

Reading Together: Everything You Need To know to Raise a Child Who Loves to Read **by Diane W. Frankenstein. For more Information visit: www.dianefrankenstein.com/**

Conversational Reading

Read a book. Ask a question. Start a conversation.

Conventional wisdom has become so focused on the importance of reading to children that it has, to a large extent, ignored the critical component of the importance of talking with children about what they read. As important as it is to read aloud to children—a child's desire to read comes from being read to— many of the benefits of the read aloud experience are lost when there is no verbal interaction. Reading to a child does not by itself automatically lead to literacy. Talking with children has an even stronger effect on literacy learning than reading aloud to them.

Conversational Reading, talking with children about the stories they read, teaches children the concept of making connections—knowing how to connect books, experiences and ideas. A common assumption is that children understand everything they read, but this is not the reality. Children who talk about stories and the subjects a story explores are involved readers who better understand what they read. Children who better understand stories become more confident readers, and this confidence directly impacts the pleasure children find in the stories they read. Let there be no doubt, children who read what they love, love to read.

The following strategies and tips can be used in classroom reader's workshops as well as in the home. Providing workshops on conversational reading for faculty and librarians and offering parent education on conversational reading shows parents how to support what is going on in the classroom and builds an integrated reading program in a school community.

“‘What is the use of a book,’ thought Alice, ‘without pictures or conversations?’”

Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

- Conversational Reading is making comments and asking questions— talking with children about a story— asking, “What did you notice?” and “What do you think?”
- Conversational Reading promotes active literacy, nurturing a child's curiosity, instilling a love of exploring and learning. Curiosity is our most powerful search engine for learning.
- Conversational reading helps children develop the ability to use words to express themselves and gives them a command of language.
- Children first need to understand a story before they can understand the meaning of story.
- Many of the skills children need to *get ready* to learn to read are first learned in conversation. Vocabulary is the linchpin to literacy.
- Children read for story, and when they are working too hard with the mechanics of reading it becomes difficult for them to enjoy the story. Choose books that speak to both the appropriate reading level and a child's developmental readiness for the story.
- Don't interrupt the reading of the story with explanations or editorials, which can easily annoy and frustrate a child.
- Read the story as it is written. Once you begin to tinker with the story, by substituting an easier word or leaving out complicated sentences that you think might be confusing, you are interfering with the magic of the story.
- Don't stop reading aloud to children once they have mastered the ability to read on their own.
- The most important outcome is not how many books children have read, but how many conversations they've had about them.

Conversational Reading Tips

“Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I’ll understand.” Chinese proverb

Nobody comes into the world knowing how to talk about a story. Finding meaning calls for guessing, speculation, and pondering; it’s less about what *you know* and more about what *you think*. It is a little like thinking out loud. Conversational reading is less about trying to figure out the meaning of the stories and more about what the story means to children in their lives now.

- Start a conversation with a good question— a question that takes you someplace in your thinking. A good conversation is not about the answers, it is about the questions.
- To begin a conversation, ask specific, concrete questions—where the answers can be found inside the story. Who, What, When & Why questions. (See *Unlovable*)
- Make personal connections to a story. “Has this ever happened to you?” “What would you do in this situation?” Conversations that move away from the plotline and into the personal are how children see connections between a story and their lives.
- Try listening. If you ask children a question, you have to wait a little while and allow them to think and respond.
- “What if” is a powerful tool to get your imagination working.
- Follow Winnie the Pooh’s advice on conversation: “It is more fun to talk with someone who doesn’t use long, difficult words but rather short, easy words like ‘What about lunch?’”

Conversation Starters

- Have your child tell you what is happening in the story first by looking at the pictures (picture walk).
- What character would you like to be your friend?
- Is there a character you dislike?
- What would you do in this situation?
- What if?
- Do you like the ending of the story? If not, how would you change the ending?
- What are you curious about at the end of the story?

Reading Together is available at your local bookstore or can be ordered on Diane’s website. For more information visit www.dianefrankenstein.com

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