CHAPTER 22

Read Me a Story

Reaping the Benefits of Reading for Young Children

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> Christopher was sitting at his preschool writing center hard at work. A visitor to his classroom observed him for a few seconds then asked, "What are you writing?" Christopher replied, "I don't know yet. I'm not done." The visitor continued the conversation, "OK, be sure to put it in the writing rocking chair so you can share when you do finish. I can't wait to hear." A familiar routine in the classroom was for children to put any writing they accomplished during play in the teacher's rocking chair, so they could share it with the group at the end of center time. Christopher and eight other children placed their written messages in the chair, and the teacher asked each one to tell about their writing (Figure 22.1 shows Christopher's writing). Christopher announced, "I wrote a story but I didn't illustrate it yet. It says, 'The dog was bad.'" He read with emphasis, then glanced up from his paper at the other children, looking each one in the eye. Then he turned back to the paper and read at a rapid pace. "'It ate the mouse, it ate the cat, it ate the house, it ate the mommy.'" Then he slowed down and said very deliberately, "'It died, of course.'"

Christopher's story writing and pretend reading demonstrate many of the literate accomplishments expected of middle-class 4-year-olds, and expectations increasingly fostered in highly exemplary preschool programs for at-risk children. He was willing to pretend to write a story and did so using real and mock letters (mainly those found in his name). He wrote from left to right in lines of text. His story had six sentences, and his written text had six lines. In addition, he demonstrated his many experiences with having stories read aloud to him in engaging ways. He knew just when to look at his audience, how to use pacing to capture interest, and when to change his voice to indicate a critical part of the story. He also demonstrated knowledge of the plot line from the familiar traditional tale "I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly." Indeed, reading stories and other genres of literature aloud was a critical component of his preschool program.

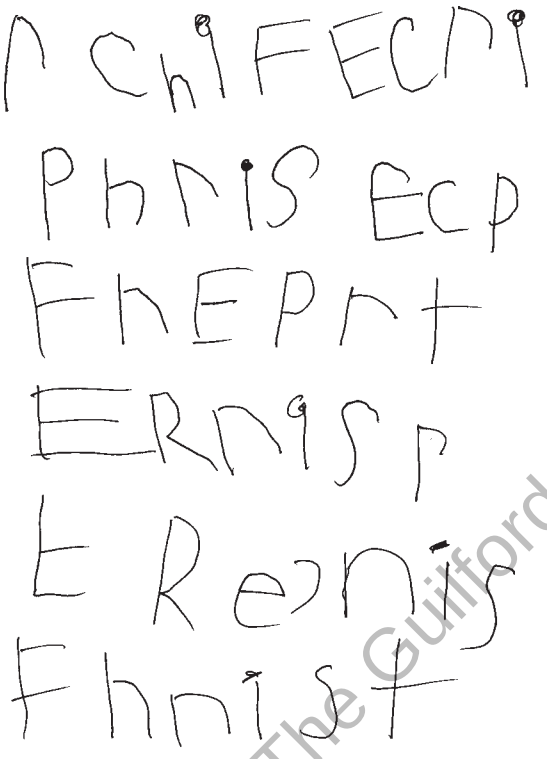

FIGURE 22.1. Christopher's writing.

What Research Says about Reading Aloud to Preliterate Children

Many researchers for the last 30 or more years have investigated the benefits and nature of reading aloud to young children prior to the period when children can read for themselves. Because of space limitations, I focus specifically on research that has examined the benefits of reading aloud to children's language growth, comprehension development, and writing.

Reading Aloud and Its Benefits for Children's Language Development

Three meta-analyses of read-aloud research have confirmed that both parents' and teachers' read-aloud practices produce language gains for young children. Bus, van IJzendoorn, and Pellegrini (1995) found a moderate effect size for children's language growth, emergent literacy, and reading achievement based on the frequency of parent read-alouds. The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) found similar results in a review of preschool and kindergarten intervention programs that included a read-aloud component. Another meta-analysis using nearly twice as many studies as those included in the report of the National Early Literacy Panel found similar results: a moderate effect size for children's overall language growth (Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009). However, these researchers also

documented two other critical findings. Interventions delivered by researchers produced greater effects than those presented by teachers. Interestingly, this result was confounded by group size because teachers were more likely to work with larger, whole groups, whereas researchers were more likely to work one-on-one or in small groups. Thus, the quality and likely the frequency of the interactive read-aloud is a critical variable (assuming that researchers are more skilled than teachers at interventions).

Examining individual studies within these meta-analyses that subsequently were published yields a gold mine of information about the nature of high-quality read-aloud sessions and their effects on specific language outcomes. In fact, in a critique of the findings of the National Early Literacy Panel report on the effects of read-aloud interventions, Schickedanz and McGee (2010) examined each study and found more nuanced outcomes. Thus, I review here a few individual studies of read-alouds, with an eye toward drawing practical implications.

Pappas and Brown (1987) examined how kindergartners' pretend readings changed after hearing a book read aloud three times. In a case study, researchers read a storybook aloud to a child and after each reading invited the child to read the book "her own way" or just to pretend to read. In pretend readings across the three read-alouds of the book, the child mentioned more of the actual story events in linguistic forms like those found in the book, and fewer ambiguous and misplaced ideas. The authors argued that the results demonstrate how children become familiar with the linguistic patterns authors use to convey their meanings in written stories (called the *written register*), which is critical for comprehension. While the pretend reading was used as a measurement in this study, a practical implication seems to be that if children engage in activities that extend their language experiences with the books after read-alouds, such as pretending to read the story, the benefits of using and understanding book language may increase.

Retelling a story (while looking at its illustrations) after hearing it read aloud was also examined in a study with older children. Penno, Wilkinson, and Moore (2002) were interested in vocabulary gains of first graders who listened to stories read aloud to them. Each book was read three times, and each time children retold the story. In one condition students heard word explanations for target words, whereas in the other condition no such explanations were provided. In the word explanation condition, the reader (1) slipped in a short verbal definition of the target word, (2) pointed to salient features in the illustrations related to a word's meaning, or (3) dramatized or role-played a word's meaning. Students in the word explanation condition made greater gains than those in the no-explanation condition as measured by a multiple-choice vocabulary test of the target words and the sophistication of students' use of the words in the retellings. Unfortunately the retellings were not analyzed for children's comprehension of the story events or use of the written register. Nonetheless, this study suggests that even as children approach the period in which they are learning to read, they still benefit from systematic read-alouds of stories, especially when readers provide information about vocabulary meanings without interrupting the reading. Again, retellings after the read-aloud probably boosted the benefits of learning vocabulary from the read-aloud.

A more recent study (Biemiller & Boote, 2006) used similar read-aloud procedures with and without word explanations with predominantly kindergarten, first-grade, and second-grade English learners (ELs). The findings showed that word meanings were learned to a greater degree in the word explanation condition. Furthermore, when the number of readings was increased from two to four readings, kindergarten children made greater gains. On the other hand, first and second graders made as many gains with two readings of a book as with four. These researchers conducted a second experiment in

which books were read only two times, but twice the number of vocabulary words were taught (12–14 per book compared to six to eight). Teachers reviewed the meanings of target words after reading and on a subsequent day. The children learned twice as many words in this study, and these gains were sustained, as measured by a delayed posttest. Again, even older children in early elementary grades still benefit from multiple read-alouds of the same story with attention to teaching vocabulary words. It is important to note that review of the words after reading provided an additional boost in vocabulary learning. Older children need fewer book readings than kindergartners, but all children benefit from learning about a dozen targeted vocabulary words per book.

Two studies underscore how reading aloud provides benefits for two at-risk populations: children from underrepresented populations and ELs. Britto, Brooks-Gunn, and Griffin (2006) demonstrated that low-income African American mothers could produce higher language interactions during storybook reading when they engaged their preschool children in a conversation about a book before, during, and after reading than mothers who only read the book aloud. Roberts (2008) found that EL children who first heard storybooks read at home in their home language then heard their teacher read the book aloud in English learned as many English vocabulary words as children who heard the book in English both at home and at school. Family participation in the project nearly doubled when parents became aware that they could have access to school materials in their home language. These studies show that, with modification, parents of children in at-risk groups can be supportive and provide additional academic gains for their children through read-alouds.

Van Kleeck, Woude, and Hammett (2006) expanded research on reading aloud to consider the levels of children's language being targeted for instruction and measurement. Previous studies have primarily targeted receptive vocabulary (pointing to a picture when its name is spoken) or expressive vocabulary (saying the name of an object or action in a picture). This level of language is concerned with literal meaning, for example, when children are asked to identify an object or person in an illustration or to tell what is happening in an illustrated event. Higher level language focuses on inferential meaning rather than literal information. Children use inferential language as they infer character motivations and make connections among and between events in a story and their own life experiences. This language is elicited when children are asked questions such as "Why did the fox try to jump on Rosie?" or "What will happen if he catches Rosie?" The amount of this type of language use, which has also been called *analytic* talk, evoked in children during preschool read-alouds predicts their reading comprehension a year later (Dickinson & Smith, 1994).

In scripted read-alouds presented to language-impaired preschoolers, Van Kleeck and colleagues (2006) asked 25 questions, 70% at the literal level and 30% at the inferential level. Readers were provided scripted answers to the questions to give to children who failed to respond, in order to demonstrate both inferential and literal language and thinking. Children in the treatment group made greater gains on a standardized receptive language test and on assessments of both literal and inferential language use. The effects for inferential language gain were smaller than those for literal language gain but nonetheless positive. Thus, the types of questions teachers ask and their ability to model appropriate answers for children is a variable in high-quality read-alouds.

Finally, the genre of the book read aloud has been found to be influential in increasing children's language use. Price, Van Kleeck, and Huberty (2009) observed parent read-alouds of storybooks and expository (informational) books to preschoolers. Four levels of talk were coded. At Level 1 parents or children labeled objects or characters, or located

them in illustrations. In Level 2, they described characteristics of objects or characters (noting size, color, shape, number) or described a scene in the illustrations. At Level 3 parents and children recalled information presented earlier in the book, made evaluations, or compared text events to the children's lives or to events in other books. At Level 4 children and parents engaged in reasoning as they made predictions, provided definitions, or made explanations. Expository text reading produced the greatest amount of Level 4 talk in both parents and children. Presumably these experiences provide to children demonstrations of and use of inferential language similar to what was scripted in the Van Kleeck and colleagues study (2006).

Two recent studies by Neuman and her colleagues (Neuman & Dwyer, 2011; Newman, Newman, & Dwyer, 2011) confirm that engaging children in activities that require sophisticated language use is an important component of a read-aloud program. These authors developed a curriculum around two units: living things and healthy habits (with a third unit on simple math in one study). During each topic teachers presented information in video clips, read informational books aloud, asked questions and presented challenges, reviewed information and vocabulary meanings, and engaged children in developmental writing (using whatever level of writing children were willing to use). The focus of the instruction went beyond merely learning new vocabulary such as *katydid*. Instead, children learned categorical information, such that a katydid is an insect because it has three body segments and six legs (targeting the vocabulary words *katydid, insect*, and *body segments*). The results demonstrated increases in children's vocabulary, as well as their ability to describe why words are placed in particular categories. Importantly, children displayed understanding of new words not taught in the curriculum when they were given information about the category of a new word. This study confirmed the need for information book read-alouds, and that reading books aloud on a single topic should be sustained across considerable time to allow for multiple and expanded understanding of concepts. Teachers should aim to develop vocabulary knowledge beyond mere definitions, but build understandings of categorical word knowledge.

In summary, a large body of research has suggested a wealth of effective read-aloud techniques. As summarized in Figure 22.2, teachers need to select books carefully and consider which vocabulary words to target for instruction. Teachers should read books more than once as they model how to comment about literal and inferential information. Books can be extended through retelling, pretend reading, writing, dramatic play, or hands-on science experiments.

Reading Aloud and Its Benefits for Children's Comprehension Development

Compared to the large body of research focusing on the relationship between reading aloud and young children's vocabulary growth, surprisingly few studies have attempted to improve children's listening comprehension of the stories being read or to transfer effects to general listening comprehension. Reese and Cox (1999) asserted that adults adopt different styles of reading aloud naturally (e.g., Britto et al., 2006; Dickinson & Smith, 1994), and argued that some of these styles may be more suited to developing comprehension than others. For example Dickinson and Smith (1994) found that one style of reading, which they called *performance-oriented* style, included more challenging comments and questions, and might therefore produce better comprehension gains. Reese and Cox (1999) also noted that another read-aloud style, which they called the *comprehender* style, includes comments and questions calling for reasoning and explanations that might also result in higher levels of listening comprehension for young children. Finally, they

noted that a *describer* read-aloud style, which includes lower-level "what" questions, may not produce listening comprehension gains as effectively. Unfortunately, the results of their study examining the effects of three read-aloud styles did not bear out these assumptions. The describer style was the only reading style to influence outcomes, and these were linked to vocabulary and print outcomes. While the performance-oriented style produced the greatest mean gain in comprehension, the effect was not statistically significant. A closer look at the comments and questions used in the scripted read-alouds revealed no questions that required children to explain major events in relation to the story as a whole, which often is a critical component of higher level, inferential comprehension.

Stevens, Van Meter, and Warcholak (2010) found that reading aloud to kindergarten, first-grade, and primary-grade special education students, along with teaching them explicitly about story structure, improved their comprehension better than that of children who merely listened to the same stories. It is important to note that only free recall and answers to questions at the literal level, not answers to inferential questions, were scored.

- Select high-quality story and information books, and consider how best to introduce them. It is particularly important to introduce a story's problem because young children do not attend to this story element without being prompted.
- Prior to reading, select moderately challenging vocabulary to enhance children's understanding of the book (like the Tier 2 words recommended by Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2000). Target 10–12 words per book.
- Provide explanations of vocabulary while reading without interrupting the flow of the book. Engage children in conversation after reading in ways that foster inferential language and higher level thinking using target vocabulary.
- Read the book up to four times to preschool and kindergarten children, but fewer times to first and second graders.
- Teach children how to notice and to think about salient elements of stories. For example, as children learn to identify characters, they should also be taught to think about what motivates them and make inferences about what characters are thinking and feeling, and the effect this has on their actions.
- Provide follow-up activities that engage children in retelling or pretending to read the book. Engage children in writing or dramatic play activities.
- Plan for extended science or social studies units of study in which informational book read-alouds are embedded. Select multiple books about the topic; locate appropriate multimedia items and pictures to support conceptual learning.
- Select concepts to be developed using categories (e.g., insects) and their defining characteristics (all insects have three body segments and six legs), and teach these concepts with their vocabulary directly through explanation in read-alouds and in follow-up conversations and activities.
- Ask both higher-level inferential questions and lower-level literal questions, and model how to answer those questions. Model asking and answering the questions in a first read; ask questions and supporting multiple children as they attempt to answer the questions in the second and subsequent readings.
- Intersperse questions about nonfiction books during reading and conversation. Remember to use both literal and inferential questions.

FIGURE 22.2. Research-based implications for read-alouds.

Heisey and Kucan (2010) examined whether interspersing questions during a read-aloud or asking questions only after a read-aloud would improve first and second graders' understanding of nonfiction science books. Children recalled more information and were able to provide more justifications for their explanations when read-alouds were interspersed with questions than when questions were asked after read-alouds.

In summary, there is evidence that kindergartners and first graders improve comprehension of what is read to them and transfer this ability to other stories when the emphasis is primarily on literal recall. There is insufficient evidence at this time as to the best style of reading aloud to influence listening comprehension at higher levels of thinking; however, Figure 22.2 provides possible implications for teachers.

Effects of Read-Alouds on Children's Writing and Play

Research over two decades has shown that the literature children hear read aloud influences their writing content and style, but that highest quality literature has the most impact (e.g., Dressel, 1990). Fewer studies have examined how children's emergent and early writings are influenced by the literature they hear read aloud. Lancia (1997) described how his second graders used literature in their writing: borrowing an entire plot or a book's characters; plot devices, including settings or language patterns or titles; or genre devices, such as false leads in mysteries. Weisch (2008) found similar borrowings in children's pretend play in preschool. Rowe (1988) reported that young children often seek out toys to populate their play about books. She argued that selection of particular toys to use as characters in their play demonstrates that children as young as 2 years old comprehend character traits or characteristics that identify particular characters. Thus, while reading literature aloud has been shown to have a profound impact on older elementary children's writing, and much anecdotal evidence suggests it has this same effect on emergent and early writers, research evidence is lacking. However, children's play is clearly influenced by their experiences with literature that is read aloud.

In summary, reading aloud has an enormous influence on the development of a wide array of children's early literacy concepts, especially the development of oral language and listening comprehension. The remainder of this chapter focuses on two critical components that *require* reading literature aloud to children: higher level language use and comprehension. Because the effect of genre is influential, I first use the insights gained from research to put into practice reading aloud narratives or storybooks to preschoolers through second graders, and ways to extend these in follow-up activities such as writing, play, retelling, and pretend reading. Then I focus on describing high-quality reading of nonfiction, information books in rich and extended content units of study.

Research into Practice: Quality Read-Alouds That Promote High-Level Oral Language and Comprehension Development

Reading Aloud Narratives or Storybooks

Narratives are stories that have, in the simplest sense, at least one well-developed character, an initiating event that reveals a problem, attempts to solve the problem (usually thwarted by obstacles), a resolution of the problem, and an ending that reveals the main character's reaction to the story resolution. The story takes place in a setting that

provides either a backdrop for the story (e.g., the generic "once upon a time" settings for folktales) or an integral setting in which the specifics (time, location, conditions) are a critical element to the story plot. Furthermore, stories convey abstract themes that readers infer, based on their own understanding of the overall story in relation to their life's experiences.

Again, in the simplest sense, knowing about these elements (at least characters, setting, problem, attempts, and resolution) helps children better recall story information and enhances their overall listening comprehension for stories (Stevens et al., 2010). However, a story read aloud is enriched when teachers go beyond simple reading to examine a storybook in its richest form. Every element of a high-quality storybook contributes to its meaning: the title, the size and shape of the book, the endpapers, the color, perspective in the illustrations, and placement of text on a page, to name only a few design elements (Sipe, 2008). Cochran-Smith (1984) argued that teachers play the role of an ideal reader as they read aloud to children. Ideal readers notice design elements and consider a story in all its complexity. As ideal readers, teachers model for children what they are thinking and wondering as they read the book. They think aloud and make explicit what they are thinking, where they are looking, and what they are wondering about. This naturally includes literal information from the text and illustrations, as well as inferential thinking. The comments naturally include thinking at high levels of cognitive demand as teachers evaluate, make judgments, infer character traits, and connect ideas among story events. Thus, a high-quality read-aloud begins as teachers carefully look through books and say aloud to themselves what an ideal reader would likely be saying, perhaps mostly unconsciously.

Consider *Knuffle Bunny* by Mo Willems (2004). First, I look at the both the front and back covers and consider the title. The front cover shows a close-up of a little girl with a stuffed rabbit, walking with her father (who is seen only from the waist down). The back cover shows the little girl and rabbit in the daddy's arms as he walks with a mother holding a laundry basket filled with folded clothes. Everyone is smiling, and the perspective is much farther away, so that the setting of large brownstone buildings on a city street is very visible. The title, Knuffle Bunny, might refer to the girl or stuffed rabbit, either of which might be the main character around whom the problem is likely to be centered.

Next I look carefully at the end pages, frontispieces (illustrations before the title page), title page, and dedication, if there is one, in the opening pages. I check to see whether the front and back endpapers are the same (which they are in this book). The endpapers are a repetition of what looks like the door of a washing machine, with the stuffed rabbit inside with the bubbles, as if the rabbit is being washed. I am wondering if this might foreshadow the problem in some way. Three frontispieces show the daddy and mommy prior to the time of the story. The title page shows the girl hugging the bunny in front of washing machines at a laundromat. She looks blissful. I am wondering who Knuffle Bunny is and what the washing machine will have to do with the story.

Now I carefully read the story, looking at the illustrations before and after reading. After reading the first double-spread text, I know the little girl is Trixie, and I infer the errand they are going on is to wash clothes, presumably at the laundromat. The illustrations of the dad and Trixie break out slightly from the frame of illustration perhaps to signal that they are beginning a grand experience away from the safety of home. In the next two double spreads, I notice that as they walk down the block, through the park, past the school, and into the laundromat, Trixie and her dad are happy. Dad pays a great deal attention to Trixie (I infer that he is attentive to her), and she is being very good

staying near her dad (I infer that she is a well-behaved child). Trixie seems very interested in all that is around her (I infer that she is curious).

There is a dramatic shift on the next page, where Trixie is dancing with pants on her head, swinging a bra, and illustrated with an exaggeratedly large, wide-open mouth (now I infer that she can be boisterous, loud, and silly). Dad seems tolerant and is looking at Trixie rather than what he is putting in the washing machine (I infer that Mom would never let Trixie get away with this behavior!). Dad lets Trixie put in the coin (he is letting Trixie have extra fun), and they walk away. I can see the bunny looking out from the washing machine. Seeing this triggers me to look back at the previous page and notice that the bunny is in the basket with the dirty clothes, and Dad isn't watching what he's putting in the washer. I infer this is the start of trouble (it will be important for children to notice what is going on in this and the following illustration). On the next page, Trixie is her curious self as she walks calmly home looking all around her, but then the text font enlarges on the words "realized something" and she is illustrated with great big eyes and a sad frown. The next two pages show Trixie trying to talk. She says nonsense words and I now realize the important fact I skipped over on the very first page of the story: "Not so long ago, *before she could even speak words*, Trixie went on an errand with her daddy. . . ." (I realize I will need to make sure children pay attention to this text early in the story). Her father replies to her as if he understands, but he does not. He thinks Trixie is talking about going home. On this page I infer that in Trixie's head she is saying, "No, no. Rabbit gone. RABBITT GONE." She must be very frustrated by her attempts to tell Daddy, but he cannot understand. It is so ironic that Trixie is "trying to use words" to solve the problem but cannot do so.

On the next two pages, Trixie continues to try and communicate without success, because Dad does not have a clue. She escalates into going boneless. I infer that, in Trixie's head, she is deciding not to go one step farther until she has her rabbit. Her daddy drags and carries her screaming the entire way home (she is very persistent). I infer how mad she is at her dad, and she keeps trying to say, "NO, rabbit gone." Daddy looks very angry (I can just hear him thinking, "What is the matter with Trixie? One minute happy, the next having a silly tantrum"). Just as he is unlocking the door, Mother asks, "Where is Knuffle Bunny?" Aha, I now know that the bunny is Knuffle Bunny and obviously it goes everywhere with Trixie. The expression on Trixie's face says, "I told you so." There are large zig zags in the illustrations coming from Dad's head emphasizing that he knows he is in trouble now. The family runs back to the laundromat. I can just hear the mom and dad thinking, "We better find Knuffle Bunny or there will be no living with Trixie."

When they get to the laundromat, there is a montage of four illustrations on one page showing the frenzy of their search inside, around, and behind all the washers, but they do not find Knuffle Bunny. Trixie is illustrated with quivering lips, so Daddy knows the search is not over. Now he looks determined (Trixie must get her persistence from him) and pulls all the clothes out of the machine. Trixie jumps for joy and says, "Knuffle Bunny." She talked! And the last page confirms that Trixie said her first words. So I know the end pages do foreshadow the loss of the bunny in the washing machine, and the back cover is the happy family returning home with the laundry clean and Knuffle Bunny safely found. I carefully look back at the pages where Dad is not looking as he puts in the laundry. It does not show him putting the bunny in the washing machine, but it is clear that he is not looking; I infer that this is how the bunny accidentally was put in the washer. I notice that the washer is labeled "M." On the next two pages, it is clear that the rabbit is in that washer, but neither Dad nor Trixie notices. On the search pages, they are looking inside the "M" washer but not deep enough.

After my first read, I consider the problem of the story, which is usually beyond the obvious, in this case that Knuffle Bunny is gone. The real problem is that Trixie cannot talk; she cannot communicate that the rabbit is gone. Dad does not understand what Trixie is trying to communicate. The solution occurs when Mom immediately recognizes the problem, and Dad gets serious about looking in the washer. One theme of this story is a caution for dads: "Always find a reason for a tantrum!" and Willems's subtitle confirms (*Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale*). This story might be about his own experiences with children (perhaps his own wife and child?).

Finally, I look back through the text to decide on important vocabulary words and phrases children might not know and that are important to understanding the story. I select the phrases *speak words* and *nowhere to be found*, and the words *errand, block, laundromat, machine, realized, bawled*, and *boneless*. I also decide to use and explain the words *persistent* and *communicate* because these were important to inferences about the story's meaning.

Only now am I ready to begin planning how to share this story with young children. I would want children of any age to notice by the second or third reading all the detail and inferences that I have revealed for myself. A portion of my plans for the first, second, and third reading of this story are shown in Figure 22.3. As shown, in the first read I make many comments. In the second read I ask questions related to comments I made on the first day. In the last read I usually ask children to reconstruct the story as I ask for clarifications and elaborations (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). I show each illustration and ask, "What is happening here?"

Notice that my comments on the first read are based on the inferences I made as I read the book. After reading, I always ask one high-level question, which is intended to get children to reconsider an event within the context of the entire story. I use higher-level question stems that require children to reason with longer explanations that provide justifications. For example, questions I might ask about *Knuffle Bunny* are as follows:

- *Why* didn't Dad know where Knuffle Bunny was?
- *Why* didn't Trixie communicate to Dad?
- *How do we know* that Dad didn't realize Knuffle Bunny was missing?
- *How did we know* where Knuffle Bunny was?
- *What would happen if* Mom hadn't realized Knuffle Bunny was missing?
- *How* did Knuffle Bunny get lost?
- *How* is Knuffle Bunny like a best friend?

With children of all ages, I would follow up each reading with an activity that further extends children's understanding of the story, and their knowledge of the target vocabulary and story structure elements. I might place drama props (e.g., an item of clothing or an object associated with a character) in a dramatic play center. I might construct a chart of the major story parts and have children retell those parts of the story. Children could draw pictures of their favorite characters, then write about that character using emergent or invented spelling.

Older first and second graders could work in groups to prepare three other responses (Morrison & Wlodarczyk, 2009). Children could construct alpha-boxes by selecting a word or phrase from the book that begins with each letter of the alphabet. Or children could take a stand both for and against an issue related to the book and tell why they take this stand. For *Knuffle Bunny*, children could be asked: "Do you think the parents should have let Trixie take Knuffle Bunny to the laundromat?" Children answer "yes" or

	First read	Second read	Third read
Book introduction (front cover)	The title of this book is *Knuffle Bunny*. (Show front cover and point to title.) It is about Trixie (point to girl) and her dad (point to dad). Trixie has a problem. Something gets lost. Let's find out what gets lost and how they find it. Here are the end papers. I see washing machines. I predict a washing machine will be in this story. (Encourage comments about what children see and predict.)	Who can remember the title of this book? (Read title.) Trixie had a problem, didn't she? What was her problem? (Expand and clarify children's responses.) Look at the end papers. They help us know what the problem is going to be. How do they help?	Everyone, tell me the title of this story. What was the problem? (Have multiple children respond.) (Show end papers.) What is happening here on the end papers? Why did the illustrator make these end papers? (Expand and clarify children's responses.)
Title page	(Read title.) Here is Trixie in the laundromat, a store where you can wash your clothes. See all the washing machines. I am wondering who is Knuffle Bunny and why that is the title of this story.	Why is Trixie hugging that rabbit? Where are they? I think I know why the story's title is *Knuffle Bunny*. Who can tell me why this story is called *Knuffle Bunny*?	What is happening here? (Expand and clarify children's responses.) Why is *Knuffle Bunny* a good title for this story?
First double spread	(Read text.) Here are Trixie and her dad going on an errand, which means they have to do a job. I see a basket of clothes. I bet the errand is to wash clothes. Now remember Trixie is little, she can't even talk yet. Mom seems like she is going to enjoy reading a book and Trixie is excited, isn't she?	(Read text.) What was the errand Trixie and her dad had to go on? How do you know? What was the clue? What is important to remember about Trixie? Why is it important to know she can't talk?	What is happening here? (Expand and clarify children's responses then read text.)
Fourth double spread (inside the Laundromat)	(Read text.) It doesn't look like Trixie is helping at all. She is misbehaving, being bad. I don't think her mom would let her put clothes on her head. Look, I think she is yelling. Dad is watching Trixie. I think he is thinking, "That Trixie is so cute." Look, he isn't watching what he is doing. He is putting clothes in that machine, the one with M on it, but he isn't looking. (Demonstrate putting in clothes without looking.)	(Read text.) Is Trixie helping? Why do you think she is misbehaving? This is where the trouble begins. What is the trouble about to happen here?	What is happening here? (Expand and clarify children's responses then read text.) What will happen next?
Fifth double spread (when Trixie puts the money in the machine and they start to leave)	(Read text.) Oh no, look here. (Point to bunny ears and bunny face.) What got into the machine? I don't think Trixie knows. Do you think Dad knows? Trixie is just so happy she isn't noticing that her rabbit is gone. I think this might be trouble, don't you? Look at the bunny. I think he is shouting, "Don't leave me in here!!!"	(Read text. Oh no, I see trouble, what is it? Why is it a problem that the rabbit is in the washer? Do you think he is just dirty and needs a wash? Did Dad put him in the washer on purpose? Why didn't Trixie notice the rabbit is gone? What do you think the rabbit is feeling?	What is happening here? (Expand and clarify children's responses then read text.)

FIGURE 22.3. Plan for reading selected portions of *Knuffle Bunny* (Willems, 2004).

"no," then tell why or why not. In all extension activities, I would model use of the target vocabulary and provide supportive, positive feedback when children use these phrases and words independently.

Finally, I would plan ways to connect across stories. For example, *Knuffle Bunny* could be read before or after *Oonga Boonga* by Frieda Wishinsky (1998). In this story a baby cries and cries, and cannot communicate her problem—that she misses her brother. Thus, these books are linked by a similar problem. Children can compare and contrast how the children try to communicate and how the problems are solved in the two books.

Across a year's time I would be sure to cover each story's structure elements in depth. I would gradually reduce the number of explicit comments in the first read and ask more questions. I would select more challenging stories, with longer, more complex plots and texts. Similarly, I would select more challenging vocabulary.

Reading Aloud Nonfiction Informational Books

I would use a separate reading time to focus on nonfiction books. During the study of science or social studies topics, I would select book topics that follow content standards to read aloud. Once I selected a topic, keeping in mind the content standards to be covered, I would search for related nonfiction books to read aloud.

For example, on the topic of living things, I might focus on the nature of animal homes—specifically, the structure and building of bird nests. This is in line with content standards in life sciences (e.g., California Department of Education, 2000) in which kindergartners and first graders know and observe differences in behaviors and habitats of specific plants or animals. Furthermore, first graders are to know features of habitats and how animals use the habitats (e.g., for nesting) to thrive. There are several appropriate books for young children on nests and nest building, but I would begin with *Eyewitness BIRD* (Burnie, 2004) because it has the most information. It is too difficult to read aloud in its entirety to preschoolers or kindergartners, but I have found it to be an excellence resource for what I call "information book conversations," which occur when teachers tell children about a topic from an informational book using its illustrations as support. Occasionally parts of the text might be read aloud. I have found that information book conversations are much more powerful when conducted much like narrative read-alouds. I focus on the same content using the same book and other supporting activities or objects for 3 days. The first day I do much of the talking, with children doing activities and observing pictures, objects, and YouTube video clips. The second day I ask questions about material presented the first day and help children extend and expand their responses. On the third day I ask the same questions and make sure that most children have multiple chances to respond (by asking several children to answer the same question).

I have found that using five higher-level question stems helps me not only to pull the literal information from the information book but also to fill in inferential information not stated in the text or shown in the illustrations. I have found that posing the questions and searching for answers readily produces inferential-level thinking and identifies key vocabulary and concepts. These question stems are as follows:

- How—?
- Why—?
- How can we prove (or how do we know)?

- How is_____like (or different from)_____?
- What would happen if—?

For example, to plan a study of bird nests, I first pose the question (I underline vocabulary that will be highlighted), "How do birds build their nests?" I found that birds do two activities simultaneously: They gather *building materials* and *fashion the nests*. Most nests are *cup nests*, which are built from a variety of *natural materials* found in birds' *habitats*, including grass, *twigs*, leaves, animal hair and feathers, seeds, *moss*, and *lichen*. Birds also use *man-made materials* such as string, *tin foil*, paper, and tissues. Second, I pose the question, "Why do birds use each of these materials?" I found that grass, twigs, and leaves are used to *structure* the nest and that moss, feathers, animal hear and tissues are used for *insulation*. I naturally pose two more questions: "Why structure the nest with twigs, and so forth?" and "Why does the nest need insulation?" These questions are not answered directly in the text; however, they may be answered by looking at several illustrations that show drawings of birds standing on the edge of the nest feeding the baby birds. A series of photographs show the babies in the nest at 1, 3, 5, 9, and 13 days after *hatching*. These illustrations show that the babies are born without feathers and only gradually acquire them, and they showed how large the babies become (they *increase their weight 10 times* in 10 days!). I inferred that the nest must be built strong enough both to hold the parent and to *support the growing babies* as they increase their weight—thus, the need to use *sufficient* twigs and sticks. I also inferred the nest must be soft enough that the very *delicate newborns* will not be harmed, and provide enough insulation for the *featherless* babies to keep warm. Thus, nests need to be lined with very soft materials. I happened to think about a *baby crib* and how similar a nest is, with the need for soft *"bumper pads"* all around the *crib's rails*. This led to the question, "How can we prove that nests need soft materials?" I decided to plan an activity that compares rolling an egg around in a metal pan and in a pan full of cotton balls.

I found out that birds make the nest's round shape using a *circular movement*. First, birds bring the material and push it into the nest. Then they sit on the materials and turn around in a circular movement, pushing outward with their breasts. Thus, I inferred, this is why the nest is both circular and the shape of a cup (answering the question "How does a bird made the nest round?") Of course, I inferred the answer to "Why is the nest called a *cup nest*?" but needed to make it more explicit. Cup nests look like cups because they have an *indentation* in the center surrounded by *tall sides*. Again, I made the connection to a baby crib with those high railings × answering the question "How is a baby crib like a cup nest?"). This led to the next question: "Why are nests in the shape of a cup?" Neither the text nor the illustrations provided the answer, but the analogy to the baby crib suggests that the tall sides help keep the babies from falling out. A YouTube video I located showed for several minutes a single egg in a nest, in a tree that swayed back and forth in the wind. The egg rolls slightly but does not fall out from the nest, confirming that the indentation with its tall sides keeps the egg and babies from falling out. This made me pose the final question: "What would happen if the nest were not in the shape of a cup with its high sides? What would happen if the nest were flat like a plate?" The answer is simple, the egg or babies would roll out and not *survive*.

I am now ready to consider the order in which I present the information, the illustrations I show, which bits of text I might read, and what other materials and activities I should plan. I decided to get a picture of a baby crib (and my niece had a doll crib). I planned to take a trip around the edge of the schoolyard later to gather possible nest-making materials for a nest-making activity for preschoolers. I tore a trash bag full

of newspaper strips for "building materials." Children gathered the material in their "beaks" placed it in the nest pile, and sat on it. Then they turned around in a circular motion. By the time each child worked on the nest, we would have a nest of newspaper. I also found plastic eggs that fit into a large teacup I brought along with a dinner plate (and each child experimented with swaying the cup or plate "nest" in the breeze). Finally, I gathered two real eggs, a metal baking pan, and lots of cotton balls.

On the first day I presented the informational content, focusing on the rich vocabulary and concepts, reading some text, and showing illustrations and the YouTube clip, as well as the baby crib. The children participated in the nest-making activity and experimented with the cup and plate nests. I conducted the experiment—"How can we prove that nests need soft materials?"—using the eggs and pan full of cotton. The second day I posed each of the questions I used in preparing for the first day and supported children's responses, especially helping them use the scientific vocabulary. I often expanded and clarified their responses. I interspersed asking the questions with doing the activities a second time. I sometimes used other information books to show illustrations or to read bits of text to support and extend our growing knowledge about bird nests. For preschoolers and kindergartners I asked questions on the third day but also helped children retell everything they knew about bird nests by asking, "Who can tell us something they know about bird nests?" I helped children use the scientific vocabulary in their informational retellings (Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008). For first and second graders, on the third day I shared additional books about bird nests and shared a writing chart of the important new vocabulary words. I invited children to retell all they knew about bird nests. Finally, children then drew cup nests and wrote about them in their science journals.

Reflections and New Directions

Reading aloud to young children benefits their vocabulary growth, understanding, acquisition, use of particular language structures found in written texts, and comprehension of both inferential and literal information. We have few studies showing that the style of reading aloud influences comprehension at different levels. Also, few studies have measured children's comprehension of individual stories or their listening comprehension in general as a result of reading aloud. This is a rich area for classroom implementation as research in action. I would have hoped for more teacher action research results published in professional journals such as *The Reading Teacher* or *Young Children*. For example, Gregory and Cahill (2010) describe a kindergarten program they developed to teach children how to use scheme and visualization, and to ask "I wonder" questions and make inferences. Unfortunately, they did not measure the results of their program or even providing anecdotal evidence.

Similarly, we have emerging evidence that reading aloud enriches children's pretend play, but we need more evidence of how reading aloud provides models for children's writing, especially in the emergent and early invented stages of writing. However, merely reading a book aloud will not produce these results. High-quality read-alouds are carefully planned and delivered to share with children the richness of a quality storybook and higher level knowledge related to content topics. This chapter has presented principles of reading aloud based on research and has provided richly descriptive illustrations of how teachers can plan engaging and effective read-alouds for all children, including those most at risk.

Professional Development Activities

- Select a recently published storybook that is appropriate for a read-aloud to explore during a grade-level meeting. As you and your colleagues read the book, comment on what you are predicting and inferring. Focus on what the characters are thinking, what motivates them, and why they are acting as they do.
- Plan a read-aloud using many of the comments you and your colleagues discussed during the book-exploring session. If possible, have everyone conduct the read-aloud and tape-record the session. View the tapes together to look for evidence of your children's comprehension.
- Read the book aloud a second time, this time asking more high-level questions. Again video-tape and view the read-aloud for evidence of deeper understanding, especially in children you consider at risk.
- Find an appropriate book for an information book conversation. Plan with your colleagues what information you might share to answer the higher-order question stems provided in this chapter.

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