

EPISODE #2

Answers to Common Questions about Shared Reading

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You are listening to Episode 2: Answers to common questions about shared reading.

Were you with me last week? I shared 5 mistakes to avoid when doing shared reading with your learners. Today, we're going to dive a little deeper and I'm going to answer 6 questions about shared reading that were submitted by my readers.

Remember that shared reading is when a teacher and a group of students read an enlarged text *together*.

The first question I want to answer is: **Why bother with shared reading? What's the point?**

This is actually a really great question because our school days are full, and we want to make sure that everything we include has a purpose. The purpose should not be because someone told you you should do it. It should be because it's pedagogically sound and it's going to make a difference for your learners. The last thing you want to do is stuff something else into an already full day without knowing why. So, let's talk about why shared reading is worth time in your school day.

In Episode 1, I asked you to picture your balanced reading program as a ladder. You're standing there holding the bottom rung and the bottom of the ladder represents the most support that you give your students as readers, so that very bottom rung is read aloud.



The next rung above that is shared reading. That's when you and your students are sharing the reading work. It's very important that we have that rung, because the next one is guided reading, where you're going to back off quite a bit and serving more as a coach.

The reason that second rung is so important is that shared reading bridges the gap between read aloud and guided reading.

Done well, shared reading offers students guided practice in increasingly difficult texts, so that they're ready to tackle those more challenging texts in guided reading. You might feel that adding shared reading to your day is just one more thing you don't have time for, but look at it a different way: shared reading can actually save you time, because it's going to help your students accelerate through those guided reading levels faster.

I just gave you the big picture of WHY shared reading deserves a place in your schedule. Now, I would like to share a list of benefits of shared reading.

Number one: shared reading is FUN. When you choose the right texts and you find your rhythm of the right balance between teacher-directed and student-shared, shared reading is incredibly engaging.

It's also a great way to introduce your students to different genres. Back in the day, when shared reading was kind of new and a lot of us were learning it, we thought that the only way that you should do shared reading was with big books or poems. Certainly, big books and poems are great for shared reading, but we can use a lot of other things. In our last episode, I talked about document cameras and how they're not very expensive, but they can turn practically any text into a shared reading text. Because of that, we can use lots of different things, not just big books and poems. You can use nonfiction texts, whether those are nonfiction books or perhaps articles from your weekly time for kids magazine or perhaps Scholastic News. You can even use a chapter out of a chapter book.

I mentioned this already, but it's worth saying again: shared reading helps your students move through guided reading levels faster. If you're finding that your students are plateauing at a guided reading level--which tends to happen a lot whether they're reading

on their own or in a group--you may find that using shared reading helps them bust through that plateau and get up to the next level. What you want to do is take a look at a particular reader and ask yourself, "What's stopping them from moving to the next level?" When you have them try the next level, what's tripping them up? Is it sounding out words? Is it using context clues? Is it comprehension? Whatever it is that's tripping them up, teach that skill directly in shared reading, so that you're equipping them with the tools they need to read the next guided reading level.

Shared reading also builds class community. This is so important because of the many things we want to do as a group in our classrooms. You want to teach your students to do problem solving together. You want them to talk about their writing together. You want them to share books together. If they're going to do all these things together, they need to feel safe. They need to feel that they're in a place where they can be part of a community, give, take, share. Shared reading helps establish that community that you're going for.

Finally, shared reading is just plain wonderful for teaching all basic reading skills. It builds book and print awareness, it allows you to teach phonological and phonemic awareness, gives practice with phonics and word-solving skills, it provides an opportunity to teach comprehension skills and strategies, and, perhaps most of all, provides a platform for modeling and building fluency.

So that's my very long answer as to why we bother with shared reading.

Let's move on to **question #2**, which is: **How do I schedule shared reading?**

Well, in Episode One, I gave you the good news that shared reading does not have to take much out of your day. In fact, you only need ten to fifteen minutes, [three to five] days a week, and you have plenty of time for shared reading. As to where you should put that time, I recommend putting it in your reading block if you can. You may have, perhaps, one and half to two or more hours set aside every day for your reading time. That usually includes things like read aloud. It certainly includes your small groups and independent reading. Consider: can you put shared reading at the beginning of that time?



The nice thing about putting it at the beginning is it becomes a familiar, enjoyable routine to start reading time and help students slowly ease their way into the work of reading--on their own or with you in a small group. Another benefit to doing shared reading at the beginning of your reading block is because that last sentence of your shared reading lesson is usually some kind of connection to the reading work that your students are going to be doing. For example, at the end of a shared reading lesson in which we focused on reading fluently with phrasing, I might end that lesson with a sentence like this: "When you read your own books, remember: you're not a robot. If you feel that you sound like a robot, keep practicing the book until you sound like a reader."

Or, here's another example. Let's say that your shared reading lesson was about teaching your students how to retell a story, so you might conclude your shared reading lesson like this: "Sometimes, I will ask you to retell the books that you've read on your own. Remember to tell about the most important events just like we did today. Using the pictures can help you retell the story just like we used the pictures today when we were retelling this story." Those are actually directly taken from shared reading lesson plans that I've written. You see that the final sentence of your lesson segues naturally into reading time.

But, you don't have to put shared reading at the beginning of your reading block. Some teachers like to use it sort of in the middle, or two-thirds of the way through as a way to break up the reading time. Let's imagine that you meet with three guided reading groups a day, and, during that time, the other students are reading on their own or they're working at literacy centers. It's really good, perhaps, to take a break after that second guided reading group and do some shared reading. You're helping students who are starting to get off-track, you're taking them back with you to get them enthusiastic about reading and to give them a change of pace, so that they're reenergized to get back to their reading work.

If you'd like to put shared reading in your reading block but you just don't have room in your schedule at that time, you could consider putting shared reading at the beginning of the day. It can be a nice way to connect with your students before you dive into the day's work, and it can segue into a morning meeting, a morning message, or calendar time.

Let's move on to **Question #3: Can I do shared reading with a small group or one-on-one?**

Absolutely, you can! In fact, shared reading was developed by Don Holdaway to emulate the interactive nature of lap reading, which is a child sitting on a parent's lap. So, if you can do shared reading with a small group or one-on-one, all the better! Most of the time when I or other educators talk about shared reading, we talk about it as being used with the whole class, because that's just how it's used most often. But, it's incredibly effective with smaller groups or even individuals.

In fact, if you're working with a guided reading group and you just can't get them up to the next level, you may want to take a week or two and, instead of doing guided reading with them, do shared reading. Remember that you can use those shared reading lessons to teach those skills they're going to need to be successful in the next level.

As for teaching one-on-one, shared reading is great for home school. You'd sit side by side sharing the book, or, if you're teaching several children you might be able to share the book or project it in some way or put it on a screen. Do be careful, though, to explain what you're doing. Call it "shared reading," because I would guess that when you're doing read aloud, your kids are sitting next to you or maybe even on your lap. For shared reading you want to explain, "This is a special kind of book or special kind of reading time—we're going to be reading together. Follow along with your eyes as I use my finger, and say the words with me—as many as you can."

Question #4 – How do I choose shared reading texts?

This is a great question, and it's really important we answer it, because without an answer, teachers get slowed down, or stopped, or don't even get started to begin with, because they don't feel they have what they need to do shared reading. A perceived problem is lack of supplies. If teachers don't have a collection of big books--which are very expensive--they often feel they can't do shared reading. But, remember, all you need is a document camera (thankfully they are not crazy expensive) and you can make any text into a shared reading text, because it allows you to display the text on a wall or screen so everyone can see it.

But, even though any text CAN be used for shared reading does not mean any text SHOULD be used. Make sure the text is something that you and your students will enjoy reading over and over for several days. And, make sure it's above the average reading level of your group. I would say at least one to two levels above the reading level of your group, sometimes more. It should provide opportunities to teach reading skills your students need, or are going to need, as they progress through reading levels.

#5- How do I keep my students engaged and paying attention during a shared reading lesson?

This is the question that I hear most often about shared reading. How do you keep everyone's attention? How do you make sure they're interested? How do you make sure they're actually following along and reading with you? Because, of course, if they're not actively participating, they're not going to get a lot out of shared reading.

Here's the deal. If you are doing shared reading right, most of your students will be engaged. When you choose a great text, you make sure everyone can see it, you read it enthusiastically, you mix it up creatively, and you use your own personal teaching super powers to keep your students on task, you will not have a huge problem with students misbehaving. I'm not promising everybody's going to be listening, because it's not a perfect world, but I would say that most of your students are going to be listening and enjoying it.

If the opposite is true--you are finding that your kids groan when it is time for shared reading time, or half the class is fidgeting or turning around--take a good look at what you're doing. Here are some questions to ask yourself. First, can everyone see the text? Easels are great, but I know how it is--that ledge can be really low and so sometimes only the kids in the very front can see all the words. Figure out a way to display it that everyone can see it.

Do you need to back up and practice procedures and behaviors? Maybe when your students come together for that shared reading time, it's a little bit of chaos: they're fighting about who sits where, they're poking each other, they're being noisy, and it takes

effort to get everyone's attention focused on you. You may need to take a few days off of shared reading and just practice that procedure of leaving their seats and coming to the center and being ready to learn and listen.

Is the text too easy? This can be a problem if most of the class can read your shared reading text every day with you—by the second day, they can read the whole thing—I would go up a level or two.

You also want to ask yourself if you're reading a book to death. If the kids are engaged with you the first day or two, but by the end of the week it's going to pieces, then you may be using the book for too long. You are not a slave to shared reading lessons. If you use shared reading lessons by a big name publisher, or by someone on Teachers Pay Teachers, or one of mine that you downloaded from my membership, The Measured Mom, Plus!, and you're finding that by the middle of the week, you're just not keeping your students' attention, you can set it aside. YOU are in control, not the creator of the lessons.

If the lessons are for five days, but by day three, you and your students are kind of sick of the text, set it aside. Choose a different text to finish the week, or set aside shared reading for that week and resume the following Monday. You get to decide how long to use a text, no one else.

Another thing to ask yourself if you're having trouble with behavior during shared reading is are you keeping the reading interesting? Last week, I shared a common mistake with shared reading, and that is letting it get stale. It's an easy trap to fall into, but it's also an easy one to get out of. Mix things up. Use fun tools like highlighter tape, magnifying glasses, sticky notes, word masking cards. Change how you read the text. Incorporate fun, hands-on activities that will drive home your teaching points. If you need ideas for how to mix it up, go back and listen to Episode 1, because there I give you lots of ideas for mixing up shared reading.

Another thing to try if your kids are not listening is to adjust the pace of the lesson. Talk less and engage them more if they're losing attention, or just end the lesson—that's okay, too.

Finally, ask yourself: "Are you asking the right questions?" You want to be as open ended as possible here. It's very easy to take over during shared reading, but remember: you're *sharing*! Here are some questions that you can ask to help your students take more of a role: "What do you notice?" "What else do you notice?" "What can you try?" "How did you know this word wasn't ____?" "How do you know?"

You see that changing the types of questions you ask can help your students stay on track and be more interested in participating.

Here's our final question about shared reading and it's a very important one and a common issue that many teachers face. That is: **what do you do when you have students whose reading levels are way above the rest of the group?**

This is such a good question, because it's a real challenge that I faced as a primary teacher. My first year of teaching first grade, I had a student who still didn't know all the alphabet and I had two students who were easily reading at a fourth grade level. You might ask: "Was shared reading a lost cause with this group?"

It didn't have to be. But I will agree that it is tricky. Here are some suggestions for when you have this big range of reading levels and you're struggling to find a book or a text that's just one to two levels above the average reader. Here are some things to try. Number one, don't choose a text that's going to bore most of your group. Low readers can still benefit from a text that's much higher than their reading level if you use it right.

Number two, train your high readers to problem solve in their heads, because I know how frustrating it is when you're reading with the group and you're trying to teach them to sound out tricky words and your strong readers just blurt out all those hard words right away and your lower readers don't even have a chance to try and figure them out. What you can do is train your high readers to solve those words in their heads. You can do this when you're meeting with them at their small group guided reading instead of talking about it in front of the whole class. You can teach them that when they know the word they can signal that to you by just putting a small thumbs up next to their chest. They would do that instead of raise their hand and say, "I know, I know!" We want to help the

other students feel comfortable solving the words without feeling like someone's breathing down their necks with the answer.

Something else you can do to make sure you're keeping the interest of everybody, whether it's a low or a high reader: take the skills OUT of the text and differentiate with the activities.

For example, if you are teaching CVC words because you're reading a book that focuses on sounding out simple words, and you know you have students who are reading much higher, what you can do is pull out some word cards for students to read in pairs or to sort by pattern and you can give those higher readers harder words. If you're doing CVC words, your higher readers could have CVVC words, so maybe words with "ea" or "ee" or even multi-syllable words. Give them a chance to practice something that will actually benefit them instead of forcing them to review something that they've already known for a long time.

Here's another tip for making sure that your shared reading lessons are meeting the needs of everybody: vary the type of comprehension questions that you ask. Make sure you're asking a variety of low- and high-level questions. For example, you're talking about a character and you might ask a low-level question like this: "What did the character do next/on this page?" Your higher questions could be: "Why did the character do that?" "What do you suppose the character was thinking when ..." "How would the story be different if the character had done this instead?"

Another example. You could ask a low-level question such as, "How did the character solve this problem?" Higher questions could be: "What was the turning point in the story?" "How else could the character have solved the problem?"

Finally, tip number five, how to differentiate in your shared reading lessons. I kind of recommend this one as a last resort, because I think doing shared reading as a group is good for a lot of reasons and a big one is time management. But, if you really need to, you can provide different shared reading lessons. You might consider having two separate shared reading lessons, one for the lower readers and one for the higher readers. Another option is to take away group shared reading altogether and tack on shared reading to each

of your guided reading lessons. Instead of having fifteen minute guided reading lessons, they might be twenty-two minutes and you have an abbreviated shared reading at the beginning of your guided reading. I don't really recommend that, because I know that time is short and that every minute that you add on to your guided reading is an extra minute that the rest of your class has to be working on their own, but it's something to try. You could even go every other week: one week you do a whole-group shared reading lesson all week long, and the next week you tack it on to the guided reading lessons. Teaching is certainly nothing if not problem solving, so certainly try different things until you find a shared reading set-up that meets all your students' needs.

To learn more about shared reading, I have a few recommendations for you, and you will find links to all of these in the show notes for this episode. Be sure to go to themeasuredmom.com/episode2 to get all these links. I recommend my five-part, free blog series about shared reading which you can find at themeasuredmom.com/sharedreading. It has some printables including an editable shared reading lesson plan template.

If you're a member of The Measured Mom Plus --my affordable membership for PreK through grade three teachers--you definitely want to check out that mini-course about shared reading. It has a lot of resources in there that can help you as you plan your shared reading lessons. If you're not a member yet, be sure to check it out, because you're going to get access to this mini-course I just mentioned, as well as many other videos and printables for teaching PreK through grade three. You'll also get access to printable, five-day shared reading lesson plans. Currently, I am adding two sets every month, and just for you, as a listener of this podcast, I am going to share a free sample from the membership. It's a free, five-day shared reading lesson plan for the book *Sheep in a Jeep*, by Nancy Shaw. I recommend that shared reading lesson for kindergarten or first grade.

Go ahead and head to the show notes themeasuredmom.com/episode2 to get all those links and that free, five-day shared reading lesson plan.

Thank you so much for listening, and I'll talk to you again soon!