

Jennifer Connolly

Mrs. Connolly

English 102 / 8A

20 January 2016

Why I Read Aloud with Students

Let me ask you a question. Do you hear “voices” in your head when you read to yourself? (Not I’m-a-crazy-lunatic kind of voices, but the voices of imagined characters or the familiar reading voices of a teacher, a loved-one, or even yourself). You might be surprised that *not* everyone has an “internal reading voice.” Or maybe it doesn’t surprise you because you are one of those people who, for whatever reasons, has never developed this amazing reading extra.

When you read along with a skilled and experienced orator, you notice emphasis, tone, and word pronunciation that you may not get when reading silently, and hearing can make it easier to create mental images (deCourcy Hines 2). And, according to Jess deCourcy Hines, a high school librarian in Queens, New York, “reading aloud can advance teens’ listening and literacy skills by piquing their interest in new and/or rigorous material” (1). Reading aloud enables me to help students interact with more challenging texts since “[y]oung people often listen at a higher comprehension level than they read” (1).

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Complaints about how much I read aloud in class exist every year on my end of year survey, and I get it. Some of them are legitimate. Some of you read so quickly, and so well, that my read-aloud hinders you, you’d rather read it yourself. (If this is you, I’d venture a guess that you *do* possess a strong “internal reading voice” or maybe photographic or semi-photographic memory). But not everyone is a fast reader, or a smooth reader, and some super-intelligent people read slowly and deliberately. Imagine it from a teacher standpoint. You (the teacher) give the class a short piece to read and some time to read it quietly to themselves. Speedreaders are done in two minutes, average readers are done

in five, deliberate readers it may take seven, and two kids who just keep finding themselves distracted today still aren't done ten minutes later. Meanwhile, the three kids who didn't want to read it in the first place are completely distracting others by talking to each other, and the ones who finished first are now wondering when we can move on. Then we move on, and a couple of deliberate readers are left thinking, "What? I wasn't even done reading that yet." Common sense and good teaching says if the piece is read aloud, and the students make it their mission to read along, we all finish together, and those distracted kids are more focused, and those who weren't going to read don't have the opportunity to be a distraction.

I could ask students to read outloud. Some of you are great at it, and some of you would rather have a root canal. And some of you are brave and willing to read despite your stumbles in sight-reading a text, which is commendable, but others of you are then mentally cursing the awkwardness with which that text is read. I just don't see a point in creating that kind of conflict among you. So I read.

And let's face it, most of the time the students who do the most complaining about the teacher reading aloud are the same kids who wouldn't read it at all if it were a take-it-home-and-read-it-just-because kind of assignment. (You know who you/they are. . .) But those were just strategical classroom reasons, the aesthetic reasons are much more important.

"Reading [and hearing writing] aloud forces the brain to slow down and examine the piece of writing more carefully and from a different perspective" says the Writing Studio at Duke University.

Looking at text while listening to it being vocalized lets you notice extras you might miss when you only do one or the other (1).

You know that feeling you get when you hear a powerful song lyric? The pivotal speech by a dramatic character in your favorite movie? The moment in a theater production when everything comes together through words and sound and the visual to create a visceral response? The moment you read a breath-taking piece of prose for the very first (or the twenty-fifth) time?

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Your breathing quickens. . . or maybe it stops altogether. Your chest swells, heart full, beating fast, like it might jump right out of your chest. When emotion overwhelms the senses, you know you're onto something magical. The right words can take you there, but sometimes only with the right delivery, inflection, cadence. Hearing words read aloud heightens our awareness, and vocally reading those words is an effective way to render experience more fully.

This is why I read aloud with students.

Works Cited

- DeCourcy Hines, Jess. "A Curriculum Staple: Reading Aloud to Teens." *School Library Journal*. SLJ, 25 Nov. 2015. Web. 20 Jan. 2016.
- Thompson Writing Program. *Reading Aloud: A Revision Strategy*. Durham, NC: Duke University, 18 Jan. 2016. PDF.