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opening extract from

# Great Books to Read Aloud

written by

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# It's never too early to start

Jacqueline Wilson
Children's Laureate
2005-2007



I love reading. I read everywhere – curled up in an armchair, slouching on the sofa, lying in the bath, half-dozing in bed. I always read on journeys. I even read walking along, though this is silly, and I shall doubtless walk slap-bang into a lamppost one day.

When my daughter, Emma, was born I fed her and changed her and rocked her . . . and read to her. She was one of those fidgety babies who barely slept and wanted to be played with all the time, which was pretty exhausting. There was just one thing that kept us both thoroughly happy and contented, and that was our reading aloud sessions. I'd sit her on my lap and cuddle her close and we'd turn the pages of a big picture book together. When there was a dog we'd go 'woof, woof' and pretend to stroke him. When there was a picture of a cake we'd pretend to eat and go 'yum, yum'. It was as simple and as basic as that.

By the time she was a toddler we were onto little stories and rhymes. We had great fun reading *Where the Wild Things Are*, roaring our terrible roars and showing our terrible claws to each other. Then we got onto all those gentle little girlie books like *Milly-Molly-Mandy*, stories I'd loved when I was little, and we talked to the animals, Little Bear and Little Grey Rabbit and Frances the Badger.



I worried that our lovely reading aloud sessions might stop when Emma started to learn to read. But we carried on, because I could read her older books she couldn't yet tackle by herself. Emma loved Victorian books so we could have a

wonderful wallow in *Little Women* and *What Katy Did* and *A Little Princess*, and by the time she was approaching adolescence we'd read *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations* together.

I don't think I was that brilliant a mum. I sometimes got tetchy and I was always a rubbish cook – but I'm so pleased we read aloud. I think it's the best gift you can give your child. It's a wonderful way of bonding together and simultaneously entering the magic world of the imagination. It's the easiest way of making sure your child is hooked on books for life.

This book is packed full of helpful suggestions for reading aloud, with top tips, an annotated list of brilliant books for all ages chosen by experts, and fascinating recommendations from a galaxy of celebrities. I hope you enjoy flicking through it – and then get started on reading aloud yourself. Read to your daughter, your son, your grandchild, your niece, your nephew, your pupils, your next-door-neighbour's child . . .

Spread the word.

Jacqueline Wilson

x x x

Happy Reading!

# Benefits of Reading Aloud

By Julia Eccleshare

For all readers the advantages of listening to a story are unlimited.

First and foremost, it is fun. Sharing a book is an entirely delightful thing to do. And it's easy, too. Enjoying silly sounds together, searching under flaps for missing characters, repeating the words and linking them to the pictures is a delightful experience for all from the very youngest baby onwards.

But beyond the pleasure there are also important and significant benefits.

Reading aloud has a remarkable effect on children. It enhances children's skills, interests and development in many ways that reach far beyond just improving their own reading interests and abilities.

Listening to stories has a strong influence on personal and social growth as it gives children the chance to experience things beyond their own world and to think about other people and their lives. Hearing stories also gives children access to new words, phrases and sounds, all of which improve their spoken and written vocabulary. Sharing a story by reading it aloud can make difficult or scary things seem safer.

All of these and more are the unexpected extras that can be gained from reading aloud.

## Try it!





## ANNE FINE

When my girls were young we spent hours idling about in our nighties in the double bed, ploughing through books from the library. They'd lie, one on each side of me, sucking their thumbs and jabbing me in the ribs with their elbows if I stopped doing the voices properly. They were some of the happiest times we had.

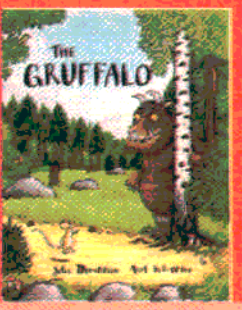
Then came the dark, dark years when my girls wanted to read by themselves. Now I'm thanking my lucky stars I have grandchildren and have started again at the beginning. Here's me and Isaac with our much-loved book of nursery rhymes. (You don't have to know the tunes. You just have to be bold enough to make one up and sing it with perfect confidence.) Since Isaac is currently enchanted by the notion of 'Man as Egg', one of his favourites is 'Humpty Dumpty.' But we warble them all with the greatest enthusiasm.





## RUTH KELLY MP

I love reading to my children and they have all enjoyed *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler. A wonderfully illustrated books, it tells the story of a brave little mouse who goes on a long journey through the deep dark wood. It is a tale of ingenuity, courage and self-belief, which sparks the imagination. With both rhythm and pace, the story can be retold hundreds of times.






## J. K. ROWLING

One of my fondest memories of my eldest daughter at age five involved *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* by C.S. Lewis. I used to balance the book on top of a very tall standard lamp to prevent her reading on before the next bedtime. One day, while I was safely in the kitchen, she clambered up a set of shelves to reach the book, gulped down the next two chapters and then, hearing my footsteps, hastily returned it to its perch on top of the lamp. I only rumbled her because she showed absolutely no surprise when, during that night's reading, Eustace, the hero, turned into a dragon.

My two younger children are still immersed in picture books, although my son's most recent favourite is *Dr. Seuss's Green Eggs and*