



Books: Tips for Reading with Young Children

In a world awlirl with in-your-face nonstop entertainment, stories well read or engagingly told give children a place to use their own imaginations. It provides a relaxed time and a quiet activity for them to enjoy. More than that, it provides the impetus for a lifelong love of reading, which helps greatly in guiding children to want to read the Bible for themselves. Children of every age love a good story!

Provide a comfortable place for children to look at books. Several carpet squares or comfortable pillows and a few books (related to the aims of the lesson you are teaching) are all that is needed. Invite children to look at books during Bible learning activities or when children finish an activity early. If a bookshelf is needed, provide one made with angled shelves that make it easy to organize and display books.



Books for Preschoolers

Expect that many children may be more interested in the pictures of a book than the story itself. Always be sure that any book for young children is appropriately

illustrated. Some illustrations may be beautiful; but if they are not clear to a child, they will be meaningless, and children will soon lose interest. Remember that as you are reading the words in a book, children are viewing the pictures. The illustrations must relate directly to the words. Pace your words so that children can both look at each picture and hear the words you are reading.

Select books that don't have too many words on each page. If it takes too long to read the words, children will not be able to stay focused on the story action.



When a book has too much text on the page, simply talk about the picture or summarize the content. Don't expect children to guess what is going on in a picture that is not clear or not related to the words you are saying.

Stories for two- and three-year-olds should be about familiar subjects (animals, babies, families, etc.) and about family activities (playing, helping, eating, sleeping, etc.). Fours and fives enjoy stories and pictures about family, home and friends; but they are also interested in stories about nature and machines. Simple stories about Jesus



should be included for all ages.

While a measure of fantasy or pretending is valuable for young children, be cautious at church about using books with talking animals or plants or imaginary creatures. One of our major objectives at church is to communicate the truth of Bible stories. If one minute we are reading about cartoon characters and the next minute we talk about Jesus, we create confusion for the children.

For greater involvement, use books that are predictable or have repeating phrases. When words or phrases are repeated throughout the book, children anticipate them and will say the repeating words with you as you read. This repetition further involves them in the story. Of course, they will likely be interested in reading the same book over and over again!

Tips for Reading with Several Children

Arrange books in a quiet area of the room. A child may browse through a book alone or join others to listen to a story. Remain nearby to read the text or talk about the pictures; otherwise, a child may become bored in a few seconds.

Sit on the floor or at a low table. Interest children in the book or teaching pictures



by looking at them yourself. Make comments aloud. "Look at all these big animals!" Soon children will come to see what you are doing.

As you turn the pages of a book, ask simple questions to help children "see" picture details. Also ask open-ended questions. "Where do you think this boy and his dad are going?" You can also help build a child's vocabulary by repeating the child's reply in a complete sentence and by occasionally adding a word. "Alexis, what is this? You are right! It's a bird. It's a red bird. God made the birds."

Tips for Reading Aloud

One of the greatest complaints of children is "I can't SEE!" When reading a book to a group, be sure the illustrations are large and clear enough to be seen by every child. When you first turn to a new page, hold the book out for each child to get a good look before you proceed.

If you cannot sit on the floor, sit on a low chair. The book should be held a little higher than children's eye level.

Hold the book to one side facing it toward the children as much as possible. This helps you maintain eye contact and gives children a chance to see the pictures in the book as well as the expressions on your face (the more expressive your face, the better!).

- Use an expressive voice; change voices for different characters if you can. Becoming familiar with the story ahead of time will help you plan for character voices.
- If you read a favorite story repeatedly, put together a prop box for that story. Include items mentioned in the story or several puppets. When the story is read, invite children to take turns holding up the items or moving the puppets at the appropriate times.