



LOW HANGING FRUIT

Picture Books, Vocabulary, and the Importance of Reading at Home

By Jeannie Standal

Children who are read to at least three times a week by a family member are almost twice as likely to score in the top 25% in reading. Why? When kids spend time with their adults reading aloud, they are expanding their vocabularies and world knowledge. Reading teachers know that larger vocabularies lead to better reading comprehension.

According to the landmark 1995 [30 Million Word Gap study by Hart & Risley](#), some kids show up to school having heard 30 million more words by age four than some of their classmates. That's a lot of words! How can students ever hope to make up that gap?

Enter the picture book from the school library. Children's picture books have more rare words (there is a system to rank the rarity of words) than primetime adult or children's programming, and more than college-educated adult conversation.¹ Out of every 1,000 words in children's picture books, 30.9 of them will be rare. Compare that to primetime TV for adults (22.7) and expert witness testimony (28.4).



A (rare) word about comics:

Comic books have even more rare words (53.5 words/1,000) than picture books or adult books (52.7), making them a choice selection for students, especially those in middle grades, who want to expand their vocabularies.

For many kids and for many reasons, the school library is the only library to which they have access. Research shows that children who live more than six blocks away from the public library are unlikely to use it. On the other hand, most kids spend every school day just down the hall from a library filled with books suited to their age and interests.

When considering whether those kiddos are responsible enough to take books home with them to read with their adults, please remember the benefit students get from reading aloud with family members with books that are interesting, rather than within their reading levels, and what that could do for their reading skills.

The school library is a vocabulary vault, with teachers and school librarians holding the keys. Let your students unlock the riches in print that are there waiting for them to take home.

¹Colyard, K. W. (2016, July 12). Kids Books Use More Rare Words Than Adult TV, So Drop the Remote for Improved Vocab. Retrieved from <https://www.bustle.com/articles/172062-kids-books-use-more-rare-words-than-adult-tv-so-drop-the-remote-for-improved-vocab>

LINKS TO MORE LEARNING



Why Reading Aloud to Kids Helps Them Thrive

Looking to make a case with parents for reading out loud at home? This article offers some compelling reasons, and tips for getting the most out of the experience. There are also links to recommended book lists!

<https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/why-reading-aloud-to-kids-helps-them-thrive>

Reading Aloud

While geared toward summer reading, this Start with a Book resource page offers tips in English and Spanish on reading aloud at home that are useful all year. There's also a Reading Tips Sheet for Parents available in several other languages. Another cool feature is reading tips for parents of children with disabilities.

<https://www.startwithabook.org/reading-aloud>

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



Strategies for Reading Aloud to Young Children

This YouTube video features a demo and a discussion of useful strategies to apply when reading picture books aloud to young children. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZ2rL0eByfc>

Here's another one featuring a story time with an adorable live audience and a sneezy bear: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEgREffgFfA>

DIGITAL TOOLS



Novelist K-8 Plus

Looking for recommendations for great, award-winning picture books? Novelist K-8 Plus, freely available via lili.org, has you covered. Do a keyword search for "picture books" and use the limiters on the left to narrow your results. Or, under the "Recommended Reads Lists" on the left, select "Ages 0-8" and find all kinds of picture books in all kinds of categories:

<http://lili.org/dbs/category/3>



