

Reading Support at Home



By Glenn Dack (English Leader OPJS)

Do I really need to hear my child read?

First of all, I would like to start by stating that one of my largest regrets about reading with my own children is that I stopped doing it the moment I felt they were '**fluent**'. Looking back, this was a major error because, unfortunately, being a '**fluent**' reader is just a small part of what makes us 'good' (or even 'great') readers.

If I had the opportunity again, I would approach reading with my children in a very different manner.

Who taught you how to tell the time?

It is important to begin by understanding that the time spent reading with your child in school is minimal. On average most classes house around 30 children, making reading with them on an individual basis a tricky prospect.

Obviously, as teachers, we do hear your children read, but in most cases this is during a brief session of twenty-five minutes in a group featuring 5 other children. Our time with your child on an individual basis is limited, which means the role you play is even more **essential**.

Who did teach you to tell the time? If we're really being honest, in most cases it wouldn't have been a teacher. Personally (and I can still remember it) I still have a memory of sitting in my childhood kitchen with my Mum; she would be pointing at the hands of the clock on the wall; I would be shrugging, not really sure why she was getting so annoyed by my lack of understanding.



My point being - a teacher didn't teach me to tell the time; my mum did (**because they're great!**)

We do teach the children how to tell the time in school; it comes up as an area of mathematics at least twice a year, and in my experience it's usually the same children who can't tell the time when you hit the topic that second time. Why? Because learning to tell the time is hard (it's an abstract concept) and nobody is supporting the learning at home. The more you practice, the better you get!



The more you practice, the better you get

At Oldfield Park Junior School we ask that the children read with an adult at least three (more would be preferable) times a week for no longer than 15 minutes. There is research to suggest that for the reluctant reader, or a child that finds reading challenging, 15 minutes is ample in any one sitting. Anymore and a child of this calibre will simply 'switch off'.

However, if a child is a more able reader, or a child that enjoys reading, much longer sessions will ensure greater progress. Despite their obvious talents, the 'more-able' reader still needs to share a book with an adult in order to make greater progress.

I tend to be very honest with the children I teach. Every year I have exactly the same discussion with them:

I want you to read at home because, to put it simply, the more you read, the better you will become.

In the years that I've been teaching Year 6 I have not had a single child come up to me and argue that my logic is faulty (and they can be a rowdy bunch), because ... it isn't.

It's simple, and it does apply to most things in life: If you want to improve at something, it will require a bit of **graft**. Children understand and acknowledge this fact fairly quickly because they see it all around them (**computer games, football, athletics, drawing = practice makes perfect**).



Can't I just let them get on with it?

No!

I'm going to go right back to the 'telling the time' analogy I used earlier. Imagine if you were 5 and I gave you a clock and said "What time is it, Johnny/Sally?" I can honestly say that without any **guidance** we would both be sitting there for weeks on end and you still wouldn't have a clue what the numbers, the ticking noise or the hands meant.

Reading works in exactly the same way; it doesn't matter if your child is 5 or 15, their **life experiences** and general **understanding** of the world around them is extremely limited in comparison to your own (despite what they might think or say). With that in mind, their understanding of what they read will also be extremely limited (no matter how **fluent** they might sound).

Reading with your child should never be a **passive** experience. It's always tempting just to sit back and let them rattle out a few paragraphs of an evening - but does it actually help them? Well, "yes" and "no".

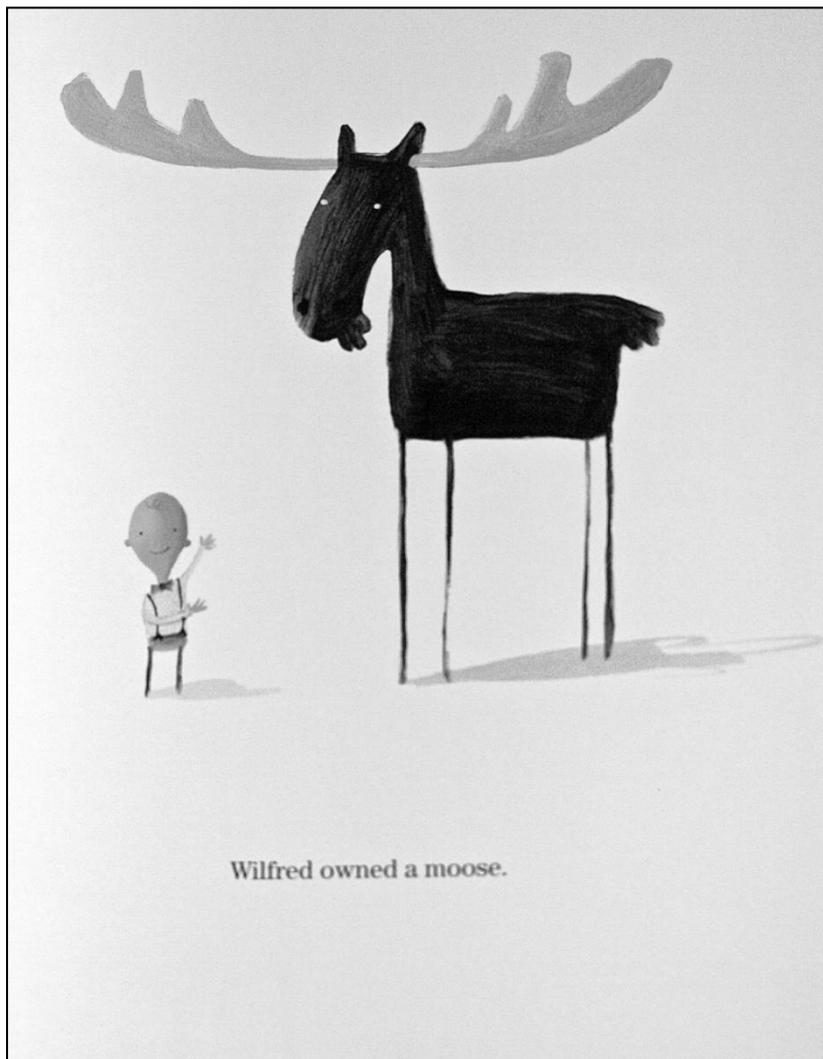
"Yes" because any chance to read out loud is another chance to **practice** the skills of decoding, fluency and expression.

"No" because reading is so much more than just these few simple components. Reading is about communicating often extremely **complex** and **convoluted ideas**, and it is this area that we need to help our children develop.



Not SATs again!

In Year 6 your children have to complete a reading test. The tests themselves are never about **decoding** or **fluency**. There is never a moment when the child will actually stand up in front of an examination board and demonstrate how nicely they announce to the back-row ... which is a real shame, as this is an area which many of our children seem to excel in.



The tests are interested in finding out how much the child ...

UNDERSTANDS about the text they are reading.

Have a quick look at the Year 6 text about spiders on the next page:

The Spider Web

Not all spiders spin webs, but they can all make silk. Spiders spin their silk through organs called spinnerets. The silk starts as a sticky liquid which hardens to form a very light but very strong thread. If you make a steel thread as fine as a thread of a spider silk, the silk would be just as strong as the steel. Each kind of web-building spider builds its own kind of web. The moment a spider hatches from its egg, it knows how to spin a certain pattern by instinct.

How a spider spins a web

It takes a spider about an hour to spin an orb web. The fine silk thread looks delicate but it can hold 1,000 times the spider's own weight!

After finishing its web, the spider usually waits out of sight with one leg on a 'signal thread'. When an insect lands in the web, the thread shakes. Instantly the spider pounces. Parts of the orb are made of a special sticky silk, so insects can't escape before the spider arrives.

Glossary

<i>orb</i>	rounded shape
<i>organ</i>	part of the body
<i>instinct</i>	by nature/not learn



Okay, you've now read the two texts on spiders. Let's have a go at a couple of questions (if you're feeling particularly mean you can have a go with your children).

Here we go ...

1) Write down 2 facts from the text that show us that the spiders' silk is very strong.

1. _____

2. _____

So-far-so-good. It's a relatively straight forward question that requires the children to simply go back to the text and **retrieve** the correct information. It relies on a certain amount of wider understanding, but to be honest, this is quite a nice question.

Try this one:

2. *Instantly the spider pounces*

In reality spiders cannot pounce or jump on the web.

Why, then, would the author choose to use the word *pounces* in the last paragraph?

Did you feel the blood drain from your face when you read that one? Imagine being 11 and being faced with it. It's a really daunting question. Why? Well, it has nothing to do with **retrieval** and everything to do with **understanding**.

First of all the child is expected to understand the word **pounces** (this is made slightly easier because the question links it to the word **jumps**). Secondly, they are being asked to consider the viewpoint of a total stranger and use their own experiences to hypothesise as to **WHY** he/she chose that particular word.

Not an easy question.

Are you confident you answered it correctly? To be honest, it's the kind of question a lot of children leave blank in the hope that it will simply just go away.

Questions! Questions! Questions!

As teachers, we have a strong focus on questioning when sharing texts with the children. This is something we need to encourage at home as it will equip your children with the tools they need in order to succeed in what can be a very difficult learning area.

Asking really good questions whilst you share a book with your child will turn a **passive** activity into an **active** one. It will help your child to develop a **deeper understanding** of the books they share with you, as well as developing those well-honed skills linked with **decoding** unfamiliar words and reading with greater **fluency** and **expression**.

On the following page you will find a fairly extensive list of questions that you might want to consider. You don't have to learn them all, but do have a close look at them, as many are quite simple and encourage your child to **THINK** about what they reading.

Questions you might consider:

- 1) **Literal Retrieval:** encourage children to describe, select or retrieve information, events or ideas from texts and use quotation and reference to the text.

What does ... Mean?

What does 'smartly' mean?

Can ... have more than one meaning?

Can 'light' have more than one meaning?

What happened at ...?

What happened at the beginning?

What did the ... do?

What did the bear do?

Which word told you that ...?

Which word told you that this is not the first comic about Superman?

Where did ... go?

Where did Peter Rabbit go?

Describe ...

Describe the giant. Describe the house they found.

Which paragraph tells you ...?

Which paragraph tells you they were out of the bear's reach?

Where are ...?

Where are the main places you can see superheroes now?

Why do ...?

Look at page 10. Why do people like stories about superheroes?

2) Deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas:

Encourage children to compare, contrast and infer.

How did?

How did the bear know the rabbit had his hat?

What words tell us ...?

What words tell us the writer of this letter is a child?

Why did ...?

Why did Lyddie have her back to the family?

What does the word ... imply about ...?

What does the word 'plush' imply about the owner of the house?

What ideas are we given about ...?

What ideas are we given about fox hunting in this article?

What does ... think?

What does the author think about fox hunting?

How did ... react?

How did Charles react to the danger?

How was ... different after ...?

How was the atmosphere in the home before and after this event?

Why is ... important?

Why is the hat important to the story?

- 3) Identify and comment on structure and organisation:** make explicit links between reading and writing - especially the way in which text is organised.

What is the purpose of ...?

What is the purpose of the picture on page.6?

How does the layout help ...?

How does the layout help the reader?

Why is ... in ...?

Why is this paragraph in bold print/italics?

Why are ... used?

Why are the subheadings on page.8 used?

Why has ...?

Why has the information been presented in this way?

Why is it easier to read ...?

Why is it easier to pick out key points of information from the fact boxes?

What did the author choose to ...?

Why did the author chose to change paragraphs after this sentence?

Why does the author use ...?

Why does the author use a different font for the postcard?

- 4) **Writers' use of language:** Explain and comment on the writer's use of language, including grammatical and presentational features.

Explain why ... is used?

Explain why two different spellings of Superkid are used?

Why does the author compare ... to ...?

Why does the author compare Hadrian's Wall to a molehill?

What does ... tell you about ...?

What does "a great armour-plated centipede," tell you about the wall?

Why did the author use ...?

Why does the author use this simile?

How does ... help you to understand?

How does the comparison help you to understand the behaviour of the character?

Why are ... used?

Why are misspellings used in the advertisement?

How has the choice of words created a feeling of ...?

How has the choice of words created a feeling of panic?

What do phrases such as ... tell you?

What do phrases such as "It is probably true to say," tell you?

Why did the author choose the verbs ... and ...?

Why did the author choose the verbs "creeping" and "tickling"?

- 5) Writers' purposes and viewpoints and the effect on the reader:** To identify the purpose and intent of the text and elaborate on observations.

Was this text trying to ...?

Was this text trying to persuade you to watch the film?

Does the author like ...? How do you know?

Does the author like spiders? How do you know?

How were the purposes of the texts different?

Look at page 10. Why do people like superhero adventures?

What can you tell me about the viewpoint of the author?

In what kind of magazine would you expect to find an article like this?

Why were ... included?

Why were quotations from the bear included in this article?

Which text do you think is more/most effective?

Both of these articles try to make you care about whales. Which is more effective and why?

Which text is ...?

Which text is giving the writer's own opinion?

- 6) Social, cultural and historical contexts and literary traditions:** Ask questions that require the child to call upon their own knowledge of traditional stories.

In what way is ... like ...?

In what way is Superkid like Spiderman?

Which features could ... have?

Which three of the eight superhero features on page 9 could an ordinary person have?

Give two pieces of evidence that ...?

Give two pieces of evidence that demonstrates that this is a modern story?

How did you know ...?

The story began with "Once upon a time". How did you know there was likely to be a happy ending?

What is it about ... that tells you ...?

What is it about the language choice that tells you it was written a long time ago?

What does ... ask ... to ...?

Why does Mother ask Clara to look after Max?

Could ... be described as ...?

Could Kevin be described as "brave"?

What else might make ... happy/sad?

What else might make the bear sad?

What other reason could there be for ...?

What other reason could there be for the town being quiet on a Sunday? Where are the children?

What if my child finds his/her reading books too easy?

Please try to remember:

It's not about the book-band your child is on; it's about their level of deeper understanding. Too easy to fluently read, or too easy to understand? The two things are very different, but both are extremely important.

If you attended my sessions linked with this booklet I will have read you '**I Want My Hat Back**'.

I read this book for three key reasons:

- it makes me **laugh** and **I enjoy it** (and that's important)
- it barely has any **complex vocabulary**
- Despite the lack of **complex vocabulary** we were still able to generate **complex questions**

Reading is about communicating complex ideas through the use of symbols. It's almost magical in its simplicity, but it is a complex skill to master. The book band doesn't matter, the level of questioning does.

Incidentally, the other text I brought to the sessions is called '**The Moose Belongs To Me**'. Again, it's a children's book, but it even states in the sleeve notes that it's a "thought provoking story exploring the concept of ownership".

It's a book aimed at 5 year olds, but you could befuddle the minds of most adults with some of the questions you could come up with!

What do you actually own? (I'm sounding a bit Karl Marx here!)

I want my child to discover a love of reading for themselves?

So do I. That would be amazing! However, we live in a time when reading for 'fun' is becoming less and less prevalent in our society, but, reading as a skill is still essential, and probably always will be.

Reading 3 times a week (ideally more would be preferable) and asking challenging questions which develop our children's understanding can only be seen as a good thing. If, along the way, our children fall in love with books this can only be seen as an excellent bi-product of the process.

Thank you for looking through this booklet; I hope it has been useful. If you have any questions or if there is anything further I can do to help you, please get in touch with me.



An adult wolf has 42 teeth.
Its jaws are twice as powerful
as those of a large dog.