

Reading stories aloud

On your marks:

It sounds so easy – ‘I’ll just read them a story’. But reading aloud from a book well is an acquired skill. Whatever situation we’re in, in school or church groups, it’s good to hone up our reading aloud skills to do the story full justice. Below are a few simple do’s and don’ts to consider. Perhaps this sheet would be useful to pass on to younger members of your leadership team to give them some fresh ideas.

Get Set:

You’ll need a book!

Needless to say, *Barnabas* has a wide range of stories to read aloud, from picture books for little ones to more complex stories for older children. Check out, for example, [Knock Knock! Who’s there?](#) or [God sent a Baby King](#). But think out of the box too – there are other excellent children’s books around. Secular books can tie in beautifully with Christian themes. Think about *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, for example – wonderful pictures and tight storyline with a strong message about transformation (or the sin of greed, if you’re feeling puritanical!)

Go!

Do

- Pick a book you love – your enthusiasm will communicate itself to the children.
- Read it to yourself before you read it aloud – familiarity with the story will add to your confidence and give you time to mentally edit the text to suit your children.
- Have a recognised way for children to sit (cross-legged?) that helps children get ready to listen, and during the reading, remind them to resume that position if their attention slips. And sit up as you read – it shows you’re interested in what you’re reading.
- Talk about the cover before you open the book – build the anticipation. ‘What might this book be about?’
- Think about a focal object – is there something you could bring in to touch and smell and look at that relates to the story? (a doll in a bed of hay, a roll and a fish, a bowl of water...?)
- Read slowly with younger children – give their imaginations time to fill in the gaps.
- Leave time for children to supply the end of a repeated phrase in the story.
- Use different voices for different characters or animals. Bob Hartman suggests easy ways to different voices in his storytelling handbooks published by Lion.
- Vary your voice: volume, pitch, speed.
- If you think the children’s attention is wandering, ask a question, ‘What would you

do next?' 'What do you think might be behind this door?' 'Have you ever felt like that?'

- Make sure the children can see the pictures – it's worth sitting a little higher than the children so that even the back row can see them – and you.
- Consider closing curtains, using cushions and beanbags to make a cosy atmosphere.
- Allow time to chat over and unpack the issues and emotions raised in the story.

Don't

- Treat the story as if it doesn't matter, as if it's something to endure before you can get on to something more interesting.
- Bury your head in the book and keep your head down: keep making eye contact.
- Pick it up for the first time and expect to tell it brilliantly – professional actors who read
- Talking Books often spend hours preparing and making meticulous notes on the scripts of the novels they're due to record.
- Feel you have to plough through long descriptions.
- Pick a book with too much dialogue – these are often better read silently to avoid confusion over who says what.
- Sit in front of a bright light or window – the book and you will be blank silhouettes.

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