

Books Aloud – Leader Guide

Birmingham, let's read together

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Overview of *Books Aloud*

Thank you for signing up to *Books Aloud* – the campaign asking communities across Birmingham to read together.

The campaign is running across Birmingham **from the start of May until the end of July 2024.**

Who is the campaign for?

Books Aloud is targeted at groups that meet at regular intervals.

We would particularly like to engage groups working with:

- Teenagers:
 - at secondary schools
 - in sports teams and other hobby groups

- Adults:
 - in community spaces (such as coffee and chat groups)
 - in groups where English is not the first language
 - supporting people with low literacy levels
 - in care homes and hospices

Objectives

We hope that *Books Aloud* participants will become more **engaged with reading for pleasure.**

We run campaigns of this kind, because we know that reading engagement leads to increased literacy skills, which empowers people to live happy and healthy lives.

Research basis

Books Aloud uses a variety of research-led approaches, to support reading engagement. In turn, our research shows that reading for pleasure supports academic success and mental wellbeing.

(<https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/reading-pleasure-research-overview/>;
<https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/children-who-enjoy-reading-and-writing-have-significantly-better-mental-wellbeing-their-peers/>)

- **Shared reading**

The Reader charity has demonstrated that shared reading can improve wellbeing, reduce social isolation and build stronger communities.

- <https://www.thereader.org.uk/about-us/our-research/>

- **Role models**

Our 2008 NLT review and 2009 NLT study showed the impact of role models on young people's reading habits.

- <https://literacytrust.org.uk/research-services/research-reports/role-models-and-their-impact-literacy-2008-review/>
- https://literacytrust.org.uk/documents/123/2009_01_04_free_research_-_reading_and_role_models_survey_2009_kOxO0Dt.pdf

- **Audio**

A study by the Gallant Lab showed that the brain responds the same way if texts are read on the page or listened to.

- <https://www.discovermagazine.com/mind/audiobooks-or-reading-to-our-brains-it-doesnt-matter>

- **Reading talk**

The *Books Aloud* guidance on running discussions about texts, builds on the research and work of Aidan Chambers, who demonstrated the value of open and stimulating conversations in engaging people with reading.

- <http://www.aidanchambers.co.uk/readingtalk.htm>

Pilot

We piloted *Books Aloud* in Aston in 2022, working with young people at All City Basketball, and a community group at Birmingham Settlement. Our pilots were small scale, but received positive feedback from both groups and endorsed our approach.

How do I sign up to the campaign?

The campaign challenges you to read aloud with your group **five times or more** before the end of July 2024.

You can opt to read aloud to the group yourself, or request one of our volunteers to come along and read for you.

To participate you need to sign up using the form [on our website](#).

((<https://literacytrust.org.uk/communities/birmingham/books-aloud/>)).

Free resources and training available

To support you to participate we are offering:

- A free book of your choice to read aloud with your group
- Free training in reading aloud and book talk, running **Friday 3 May** from 9am-12pm at the **Library of Birmingham**.
 - Access to recordings of this training if you are unable to attend on the day.
- Volunteers to read aloud with your group if you'd prefer not to do it yourself.

Delivering *Books Aloud*

Reading Aloud

If you choose to run a *Books Aloud* delivery yourself, your responsibilities will be to:

- Choose a book or text to read with the group
- Read aloud to the group at least five times before the end of July 2024
- Guide a post-reading discussion after each session

If you request a volunteer to run the group upon sign up, we will try and match you with someone to come in and read aloud. Your responsibility will be to co-ordinate times for these visits, ensure your group is in attendance, and welcome them into the space.

Prizes available

During *Books Aloud* we are offering six £50 Amazon vouchers for settings that complete challenges. The prizes will be sent to the setting which sends us:

1. The best picture of reading aloud with their group
2. The best video of reading aloud with their group
3. The best example of audience participation while reading aloud
4. A description of the funniest moment when reading aloud
5. A description of the best discussion or debate after reading aloud
6. A description of the most engaged participant reading aloud

You can put yourself forward for any of these challenges on the [*Books Aloud* landing page](#).

(<https://literacytrust.org.uk/communities/birmingham/books-aloud/>)

Evaluation

Everyone who signs up for *Books Aloud* will be asked to complete a quick 'group leader survey' and distribute participant surveys.

This will help us to measure the impact of *Books Aloud* in building engagement with reading across Birmingham.

Copyright

Please do not photocopy the story you are reading aloud as handouts, as this will result in a breach of copyright.

The *Books Aloud* campaign celebrates the impact of reading aloud even when participants are not following along on the page. This might result in poorer

comprehension in the short term, but the goal of the campaign is to create reading engagement and make the experience of reading more social.

You must only read aloud for educational purposes, and may not use the *Books Aloud* programme for commercial purposes, or share the text aloud for commercial gain. Please also do not film the story being read aloud in full unless you have permission from the publisher of the book in question to do so.

Safeguarding

During *Books Aloud* sessions, safeguarding is the responsibility of the community in which the group is hosted. This means:

- If you are a volunteer who is an existing part of a group, you should follow the safeguarding policy of the community while running *Books Aloud*.
- If you are an external volunteer, visiting a community, you should identify the safeguarding lead in that setting before delivering *Books Aloud* and familiarise yourself with their safeguarding policy.

If during the session, someone discloses information to you, that you think means they are in danger of any kind, the basic principles are to:

- Listen carefully and take notes if you need
- Do not ask leading questions or 'play detective'
- As soon as possible, report what you have heard, as accurately as possible and in the discloser's words, to the community safeguarding lead.

Strategies for reading aloud

Pre-reading: Choosing texts

Participants in *Books Aloud* each have the opportunity to choose a FREE book of their choice to read aloud with the group.

If you are unsure of which book or text to choose, here are some ideas.

Types of book

In piloting *Books Aloud* we found the following two types of book were most successful:

1. **Short story collections**

Short stories are excellent for reading aloud because they can be covered in one or two sessions. This helps with managing attendance and engagement. It can also increase the sense of participant satisfaction with the story and therefore the quality of post-reading discussion.

2. **Non-fiction books relevant to a group's interest area**

We first piloted *Books Aloud* with All City Basketball team, a group of teenage basketball players. Many of these young people did not enjoy reading stories and didn't want to 'waste' training time. We found however that they did value hearing a book about mindset in basketball – with short chapters explaining tips for mental performance on the court. This book worked because it matched the group's interest areas, and we believe the same will be true of other groups.

The sign-up form for *Books Aloud* asks for a few details about your group's interests – and the National Literacy Trust team will be happy to recommend a book to suit your group if you'd like support.

3. **Picture books**

Picture books are not just for small children!

They are a great medium for reading aloud because they include visual stimuli, which can help listeners to get involved in the story. For older and adult readers, the ambiguity of pictures in age-appropriate picture books can engage deep and accessible discussions.

Our 'Picture This' resource pack contains a range of suggestions of picture books for KS1, KS2 and KS3 audiences. Many of the KS3 suggestions would also work well with adults.

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/competitions/picture-this-reading-challenge/>

Specific suggestions

If you would just like us to 'pick you a book' that we think might work for your group's age-range, we recommend the four titles below.

Adults (18+)

The Birmingham Book edited by Kavita Bhanot - containing many stories written about characters in Birmingham - by Birmingham based authors.

Secondary (11-18)

Skin and other Stories by Roald Dahl - which features gruesome and horrific tales of crime and mystery.

Key Stage 2
(ages 7-11)

The Princess Bride by William Goldman - an exciting fantasy novel - with many short and entertaining episodes.

Early Years and
Key Stage 1
(ages 3-7)

The Book with No Pictures by BJ Novak - a hilarious and unusual storytelling option with lots of opportunities for participation.

To decide which anthology to choose, have a conversation with the group about the sort of stories they like. For Example, a group that doesn't like gruesome stories would hate the Roald Dahl suggestion.

Once you have settled on a text, it is worth reading it in full before beginning it with the group. Make a few bullet points of notes about each story or section, perhaps covering its:

- Mood or tone
- Length
- Themes
- Basic plot

Before each session, this list will allow you to discuss with group members what ‘sort of story’ they fancy and make a selection that fits the group’s mood and the amount of time you have available.

During reading: How to read aloud

Everyone makes mistakes, and stumbles when reading aloud. A lot of people can therefore lack confidence to give it a go. However – reading a short text aloud is an amazing community activity, greatly appreciated by groups. Try not to worry too much about getting it all exactly right!

All that said, there are a few things to consider in order to read a short story aloud effectively.

Skill for reading aloud	Guidance
Pace	<p>Read <i>*much more slowly*</i> than you think you should.</p> <p>We all have a tendency to rush when reading aloud – in the belief that the audience is getting bored.</p> <p>Actually, reading slowly allows everyone to follow and become absorbed in the storyline. It increases, rather than diminishes, engagement.</p>

Volume	<p>Read as loudly as you can (without shouting). Every group will have members who struggle to hear and we all benefit from clear enunciation.</p>
Variation of pitch and tone	<p>If you listen to a story read aloud on an audiobook, you will notice they vary their pitch and tone in delivery. This is because listeners enjoy variation. Monotone delivery makes a story sound boring – regardless of its content!</p> <p>No-one is expecting a full ‘actor’s rendition’ – but the more variation you can include the better your story is likely to go down.</p>
Body language and eye contact	<p>Reading a story aloud is a community activity. It is about enjoying a work of fiction together.</p> <p>By trying to make eye contact with members of the group, you can ensure that each feels a part of the experience. This in turn can encourage them to listen actively and respond with body language or vocal responses to key moments in the story.</p> <p>Similarly, inclusive body language – like keeping your head up and using hand gestures to illustrate the story – emphasises the community nature of the activity.</p>
Encouraging listener participation	<p>Encouraging audience participation in a story might seem silly at first – especially with older groups. But it can be a fun and effective way to increase engagement with the story.</p> <p>As a simple example: when there is a knock on the door in the story, you could ask all the listeners to</p>

knock on their desk or stamp a foot – to make the sound.

Or – when characters enter a busy space, you could ask them each to talk among themselves for 10 seconds to create a ‘soundscape’. When participants get used to this, you could think about more ambitious soundscapes– such as a forest, which would require different listeners making different noises!

Finding participation opportunities involves creativity and you will have more ideas as you grow in confidence.

It helps to plan, mark potential participation moments on your text with a pencil asterisk.

Post reading: leading a discussion

Discussion after reading aloud is very important – as it is the part in which all members of the group can become active participants. Expressing opinions is one of the chief pleasures of reading together.

For people who don’t or can’t read themselves, listening to a text read aloud and then having the chance to participate in a live discussion, can help to introduce the joy of book talk in an accessible way.

A good strategy for leading a discussion about stories is the *Tell Me* approach, developed by Aidan Chambers. Chambers argues that prescriptive questions (i.e. questions which seem to have a right or wrong answer or that you know the answer to) can close down discussion and alienate certain members of the group.

Questions to avoid in the ‘Tell Me’ approach

- What was the story/text about?
- Who was the main character?
- Where was the story set?
- What do you think was the main theme?
- What was the author trying to teach us?

....etc

Instead of questions, therefore, Chambers argues for explorative prompts, beginning with the prefix ‘tell me...’. ‘*Tell me...*’ statements can discuss whatever topic you like but some examples are provided below:

Core examples – *Tell Me* Statements

- Tell me what you liked about the story/text
- Tell me what you disliked about the story/text
- Tell me about a pattern you noticed in the story
- Tell me about a moment in the story/text that surprised you
- Tell me about a moment that connected to your life and experiences

Debate questions specific to the story or text

As well as ‘*tell me*’ statements, it can be useful to ask questions which deal with the story’s plot or information content specifically and invite debate. These kind of questions are again less prescriptive, as there is no ‘right answer’ in a controversial debate. For example:

- Did you agree with [character’s] decision to [action]?
- What did you think when [character] said [statement]?
- How would you have reacted when [event] happened?
- Do you agree with the [message you have found] given in the text?

Following questions up with discussion

Whether using ‘*Tell Me*’ statements or debate questions specific to the texts, the ultimate goal is to encourage open discussion.

After posing an initial prompt, members of the group usually come forward with responses to each other’s points, extending and enriching the conversation. If this has strayed from your post-reading ‘plan’, it can be tempting to cut this off and move onto the next discussion point. But try to avoid this instinct! Whatever its direction, group discussion on the text’s themes, or resonances should be left to grow naturally. If the group is reticent, some short, direct prompts can be useful to encourage more people to get involved. For example:

- Posing the same discussion point to another member of the group by asking things like: “And do you agree?”, “What about you?” or “What do you think about that?”.

- Opening up the discussion to all with prompts like “Who can build on that?”, “What else?” or “Does anyone disagree?”.
- Inviting speakers to themselves, build on their comments, with prompts like “And why do you say that?”, “I love that point – tell me more.” or “Is that a personal point for you?”

Working with larger groups – splitting the discussion

If you are working with a group of more than eight participants (as will likely be the case in all school groups), it is a good idea to have participants discuss each prompt in pairs or small groups before opening up to whole group discussions.

Sharing thoughts to a whole group can be intimidating. By splitting into smaller groups, participants have time to organise their thoughts and often feel more confident to speak up.

Support

If you have any queries, issues or concerns while running a *Books Aloud* group, contact the National Literacy Trust – Birmingham team, using the details below.

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