

Bringing Books to Life
Using books in the classroom



Bringing Books to Life

Bringing Books to Life consists of two short guides written for teachers and librarians working in schools in sub-Saharan Africa.

Starting and managing a book collection

The first guide 'Starting and managing a book collection' looks at how schools can establish and manage a collection of books, including options for the storage of books, systems for lending books, and how books should be treated to help them last.

Using books in the classroom

The second guide 'Using books in the classroom', which you're reading now, sets out the importance of introducing students to written materials and shares some ideas for how these materials, including books, can be used in the classroom to teach reading and improve learning.

'Using books in the classroom' introduces five different approaches for using written material with students: reading aloud, shared, guided, group and independent reading.

The introductions to each of these approaches have been designed to encourage you to think about new ways in which books can be used, to test these out with your students and to discuss these approaches with your fellow teachers.

We hope you find it useful.



The Power of Literacy

Being able to read is very valuable. People who can read have access to information available in books, newspapers, magazines and on the internet.

Being able to read also helps us understand written information that affects our lives, like instructions or legal documents. People can also find great pleasure in reading for enjoyment.

People who can read will find it easier to continue with their studies, to find a job and to find pleasure in being able to express themselves.

As a teacher helping your students to read will make a lasting positive difference to their lives.

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Introducing Written Materials

Exposure to written and printed texts is essential for developing the ability to read. However, one of the challenges that many schools in Africa face is a lack of books and other learning materials.

But even when you don't have access to many books you can help your students understand the importance of reading and writing.

Here are some ideas to help your students become familiar with written and printed texts:

- Produce your own posters and charts and display these on the walls of your classroom. Point to them as you tell your students what they say.
- Show them different kinds of reading material. For example you could hold up a letter that you have received from a friend or even an official document or government announcement.
- Show them newspapers or magazines and tell them about one of the articles.
- Show them a book that you have read and tell them about it and why you enjoyed it.
- Even in parts of Africa where books are in short supply both the Bible and Koran are often widely available. Being able to read one of these holy books is a big incentive for students, so showing your students one or both of these books and reading a story from it, can help them understand some of the opportunities that will be available to them when they can read.
- Displaying your students' work on the walls of your classroom creates an interesting teaching environment and shows your students that you value their writing.

- Label classroom objects, such as 'door', 'window', 'desk', 'wall', 'bench' etc.
- Develop your own books and teaching materials, like reading cards which might have a simple drawing and the word for the object depicted on the card underneath it.
- Create a reading corner, which contains your book collection, however small, along with items like your reading cards, can help make reading a natural part of classroom life.



Using Written Materials

There are a variety of simple and very effective ways for teachers to use written material in the classroom to create a balanced approach to teaching reading.

These approaches will help teachers meet the diverse needs of students. Using these methods will also help ensure that the way in which books and other written materials are used is varied and interesting, which will sustain the enthusiasm and engagement of your students.

The approaches are:

- Reading aloud
- Shared reading
- Guided reading
- Group reading
- Independent reading

Each of these approaches offers unique opportunities for teachers to increase their students' skill as confident, competent readers and to encourage greater independence.

Teachers can use a number of these approaches each day: not just when dealing with 'teaching reading' but when they have written material to use for any subject, such as science, history or religion.

Each of these approaches offers a different level of support to the student. For example shared reading provides a significant level of teacher support to students, whilst in independent reading, students read without any support.



Reading Aloud

Reading aloud involves the teacher reading from a book to the entire class.

Reading aloud to students provides an enjoyable, shared experience of written language, which can form the foundation for further language and reading development.

Reading aloud to students should be a regular feature in all classrooms and at all levels. The purpose of reading aloud is to involve students in an enjoyable experience of reading, rather than any direct teaching.

Reading aloud, you will be at the front of the class reading a text to the entire class. Listening to texts read aloud should be a stimulating and interesting learning experience for your students.

When you read aloud to your class you should try very hard to read expressively and interestingly.

Practicing reading aloud a new text can be a good way for you to develop your confidence and improve your students' enjoyment and benefits.

You may want to interrupt the flow of reading to ask your students about a particular aspect of the story. However, interruptions should be kept to a minimum, so that the flow of the story and its meaning isn't lost.

You can also read non-fiction texts to your students in this way. When reading non-fiction texts you might want to bring students' attention to particular aspects, such as the kind of words being used or the point of view of the author.

Reading aloud to students provides an enjoyable, shared experience



Shared Reading

Shared reading is an approach where the teacher and a group of students or the class as a whole read a book together.

Shared reading is often the activity within the school day that children most look forward to, especially in the early years. When using the shared reading approach, you read the text aloud so that each student, regardless of their ability, is engaged in reading and is able to enjoy the words and story.

All students should be able to see the book and its writing clearly. This is where 'big books' are useful. However if you don't have access to big books then you might think about developing your own, or using a normal size book with a smaller group of your students so that all of the students can see the words and pictures.

A book may be reread by you and your students in this way many times over the course of several weeks or over the entire year.

A shared reading session can last up to 30 minutes each day.

Shared reading involves discussion before, during and after the reading. There are four parts to a successful shared reading session, which we've set out below:

- Introducing the book
- Reading the book
- Talking about what you're reading
- Reflecting on the session

Whilst we are focusing on shared reading here, these four elements can in fact be used and adapted for all of the reading methods in this guide.

Introducing the book

When a book is chosen, you can help your students understand and prepare for the story. Your introduction can be brief and should involve discussing the title, cover illustration and author and should try to relate the ideas in the text to the students' own experiences.

Reading the book

Once you've finished the introduction you can begin reading the book. With younger students you can use a pointer or your finger to point to each word as it is read. This will help your children concentrate on the words and helps them match the written words with how they sounds when read.

With older students it is not necessary to point to every word. However, you can point to draw attention to words, information and pictures to help your students understand the significance of these things.

Using pictures to predict words and meanings is a particularly useful thing to do when using sharing a book in this way.

Talk about what you're reading

During and after reading the book, there will be opportunities to discuss it and for questions from both you and your students. This shouldn't detract from the reading of the book, but should be used to complement and enrich the reading.

You might like to initiate discussion after you've finished reading the words on every page spread. The aim is always to help children make sense of the text.

Reflecting on the session

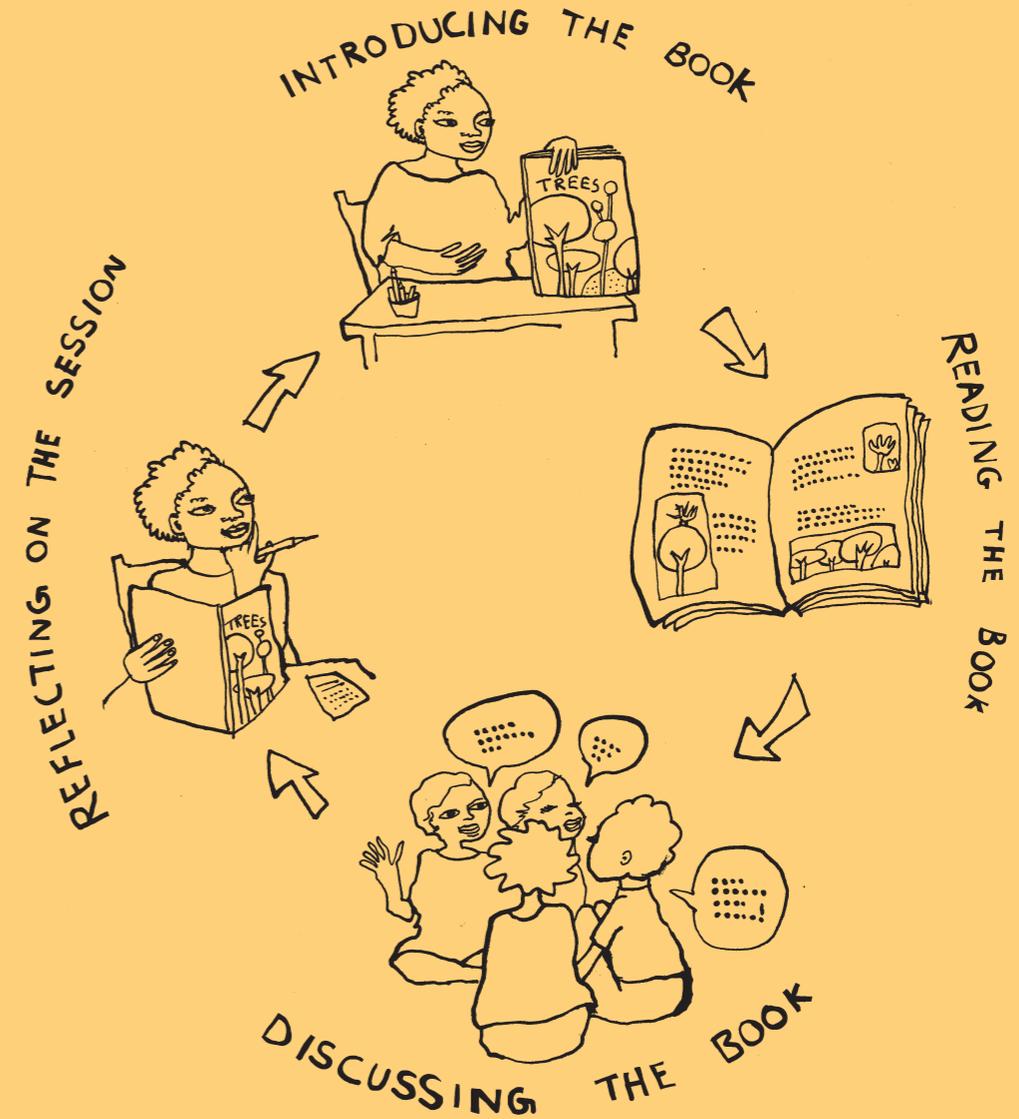
Once the session has finished it is important for you to reflect on how it went and to consider how your students interacted with the text.

If you are teaching younger children you can note their growing understanding of how printed words work, observing who among your students is focussing on the text, who is quick to join in with the reading and who asks questions about the text.

If you are teaching older children you can use shared reading to provide useful information about your students' comprehension, vocabulary and their ability to distinguish between different types of books.

You should use your reflections to think about how to conduct the next session, including what book to choose.

It is important for you to reflect on how your shared reading session went





Guided Reading

Guided reading involves helping students to read for themselves.

Guided reading is at the heart of a balanced approach to teaching reading in the classroom. It helps students become fluent, independent readers. In contrast to shared reading, where you will read the text aloud, providing an example to your students of how to read fluently, in guided reading, you help a group of students to read themselves.

Guided reading is usually taken with small groups of about four to eight students. The goal of guided reading is to teach students to use reading strategies independently so that they can read new material successfully and be able to discuss them critically.

Like shared reading, guided reading also involves a discussion to introduce the book being read. Once you've finished discussing the book the group can start reading.

Most books used with young children can be read right through without a break, but with older readers you might want to break up the reading into two chunks with a brief discussion in the break, in which the students can share what they have read with each other.

During guided reading each student is expected to read silently. During the 'silent reading' the idea is for you to be on stand by and to intervene only where necessary, to help a student with a difficulty.

Students are encouraged to use one of the strategies that they have learnt in shared reading to solve any challenges in the book on their own. Because students will be reading at their own pace, it is useful to prepare one or two sessions or tasks and to put these on your blackboard for the fast finishers. This will help prevent these children from distracting the students who are still reading.

Once every one has finished reading, you should encourage your students to talk about the book and to ask questions about it. You need to prepare some questions to help the discussion but you should also make it a point to encourage some of the students to ask questions too.

In addition to talking about the book itself you can ask the students to identify any words or areas of the book that they found difficult to read or to understand. Then you can discuss what strategies they used to overcome these difficulties.

Once again you should reflect on how the session went, noting any observations you made about particular children. You can use this information to plan your next guided reading session, including what book your students will read.



Group Reading

Group reading involves one student reading out loud to other students in a small group.

Group reading is a useful technique to use with more fluent readers.

Group reading reinforces the strategies that help students to read by allowing students to share those strategies among themselves. It can also play an important part in building the confidence of students and help students understand the value of working together as a team.

To run a successful group reading session you will need enough copies of the book being read for either every student or that allows students to share the book with one other pupil. Because the group of students reading should be kept small, say to no more than six students, you can run a session with three or four copies of the same book.

When all of your students have a book or are sharing it, nominate one of the students to read the book to the other students.

The student should be encouraged to read loudly so that everyone in the group can hear her. When the student encounters a difficult word the other students should be encouraged to help, by sounding out or reading the word for the student.

If the group as a whole encounters a difficult word that none of its members can read then they should be asked to put up their hand so that you can help them.

Depending on the time you have for your group reading session, you might ask each of the students in the reading group to read out loud to the group. If there's only time for some of the students to read, then those that missed out should be asked to read during the next shared reading session.

In addition to helping each other to read the text, you can also encourage your students to discuss what they are reading among themselves.

To help them you might ask them to talk about an illustration in the book they are reading, or ask them to agree among themselves which character in the book they are reading they like best and why.

Encouraging your students to talk about what they are reading with each other will build their confidence in reading and interpreting as well as encourage their critical thinking and analytical skills.



Independent Reading

Independent reading involves supporting students choosing to read, selecting what they want to read and then being able to share what they have read.

There are four aspects to supporting your students to read well independently. These are:

- Choosing reading material
- Creating space and time for reading
- Responding to what's been read
- Developing a reading culture

We'll have a look at each of these aspects separately.

Choosing reading material

As the teacher you have an important role in providing books for your students and doing whatever you can to expose them to the variety of reading material available.

The companion book to this guide 'Bringing Books to Life: Starting and managing a book collection' has some practical ideas about getting, making, storing and arranging books and other reading material.

Ideally, the books provided either in your classroom or school library should reflect a balance between familiar favorite and new material and fiction and non-fiction books.

But whatever you have available the idea of independent reading is that your students get a chance to select what they want to read on their own.

If you do have a book collection at your school from which students can select a book to read, you can help them do this by encouraging them to think about what the book they are looking at might be about, to encourage them to think about what they might like about the book and even to begin reading it to see if it is at the correct reading level for their ability.

Creating space and time for reading

Your students should have opportunities to read independently every day. However, for most students sitting still and reading quietly has to be learned.

You can support this by putting aside time in the school day for independent reading, beginning with five or ten minutes and gradually increasing the amount of time.

You can make independent reading more enjoyable by making it a special part of your students' day. You might choose to do this by allowing your students to take their book outside and read under the shade of a tree, or to sit on mats in a corner of your classroom, rather than at their desks.

Wherever your students read, by making the time for them to read on their own you will be helping them to develop as fluent readers who understand and appreciate the value of books and literacy.

Responding to what's been read

If your students are to enjoy and understand the books they've read they need to have opportunities to talk and write about them.

Talking in small groups of between four and six students about a story, picture book, article or novel is a valuable way for students to understand what they've read.

Your students will learn how to talk about books in this way by experiencing it when you encourage them to talk about a book during a reading aloud session or during shared or guided reading. Encouraging your students to respond to what's been read can happen in lots of ways.

You might ask your students to draw a favorite scene, to write a short summary of what they've read or to make a presentation to the whole class on their favorite part of the book.

Developing a reading culture

You have a vital part to play in supporting your students' ability to read and instilling in them an appreciation for reading.

You can reinforce this by monitoring your students' ability and progress during independent reading time. You might want to observe and record:

- What books students are reading.
- How the students know they have made a good choice of book.
- How long students can sit and read quietly.
- What your students do when they are reading a book that is too hard.
- Who their favorite authors are.
- Who your students talk or write to about the books they have been reading.
- Whether your students have access to books outside the school.

Knowing this information about your students will help you to support them as readers.

You can also promote independent reading by:

- Encouraging your students to always carry a book with them to read during any spare time they have.

- Encouraging your students to make a note of any points of interest, confusing words or other aspects of the books they are reading for discussion with you or their fellow student.
- Making a schedule of the times when independent reading can be fitted in at home.
- Inviting your students to talk about a book they are reading with their parents or carer and reporting back on the discussion at school the next day.

Above all teachers who love books and reading will find it easy to create a community of readers within the classroom. You can help by encouraging your students to talk about the books they are reading and to ask questions or seek clarification about words and ideas they don't understand in the books they are reading. By doing this you will see students reading to and with each other, helping less able students and generally enjoying the opportunities that books provide.

Reading has the power to change lives

Reading opens up our understanding of the world. Through reading we can find out what's happening in our local community or discover a community in a far away land. Reading also gives us the power to discover what others have written thousands of years ago and to understand the technology and process that are shaping our future. Reading has the power to change our lives.

As a teacher you have a vital role to play in helping transform your students lives, including by helping your students to read.

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We hope you'll be inspired by this simple guide to use the books and written material that you have access to in your school to support your students to read with confidence.

If you've found this book useful you might also be interested in 'Bringing Books to Life: Starting and managing a book collection' which looks at how schools can begin to establish and manage a collection of books, including options for the storage of books, systems for lending books, and how books should be treated to help them last.

You can order more copies of both guides by contacting Book Aid International info@bookaid.org

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