

What Are the Benefits of Reading Aloud? *An Instructional Format for College-Age Learners*

Evidence-based benefits:

- Reading aloud creates a classroom community by establishing a known text that can be used as the basis for building on critical thinking skills that are related and unrelated to reading.
- Discussions generated by reading aloud can be used to encourage listeners to construct meanings, connect ideas and experiences across texts, use their prior knowledge, and question unfamiliar words from the text.
- Reading aloud gives students an opportunity to hear the instructor model fluency and expression in reading technical or literary language. “Through intonation, expression, and attention to punctuation, the reader demonstrates meaning embedded in the text.”
- Reading aloud develops adaptive expertise. Routine expertise relies on automated recall of *memorized declarative knowledge* but adaptive expertise depends on the acquisition of *meaningful knowledge*. That is, knowledge organized through connections to other knowledge. An adaptive expert synthesizes knowledge groups to make meaning in new ways to solve unexpected or novel problems. (Hatano 1988).
- Reading aloud helps students learn how to use language to make sense of the world; it improves their information processing skills, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Reading aloud targets the skills of audio learners. Research has shown that teachers who read aloud motivate students to read.

General concepts found here are drawn from Patricia McGee’s “The Instructional Value of Storytelling,” which she prepared under the auspices of the United States Air Force, Human Effectiveness Directorate, Warfighting Readiness Research Division. [Hatano, G \(1988\) “Social and Motivational Bases for Mathematical Understanding”](#) in *Children's Mathematics*, ed. GB Saxe, M. Gearhart.

Anecdotal (experiential) benefits:

- Reading aloud to students both slows down and simultaneously intensifies the classroom experience. In a world of sound bites and half-formed ideas expressed quickly in electronic formats, students benefit from hearing complete ideas, expressed with originality and attention, such as one finds in literary language.

- Reading aloud facilitates narrative transport –a state characterized by absorption into a story’s narrative flow; the listener may forget her surroundings and engage her visual, auditory, kinesthetic and emotional sense, and may experience a sense of time distortion. This is a qualitatively altered state that is supportive of active and deeper learning.
- Reading aloud helps students develop good listening habits. The value of listening within an instructional dialogue may not be fully appreciated in our fast-past, digitally accessible, media-saturated, action-oriented culture. Active listening fosters contemplation and reflection, without which students may collect information, yet fail to gain knowledge.
- Telling stories from disparate points of view helps the reader and student to grasp a bigger picture and anticipate variables that may not be discernible when approached from a single perspective.
- Reading aloud provides quick and easy assessment of student comprehension. One of the most basic tests of comprehension is to ask someone to read aloud from a book. It reveals far more than whether the reader understands the words. It reveals how far into the words – and the pattern of the words – the reader really sees. Reading aloud recaptures the physicality of words.