



# EVERY CHILD A READER

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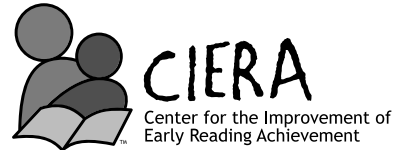


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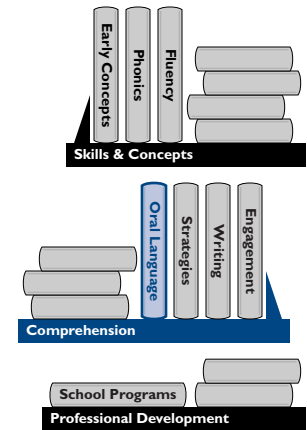


# EVERY CHILD A READER

## TOPIC 1

### Oral Language and Reading

Children’s oral language abilities are interwoven with learning to read and write. The oral language children acquire as preschoolers helps them to connect words and sounds with print. Throughout the school years, oral language is both a means whereby children learn about reading and a goal of reading instruction.



**Oral language is the foundation on which reading is built, and it continues to serve this role as children develop as readers.**

Children come to school with a great deal of knowledge about their oral language. They know between 3,000 and 5,000 words<sup>1</sup> which they comprehend aurally and can order into grammatically correct sentences to communicate.<sup>2</sup> They have even learned a lot about the rules that govern conversation: Listen to others when they speak, questions deserve answers, and commands deserve a response of some sort (even a refusal is a linguistically appropriate response). Most importantly, oral language—via conversations with parents, preschool teachers, and peers—is the primary tool they use to discover how their world works. The critical task for children entering school is to learn how to turn inward and reflect on ways they use their language to read and write.

Oral language serves two important roles in literacy learning.<sup>3</sup> First, it provides the foundation for reading and writing long before formal instruction begins. Young children’s proficiency in their oral language—their sense of words and sentences, sensitivity to the sound system, and understanding of the meanings of words—influences their early attempts to read and write. Oral language provides new information about written language. It also continues to provide information about learners’ understanding of print for many years, whatever their age or expertise. Through conversations, classroom discussions, and instruction, children are introduced to new ways of studying texts and new strategies for organizing the complex material they encounter as they read.

Second, children use oral language to tell us whether they understand what they read. When their understanding of a text is incomplete, oral language (in the form of discussions with teachers and peers) is a means of expanding their understanding. Through discussions, children hear other perspectives of a text, including how peers have related the text’s content to knowledge about the world and personal experiences. Without this talk, an opportunity is lost to extend children’s knowledge from reading.

## Accomplishments for the Oral Language–Reading Connection<sup>4</sup>

PRESCHOOL	KINDERGARTEN	FIRST GRADE	SECOND & THIRD GRADES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the overall sequence of events in stories</li> <li>• Understands and follows oral directions</li> <li>• Connects information and events to life experiences when being read a story</li> <li>• Knows that it is the print that is read in stories</li> <li>• Pays attention to separable and repeating sounds in language (e.g., Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater)</li> <li>• Uses new vocabulary and grammatical construction in own speech</li> <li>• Demonstrates understanding of literal meaning of stories by asking questions and making comments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins to track print when listening to a familiar text being read or when re-reading own writing</li> <li>• Makes appropriate switches from oral to written language situations</li> <li>• Connects information and events in text to life and life experiences to text</li> <li>• Retells, re-enacts, or dramatizes stories or parts of stories</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes transition from emergent reading to “real” reading</li> <li>• Shows evidence of expanding language repertory, including increasing use of standard, formal language registers</li> <li>• Discusses features of stories and main ideas and prior knowledge of topics in informational texts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reads and comprehends stories and informational text appropriate for grade level</li> <li>• Participates in creative responses to texts such as discussions, dramatizations, oral presentations, and plays</li> </ul>

This set of accomplishments, as with those in the frameworks of numerous states,<sup>5</sup> illustrates the integrated nature of oral and written language learning. This set of accomplishments also illustrates the manner in which children’s growth as readers and writers is grounded in the oral language learning of the preschool years. Partnerships between primary-level educators and Head Start and other preschool providers are essential if children, especially those in high-poverty communities, are to enter school with the foundations in oral language necessary to attain the goal of independent reading by the end of third grade.

## Instruction That Connects Oral Language and Reading: Grades K–1

### Talk about the what and how of reading and writing

**Oral language is the vehicle for drawing children’s attention to the functions and features of written language.**

Developing concepts about what reading is and about conventions of reading is critical to learning to read. For example, children must learn the movement from left to right and top to bottom (directionality) in written English and what the words “letter” and “word” mean. As teachers talk about content and fea-

tures of print in reading and writing activities, children come to understand how reading and writing work. Without such talk, reading and writing can remain mysterious to young children, even in settings where they encounter lots of books and other printed materials.

Kindergarten and first-grade teachers have many strategies for drawing children’s attention to important concepts about text.<sup>6</sup> Walking around the school and stopping to talk about words on doors—restrooms, offices, the cafeteria—is a useful way to orient children to the school and help them understand the role that written words play in our everyday lives. Describing the activity as “reading” when children recognize their names on cubbies and coat racks also reinforces initial reading concepts.

### **Shared readings of big books**

Big books—books large enough for all in a group to see—have proven effective in directing children’s attention to concepts such as the directionality of English print, parts of books, picture-print relationships, and connections between the sounds of oral language and the marks of written language. Books with a moderate amount of text on a page and easily discernible patterns are the best candidates for big books. A book such as *As Quick as a Cricket*<sup>a</sup> in which a child’s attributes are presented as a simile (“I’m as quick as a cricket,” “I’m as slow as a snail,”) works well as a big book.

As teachers **track print** (trace their fingers under the words as they are read aloud), children learn about the association between oral and written language. Teachers initiate children into a strategic stance toward reading by asking for predictions of the story after an examination of the cover, title, and a quick visit through the book. Suggestions for books to use in these shared reading events can be found in various sources.<sup>7</sup>

## **Instruction That Connects Oral Language and Reading: Grades 2–3**

**Teachers often use read-aloud books with challenging content to model strategic comprehension.**

### **Read-alouds of challenging books**

Starting with the first read-aloud in kindergarten, teachers elicit and expand children’s interpretations of books. As children gain reading proficiency, the object of these conversations changes from big books to regular-sized books with challenging content.<sup>8</sup>

Books about social studies, science, and other topics that children may not be able to read on their own are especially appropriate for conversations emphasizing comprehension. As examples, consider the Teachers’ Choice awards that are given annually to books selected by a nationwide sample of teachers.

These books are likely to require a teacher’s guidance if most young readers are to fully understand and appreciate them.

## Teachers’ Choices, 1997: Primary Level (Grades K–2)<sup>9</sup>

*Amazon Alphabet* (Martin & Tanis Jordan. Ill. Martin Jordan, 1996; Kingfisher): From agouti (a rodent) to zorro (a wild dog), each letter is depicted by an animal in its habitat in the South American rain forest.

*Bill Pickett: Rodeo-Ridin’ Cowboy* (Andrea D. Pinkney. Ill. Brian Pinkney, 1996; Gulliver): The story of Bill Pickett traces his early life as the son of former slaves to his rise as a rodeo star, including his invention of bulldogging, which is one of seven standard rodeo events.

*The Blue and the Gray* (Eve Bunting. Ill. Ned Bittinger, 1996; Scholastic): This text moves between the end of the 20th century and the past as two boys, one of European descent and one of African descent, watch construction on their new homes beside a field that was the scene of a Civil War battle.

*The Day Gogo Went to Vote* (Elinor Batzat Sisulu. Ill. Sharon Wilson, 1996; Little, Brown): Thembi, a child in Soweto, tells the story of how her one-hundred-year-old great-grandmother, Gogo, casts her first ballot during South Africa’s first democratic election in April 1994.

*My House Has Stars* (Megan McDonald. Ill. Peter Catalanotto, 1996; Orchard): Children from eight different locations—Alaska, Mongolia, Ghana, Japan, the Philippines, Brazil, Nepal, and the American Southwest—describe their houses, including the stars. The last frame locates the children under the same canopy of stars with their homes pinpointed on a map.

## Book clubs

**There are a number of different efforts—including grand conversations and book clubs—that involve children in student-led discussions of literature.**

In book clubs, group members read one or more sections of the same book. Before meeting for discussion, children write their views, predictions, or preliminary answers to questions about the book in literature logs. Projects like Book Club, which was initially developed for the intermediate grades, have been adapted for primary-level students.<sup>10</sup> Book Club teachers facilitate dialogues by raising questions for independent reading. Stimulating questions go beyond the content to make children think about authors’ perspectives, peers’ reactions, and similar experiences and stories. Children’s notes on the questions give structure to the discussions. With primary-level children, a “fish bowl” format can be used, in which a group conducts a discussion in the center of a circle of the whole class. Observers and participants can share and enjoy the meaning of the story, and can also discuss behaviors that support good conversation.

Though teacher guidance is essential in all phases of the Book Club, teachers must know how to shift responsibility for the discussion to the students. A second-grade teacher, for example, began by reading *Shiloh*,<sup>b</sup> a book with multiple chapters that most second graders were unable to comprehend independently. She provided a great deal of guidance in the initial stages but gradually involved the students in leading discussions. That early modeling and guidance paid dividends later on because it enabled the children to conduct their own Book Clubs with less complex books.

## Instruction for English Language Learners

**Developing literacy skills in a child's first language can foster literacy skills in English.**

Learning a written form of a second language while learning to speak a new language is a demanding task. Progress in second language reading and writing is more rapid for children who have learned to read and write in their first language. In schools where many first languages are represented or teachers are not available to teach in students' first languages, initial reading instruction must take place in English. In those situations, top priority should be to develop English language learners' oral English fluency before reading and writing instruction begins.

While English oral language development initially serves as the foundation for reading and writing, reading and writing can also support English language learners' oral fluency in English. Through shared readings of big books, English language learners attend to English vocabulary for concepts. For example, a read-along of the big book version of *Hattie and the Fox*<sup>c</sup> can direct children to the English names of various animals. These names might be reinforced by writing key words on the board.

Teachers in classrooms where English language learners are successful also have children respond to books in a variety of modes.<sup>11</sup> For example, after a choral reading of *As Quick as a Cricket*, children might take turns imitating the attributes depicted in the book—slow, strong, gentle, and shy. English language learners' reading can also be extended as they listen to audiotaped versions of the books.

## Instruction for Children Who Are Struggling Readers

**Readers' theater—where a play is read by different characters from a script—is an engaging activity for all children but can be particularly effective in providing struggling readers with an opportunity to witness the link between reading (the text of the play) and oral language (the way in which they perform and dramatize the script)**

Occasions for talking and reading abound as children select books for readers' theater. After a group of struggling readers chose *Tikki Tikki Tembo*<sup>d</sup> for readers' theater, they were observed to repeatedly read parts of the story as they negotiated the treatment of scenes and characters.<sup>12</sup> In one session, a group member said, "We have to look in the book." Another child responded: "It's right here. 'Chang ran as fast as his legs could carry him to his mother.'"

Folk tales like *Tikki Tikki Tembo* are particularly effective for readers' theater due to their straightforward story structures and dramatic problems. Since many cultures have similar tales, struggling readers can compare several versions of a tale, such as *Lon Po Po*,<sup>e</sup> a Chinese version of *Little Red Riding Hood*, with the English versions. Another adaptation comes from the transformation or "fracturing" of fairy tales such as *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*.<sup>f</sup> These familiar tales offer opportunities for children to hear, say, and read words in enjoyable stories that they understand.

**EVERY CHILD A READER:  
COMPANION READINGS**

- Goldenberg, C. (1992–93). Instructional conversations: Promoting comprehension through discussion. *The Reading Teacher*, 46, 316–326.
- MacGillivray, L., & Hawes, S. (1994). “I don’t know what I’m doing—they all start with B”: First graders negotiate peer reading interactions. *The Reading Teacher*, 48, 210–217.

**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> Gibson, E., & Levin, H. (1975). *The psychology of reading*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- <sup>2</sup> Snow, C.E., & Tabors, P.O. (1993). Language skills that relate to literacy development. In B. Spodek & O.N. Saracho (Eds.), *Language and literacy in early childhood education* (pp. 1–20). New York: Teachers College Press.
- <sup>3</sup> Sulzby, E. (1996). Roles of oral and written language as children approach conventional literacy. In C. Pontecorvo, M. Osolini, B. Burge, & L. Resnick (Eds.), *Early text construction in children* (pp. 25–46). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- <sup>4</sup> Snow, C.E., Burns, M.S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- <sup>5</sup> Wixson, K.K., & Dutro, E. (1998). *Standards for primary-grade reading: An analysis of state frameworks* (CIERA Report #3-001). Ann Arbor, MI: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.
- <sup>6</sup> Martinez, M., et al. (1989). No-risk kindergarten literacy environments for at-risk children. In J. Allen & J. Masen (Eds.), *Risk-makers, risk takers, risk breakers: Reducing the risks for young literacy learners*. (pp. 93–124). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- <sup>7</sup> Reutzel, D.R., Hollingsworth, P.M., & Eldredge, J.L. (1994). Oral reading instruction: The impact on student reading achievement. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 29, 40–65.
- Gunning, T.G. (1998). *Best books for beginning readers*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- <sup>8</sup> Valencia, S.W., & Lipson, M.Y. (1998). Thematic instruction: A quest for challenging ideas and meaningful learning. In T.E. Raphael & K.H. Au (Eds.), *Literature-based instruction: Reshaping the curriculum*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.
- <sup>9</sup> Teachers’ Choices (1997). Primary-level books. *The Reading Teacher*, 48, 239–241.
- <sup>10</sup> Grattan, K.W. (1997). They can do it too!: Book Club with first and second graders. In S.I. McMahon & T.E. Raphael with V.J. Goatley & L.S. Pardo (Eds.), *The book club connection: Literacy learning and classroom talk*. New York: Teachers College Press and International Reading Association.
- <sup>11</sup> Gersten, R., & Woodward, J. (1995). A longitudinal study of transitional and immersion bilingual education programs in one district. *The Elementary School Journal*, 95, 223–240.
- <sup>12</sup> Wolf, S.A. (1994). Learning to act/acting to learn: Children as actors, critics, and characters in classroom theatre. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 28, 7–44.

**CHILDREN’S BOOKS**

- a Wood, A. (1982). *As Quick as a Cricket*. Singapore: Child’s Play.
- b Naylor, P.R. (1991). *Shiloh*. New York: Athenbaum.
- c Fox, M. (1988). *Hattie and the fox*. New York: Bradbury.
- d Mosel, A. (1968). *Tikki Tikki Tembo*. New York: Scholastic.
- e Young, E. (1989). *Lon Po Po*. New York: Philomel.
- f Scieszka, J. (1989). *The true story of the 3 little pigs!* New York: Puffin Books.

This topic is part of the series *Every Child a Reader* by E.H. Hiebert, P.D. Pearson, B.M. Taylor, V. Richardson, & S.G. Paris of the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA).

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