



In the circle for our daily read aloud.

Reflections on Our Year of Read Aloud (BOOKLIST)

Franki Sibberson

Read aloud is a key time in reading workshop with my grades 3 and 4 students. We all sit in a circle on the floor, coming together as a community to share a book. Since each book takes approximately a month to read, I have to choose wisely. I have to know my students well, and choose books that will help move us forward as readers. I always have a stack of books ready in the summer-books I keep as possibilities for read aloud. I look for books that have enough plot twists to interest students who are still focusing on plot. But I also look for books with enough depth, dealing with complex topics we'll talk about and ponder throughout the book. Readers in grades 3 and 4 are diverse. Many are still focused on keeping track of characters, while others are able to think more critical about themes.

When I look back at our year of read alouds, I realize that most of the books I chose for read aloud were not on my stack of possibilities at the start of the fall. Each book was chosen to help move us forward in different ways as needs and interests emerged among the students. As I reflect on the year, I see that each book served a purpose, and changed the possibilities for what we saw in the read alouds that followed.

Here is the progression of the read alouds from this year:

[The Castle in the Attic](#) by Elizabeth Winthrop

The first read aloud of the year is always a difficult decision, because the book is critical in hooking kids into the read aloud routine. My primary goal in choosing a good first read is engagement. I want it to be one that will engage all of the readers in my class, and these are sometimes readers I don't yet know. I chose this book because I was confident that readers of all levels could enjoy the terrific plot. I was especially thinking of any reluctant readers I might have.

I also knew that it was a book that would allow students to make predictions (a strategy most beginning 3rd and 4th graders are very comfortable with). Making predictions would help many students enter our whole class conversation and build the type of read aloud environment that I wanted for the year. The book was perfect-it worked to set the stage for great books and great conversations.

[Larger-Than-Life Lara](#) by Dandi Daley Mackall

This seemed like another good choice for this age group. Bullying is a topic worth thinking about early in the year, and it is discussed in a way that seems appropriate for 9 and 10 year olds. This is the story about Lara, a very overweight child who enters a new school. The students in the class taunt and tease Lara throughout the book, the story is told by one of the students in the class.

In grades 3 and 4, I look for books with a plot that students can follow easily, but I also want life issues that give the book some depth and our conversations some sophistication. This book raised the level of talk in our classroom. One of the things that came out of these conversations was the students' realization that the way that an author writes a story can make you feel what the character is feeling. That was a very powerful new understanding for them.

Franny K. Stein: [Lunch Walks Among Us](#) by Jim Benton

I try to read a series book early in the school year. I want to make sure that all of the books that I read aloud are not beyond many students' independent reading. By reading an easier series book, I show students I value a variety of texts. Reading books like this one not only places value on some of the books my less sophisticated readers are choosing during independent reading time, but it also introduces many students to a series that they don't know. Many students went on to read other Franny K. Stein books following this read aloud. This book also helped me launch other conversations about series books.

[The Castle Corona](#) by Sharon Creech

This book was part of my summer list of possibilities. I loved it when I read it, and knew that my students would adore it. I had hoped that they would pick up on the themes, but the conversations went in ways that I hadn't planned. This often happens when I choose more sophisticated books-I think we will talk about themes, but often our conversations revolve around specific events in the book and how they are connected when the plot gets complicated.

[Dexter the Tough](#) by Margaret Peterson Haddix

After the success we had with [Larger-Than-Life Lara](#), I felt I needed to go back to something more plot-based. [Dexter the Tough](#) is another book about bullying and it helps readers think about judgments they make about people. Our thoughts about Dexter changed dramatically from the beginning of the book until the end of the book as we learned more about the character. I want my students to be able to think about ways in which characters change over the course of a story, and this book allowed them to do this in our conversations.

[The Van Gogh Cafe](#) by Cynthia Rylant

I wanted to choose a book that was short and had depth-a book that I could read aloud twice, so my students understand the power of rereading. Often during our first read of a book, we focus on plot and predictions. But on a second read, we can pay closer attention to the characters or the theme or the writing because we know how it all ends. I chose this book because it is short, but it has a great deal to talk and think about. We read this one twice in a row.

[The Thing About Georgie](#) by Lisa Graff

I always include a book with a theme or message that is easily accessible to third and fourth graders. Lisa Graff's novel about Georgie, a dwarf, is one of those books. This book not only helps you think a bit about what is important but the plot and writing are provocative. This book raised the level of our conversations yet again. This was the third book in which plot and character played together to give readers a very accessible theme.

[Greetings From Nowhere](#) by Barbara O'Connor

Luckily I discovered this book when we were finishing [The Thing About Georgie](#). It was such a wonderful book that I felt like I needed to read it aloud immediately. This book is about several characters who come together in unexpected ways. The focus on character development was something I wanted to add to our conversations. This book is divided into chapters that focus on the main characters in the book, so the format was new for us too. I knew that this book was more sophisticated and less plot-driven than the other books that we'd read earlier in the year, and that is one of the reasons I chose it. At this point in the year, I wanted to move the conversations well beyond plot.

[Emmy and the Incredible Shrinking Rat](#) by Lynne Jonell

I always try to choose one book that is a bit longer and more plot oriented to end the year. The main reason that I chose this book was because it is a fun story that I wanted to share with my students. So many of the goals, strategies, and our shared history as a reading community comes together with the last read aloud of the year. This is the tale of a child who isn't getting lots of attention from her parents, with a mean nanny, magic and friendship thrown into the mix. It is a unique story told in a way that makes it fun and suspenseful. I knew the students would love it, and that it would foster great talk during our last read aloud.