## Contents

Foreword by Margaret Mooney ix  
Acknowledgments xi  

1 *Shared Reading* 1  

2 *Shared Reading in the Classroom: Capturing the Essentials of the Bedtime Story* 12  

3 *Using Shared Reading for Implicit and Explicit Instruction* 25  

4 *Shared Reading in Action* 37  

5 *How Shared Reading Contributes to the Other Components of a Balanced Literacy Program* 61  

6 *Working with Narrative Texts* 70  

7 *Informational Texts* 84  

8 *Innovating on Shared Reading Books: The Reading-Writing Connection* 104  

9 *Choosing Resources for Shared Reading* 113  

Appendix A: *Who’s in the Shed?* The Author’s Perspective 133  
Appendix B: Nonfiction Series 141  
References 145
Chapter 2

Shared Reading in the Classroom: Capturing the Essentials of the Bedtime Story

Capitalize on the active and social nature of children’s learning, early instruction must provide rich demonstrations, interactions and models of literacy in the course of activities that make sense to young children.

IRA and NAEYC joint position statement, 1998

Shared reading builds on the benefits of the bedtime story to provide a solid foundation for reading and writing. At the same time, it fosters a sense of community, as children collaborate to talk, think, listen, and join in the reading.

In order for shared reading to reach its full potential the classroom situation must closely replicate the content and characteristics that make the bedtime story such a powerful precursor to successful reading.

Elements for Success

A number of elements common to the various research studies can help guide the implementation of shared reading in the classroom:
• The experience is intimate and enjoyable.
• A variety of texts are introduced and explored.
• Children actively participate.
• Approximations are celebrated and responded to.
• Participation increases over time.
• Meaning is collaboratively negotiated.
• Favorite texts are repeatedly requested and reread.
• Resources are readily available.
• Children are encouraged to make life-to-text connections.
• Children are encouraged to make text-to-text connections.
• Children are encouraged to internalize process and content.

Creating an Intimate Environment

The first element essential to effective shared reading is the right physical setting. As much as possible, the intimacy of the home situation should be recreated. I like to have a carpeted area or rug where the whole class or group can sit comfortably together and clearly see the big books, posters, and overhead transparencies. I need a chair that is low enough to allow me to develop synergy between myself, the children, and the book through my voice and body language, and help me create a supportive, interactive experience. The physical setting has to become the classroom equivalent of twenty or more children on my lap at one time!

Only when all the children in the group are comfortably seated, able to see the print and pictures and hear the language, and secure enough to take risks can I engage them in thinking and acting like readers as fully and deeply as I want them to.

Selecting a Variety of Texts

The next essential element of a successful shared reading program is to have a carefully chosen selection of material for reading and rereading, including stories, traditional tales, fables, poetry, songs and raps, and nonfiction. The interests, grade level, and ability of the group are paramount factors in choosing texts, as are the teacher’s instructional needs. The reading materials must contain print that is big enough for all to see and illustrations that complement and extend the text. They must also have features that allow the children to confidently join in with some parts of the text from the first reading. The content and layout must support the teacher’s efforts, and the text must be worth coming
back to many times for many purposes and invite collaborative meaning making.

As I think back on the kinds of books the children in my study made their favorites and the shared books the children I work with have loved, I realize that they all have at least some of these features:

- strong story lines grounded in experiences familiar to children
- factual experiences told through clear writing and organization and supported by photographs or realistic pictures
- lively, rhythmical, and uncontrived language
- illustrations that support and extend the text
- many entry points for children to participate through reading and talking
- humor
- action-packed plots
- memorable characters and language
- a satisfying ending

These characteristics guide me in choosing books for shared reading that children are likely to find interesting and that will lead to young readers’ engagement, interaction, and active problem solving.

Inviting Active Participation

It is of critical importance to choose the right resources for shared reading. The texts must delight the children, offer many opportunities for active participation, and have sufficient substance to support many rereadings. These characteristics are also true of good bedtime stories.

Teachers can make reading accessible to all by having available a range of carefully selected texts and text types and providing demonstrations of how the texts work, what readers do, and how they do it. Invitations to join in should not interrupt the flow of the story, but are given as part of the interactive experience. I might pause briefly to wonder what will happen next, or pause imperceptibly for children to supply a highly predictable word, or extend an invitation through body language. In these and other ways the children are drawn into increasing participation so that the reading of the text becomes a collaborative effort involving thinking, talking, and reading. And when children are encouraged by the appropriateness of the book and the support and
expectation of the teacher and the group, they will become active problem solvers.

By working this way, teachers can make it possible for all children to be involved in shared book reading from the first day of school. Some will talk about the illustrations, some will join in highly predictable parts such as a repetitive chant, some will listen and watch as the teacher points to the words and reads, a few will predict what might happen next, someone can help turn the pages, but all will be acting and feeling like readers.

Collaboratively Negotiating Meaning

I am constantly thinking of ways to model and engage the children in collaborative meaning making by linking their prior experience to the language, illustrations, and concepts of the texts. The idea is to encourage the children to get inside the writers’ and illustrators’ heads. To do this, I frequently wonder out loud about the decisions the authors have made. For example: I wonder what the artist wants us to think when we look at the animals on the cover of this book? What will happen next?
What makes you think that? I wonder why the author uses the words “wishy washy, wishy washy” to describe washing the animals? I wonder what clues the author and illustrators built in for us?

Children should be encouraged to build connections between the texts and their life experiences and between texts and other texts. Following the ideas of Ellin Keene and Susan Zimmermann (1997), they could be asked to visualize places, characters, and events. They should also be encouraged to collaborate as they negotiate meaning. During these activities, teachers should follow the children’s lead and explore their thinking.

**Revisiting and Rereading Favorite Books**

Books used in shared reading should be available for rereading, and the children should have a say in choosing what to read and how to read it.

One of the most significant features of the bedtime story is that children request the same stories over and over again and spend time with them independently as well. With each reading, they confirm what they already know and use that knowledge to fuel deeper explorations. Although rereading favorite books over a long period of time is a critical factor in children’s learning, it is often overlooked in shared reading. This is partly a management problem. Books are frequently kept in a central storage area and checked out as needed to ensure their availability for all. However, each classroom does need a core collection of books that can remain in the classroom for the entire school year. If books are available for only a short time, some children will never have the chance to get to know and love them.

Rereading offers benefits to all members of the group. It enables each child to take something unique from the rereading. Many voices joining in unison to read a much-loved book build a momentum that carries readers forward. This in turn creates an environment where children feel safe to take risks, to try things out, and to learn from each other.

The more experienced readers might be able to read the whole text, their familiarity with the content enabling them to focus on fluency and phrasing. Some children may notice individual words. Others may join in on a chant or refrain, some bit of memorable dialogue, or some other repetitive or highly predictable part of the text. A few children may be echo reading, joining in a second behind the others. Some may just listen to the story, not yet able to join in with the reading, but moving to the
rhythm of the language as they look at the print and follow the meaning from the pictures. All of this is significant reading behavior.

The opportunity to return to books over and over again with the support of the teacher and classmates allows children to refine their meaning-making strategies and helps them learn to draw on information from a variety of sources. Over time children will build a collection of familiar books that they can read independently and a repertoire of skills and strategies they can use in understanding both familiar and new texts.

Allowing Time for Independent Confirmation and Exploration

It is vitally important that children be given time and opportunity to revisit and reread familiar books in paired and independent situations as well as in the larger group. Independent exploration lets them apply the new skills and knowledge they have learned and allows them to practice and orchestrate behaviors that lead to fluency. As Don Holdaway wrote in 1979:

> The bedtime story should not be separated from the independent, productive behavior that it generates. Such behavior normally engages the infant in extensive, self monitored linguistic behavior for longer periods of time, involving far more intensive language use than is the case with the input activity of listening. (p. 61)

Children should have access to both big books and their small-book counterparts. These they can use for independent reading; for discussion with friends; for independent browsing; as references for retelling and sequencing activities; and for word work, such as identifying high-frequency or rhyming words. In addition, audiotapes of the books can be useful, as children can read and listen along with them. Once the children have had time to explore and become familiar with them, the books can also be used for written responses and for independent work at learning centers.

**Essential Tools**

A number of tools can facilitate shared reading in the classroom. A sturdy easel is a must for displaying books securely. Books for shared reading are much too big to be held comfortably, and the teacher
should have both hands free to turn pages and to use a pointer and other accessories effectively. You should be free to observe the children and encourage their participation without worrying about whether the book is going to fall over.

Storage areas for books are also needed. They should be kept in a place where they are readily accessible for whole-group sharing as well as small-group or individual use. Some easels have a storage area built into them to contain the books. Another option is to clip the books onto skirt hangers and hang them on a stand, or store them in plastic bags that have a hook to hang them from.

Other essential tools include the following:

- colored translucent highlighter tape
- Wikki Stix™
- Post-it notes of various sizes
- correction tape
- sliding masks
- sentence strips
- pocket charts
- word cards
- magnetic boards
- a white board or chart
- pointers
- magnetic letters
- a plain pointer that does not interfere with the view of the print

**Highlighter Tape**

See-through highlighter tape comes in many different colors and in two different widths. It can be used to help children identify a variety of language elements, including:

- rhyming words
- known words
- word endings
- transition words
- specialized language
- punctuation
- repetitive text patterns
- capitalization
- letters
- letter clusters
- definitions