

5 BENEFITS OF READING PICTURE BOOKS ALOUD TO SECONDARY STUDENTS

Words are powerful, especially when words are shared from one person to another. Reading aloud to students is a unique opportunity to share words.

Reading picture books out loud to secondary students is just as valuable as when they were read to in grade school. In addition to the illustrations adding to the magic of the spoken word, vocabulary skills and comprehension are strengthened. Here are five additional benefits of reading aloud to your secondary students.

1. Strengthens Community

Stories can connect people and build a great sense of community. Reading together creates a positive culture in the classroom and develops a unique bond among the listeners. The time secondary classrooms spend together reading a picture book aloud promotes bonding and strengthens relationships. Children's book author Kate DiCamillo said, "We humans long not just for story, not just for the flow of language, but for the connection that comes when words are read aloud. That connection provides illumination."¹



2. Gains Exposure to Diverse Themes

More and more picture books are using diverse themes and characters. Increasing students' exposure to stories about social responsibility, socioeconomic diversity, and different cultures and beliefs offers an opportunity for a class to interpret diversity together. Exposing secondary students to these books gives them the chance to see reflections of themselves and opens doors into their classmates' lives. These picture books can spark discussion between secondary students that a traditional novel read independently doesn't generate. These conversations allow for deeper understanding of diverse issues.²

3. Creates a Safe Space

Research has shown that secondary students' stress is increasing, and more and more of them are suffering from anxiety.³ When a story is read aloud, students become more comfortable discussing their emotions with others. Exposing students to stories that explore particular emotions allows them to feel supported socially and emotionally. The result is the class that is read aloud to becomes a safe space where students can accept their own feelings and understand how others feel.

4. Increases Attention Span

It may be surprising to see how engaged and interested secondary students become when a picture book is used to introduce a new concept. It is important to keep things fresh in the classroom, and a read-aloud is a great way to capture secondary students' attention. Unlike watching a video, reading aloud provides an opportunity to model learning strategies (i.e. thinking aloud, questioning, and applying). This slower discovery of ideas encourages students to listen and focus which will increase their overall attention span. Reading aloud also gives an opportunity for secondary students to fidget, move around a bit, or use flexible seating. Family counselor Dr. Michael Gurian has studied children's behavior while being read to. The scientific evidence discovered demonstrates that many kids not only need to move while being read to, they actually retain information better when they are allowed to do so.⁴

¹ Mackenzie, Sarah. "RAR #121: Kate DiCamillo on Reading Aloud for Connection – Read-Aloud Revival with Sarah Mackenzie." *Read*, 15 Nov. 2019, readaloudrevival.com/121/.

² Eggs, Reading. "7 Important Benefits of Reading Aloud." *The Reading Eggs Blog*, 5 Mar. 2015, blog.readingeggs.com/2015/03/03/7-important-benefits-of-reading-aloud/.

³ McCarthy, Claire. "Anxiety in Teens Is Rising: What's Going On?" *HealthyChildren.org*, 20 Nov. 2019, www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/Anxiety-Disorders.aspx.

⁴ Mackenzie, Sarah. "RAR #82: Why Fidgeting Is a Good Sign (and What Brain Science Has to Say about Reading Aloud), Dr. Michael Gurian – Read-Aloud Revival with Sarah Mackenzie." *Read*, 7 Aug. 2019, readaloudrevival.com/82/.

5. Provides Enjoyment

Students of all ages enjoy being read to. Reading aloud reinforces the enthusiasm we, as educators, have for books. It gives students a chance to enjoy a book without struggling to decode words or to activate background knowledge.⁵ Picture books also provide an opportunity to interpret the illustrations as text features. Stories connect us to each other, and reading together is a shared joy. Hearing stories allow students to experience other worlds and situations in a safe space. Reading is fun. Reading is powerful. Reading can spark a lifelong love of learning.

“Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning.” — Maya Angelou

Custom Title Lists

The following is a curated collection of new picture books that are excellent read-alouds for secondary students when introducing new concepts, exploring diverse themes, and sparking a love of learning.

One of Mackin’s many free services available to teachers and librarians is book collection development. Mackin’s in-house librarians and classroom specialists are here to assist educators’ particular needs. We love working with teachers and librarians to create custom title lists to meet the exact needs of each unique school community.

HUMAN RIGHTS	CIVICS	MEDIA LITERACY	CONSERVATION	SCIENCE	ACTIVISM	FEELINGS & EMOTIONS
STORYTELLING	KINDNESS	LOSS & GRIEF	LEARN THROUGH FAILURE/ PERSEVERANCE			
DIVERSITY & TOLERANCE	BIOGRAPHIES					

⁵ Short, Kasey. “Reading Aloud to Middle School Students.” *Edutopia*, George Lucas Educational Foundation, 14 May 2019, www.edutopia.org/article/reading-aloud-middle-school-students.

