back for a brand new adventure, this time with his glasses but without his cat, accidentally left behind after the summer holidays. But the clever cat decides to find his own way back to the Áras. Simple text and attractive, warmly coloured illustrations with a retro feel. (Age 0-5)

### **A First Book of the Sea by Nicola Davies, illustrated by Emily Sutton (Walker Books)**

Full of poems, lists and songs about the sea, covering all kinds of sea-themed topics, from puffins to pearl divers, this is a celebration of our blue planet in all its glory. It's packed full of facts, too - so not only will children enjoy the poetry, they will learn something new along the way. The illustrations by Sutton are stylish and deliciously colourful. (Age 0-5)

**On a Magical Do-Nothing Day by Beatrice Alemagna (Thames and Hudson)**

A young girl is stuck in a holiday cabin while her mum works so she is sent outside to play. At first reluctant to explore the "boring, wet place", she discovers so many wonders outside that she feels changed by the time she returns. The illustrations are glorious, they swim with colour and texture. If you like picturebooks that are a bit different, this one's for you! (Age 0-5)

**Don't Go To School by Máire Zepf and Tarsila Krüse (Futa Fata)**

Usually in a "first day at school" book it's the child who is anxious, but in this clever book it's Mummy, not little Benno the bear, who is scared of school. "Don't worry, Mummy," he tells her. "You'll get to know the other parents in no time. They seem really nice." The stylish illustrations in rich shades of brown, green and blue are perfect for very young children. (Age 0-5)

**Joan Procter, Dragon Doctor: The Woman Who Loved Reptiles by Patricia Valdez, Illustrated by Felicita Sala (Andersen Press)**

The true story of the Curator of Reptiles at the Natural History Museum in London who designed the world-renowned Reptile House at London Zoo in the 1920s, a remarkable feat for a woman at the time. This book, written in simple yet lyrical prose tells Joan's inspiring story. The illustrations are full of unusual colours and telling details. (Age 5-8)

**Hubert Horatio: How to Raise Your Grown-Ups by Lauren Child (HarperCollins)**

Hubert Horatio's parents love him very much but they are a little forgetful and irresponsible, so he's well used to sorting out problems. This is a delightfully bonkers story which is made for reading out loud. It's one of the most beautifully designed books for this age-group I've ever seen, Child's illustrations sing, and hats off to David Mackintosh, the book's Belfast-born designer. Magnificent! (Age 6+)

**The Dam by David Almond, illustrated by Levi Pinfold (Walker Studio)**

Based on the true story of Kielder Valley in Northumberland which was flooded to create a lake in the early 1980s, this is a haunting, lyrical picturebook for older children with mesmerising illustrations. Before the valley is flooded, Kathryn and her father visit every empty house and fill each with music. The artwork is remarkable - each page full of atmosphere and deep emotion. A triumph. (Age 5-8)

**The Dog Who Lost His Bark by Eoin Colfer, illustrated by PJ Lynch (Walker Books)**

This story of a boy and Oz, the small dog he adopts, cleverly examines the boy's fractured family as well as his relationship with Oz, who has problems of his own. Black and white illustrations full of expression by ex-Laureate na nÓg, PJ Lynch. (Age 5-8)

**I Am the Seed That Grew the Tree: A Nature Poem for Every Day of the Year selected by Fiona Waters, illustrated by Frann Preston-Gannon (Nosy Crow)**

One of the best children's poetry collections I've come across in recent years. Full of outstanding verse and stunning illustrations, it includes work by Yeats, Dickinson and celebrated American children's writer Lilian Moore. (Age 5-8)

**The Girls by Lauren Ace, illustrated by Jenny Løvlie (Caterpillar Books)**

The four girls in this book are all different - Lottie loves adventure, Leela is super smart, Sasha is practical and caring, and Alice enjoys making people laugh - and although they fight at times, they are the best of friends. With gently coloured illustrations by Norwegian artist, Løvlie, this is a powerful, inspiring book to share with any child. (Age 5-8)

**Dr Hibernica Finch's Compelling Compendium to Irish Animals by Rob Maguire and Aga Grandowicz (Little Island)**

Little Island's first non-fiction title is this stunning ode to Irish animals. The text, narrated by a fictional Irish naturalist, is perfectly pitched for young readers and the illustrations are eye-wateringly good. (Age 5-8)

**18 The Legend of Kevin: Roly-Poly Flying Pony by Philip Reeve and Sarah McIntyre (Oxford University Press)**

One stormy night, Kevin the magical flying pony bumps into Max's life and his world is forever changed. Storm waters are rising and strange creatures are threatening the peace, can Max and Kevin save the day? Charming and

funny with attractive, comic-like illustrations, this is a great choice for newly independent readers. (Age 5-8)

**19 Mary and Frankenstein by Linda Bailey and Júlia Sardà (Andersen Press)**

A fascinating biography of Mary Shelley with luscious illustrations. Bailey explains how Mary's tough childhood and teenage years helped fuel her imagination. She describes the fateful stormy night when Lord Byron first suggests a contest to write the most chilling ghost story. (Age 5-8)

**20 The Great Big Book of Irish Wildlife by Juanita Browne, illustrated by Barry Reynolds (O'Brien Press)**

A fun, accessible guide to Irish animals, with a focus on the different seasons. Browne is an accomplished naturalist and her carefully researched text is complimented by photographs and brightly coloured illustrations. (Age 5-8)

**21 Granuaile by John Burke, illustrated by Fatti Burke (Gill Books)**

The team behind Irelandopedia are back with a handsome hardback that tells the story of Mayo clan leader and 'Pirate Queen', Granuaile. The text is simply written and ideal for young children to tackle themselves and Fatti's distinctive, vibrantly coloured illustrations breathe new life and energy into the well-known story.

(Ages 5-8)