

# Reading to the Child: What does she/he already know?

The purpose of the first few reading sessions is for volunteer and child to get to know each other while instilling a sense of comfort and trust. If the skill of reading is either new or difficult for the child, asking the child to read during these initial sessions will defeat that purpose. A better beginning can be made by reading *to* the child at the first few meetings, while carefully observing the child's behavior and responses in order to find out as much as possible about her/his familiarity with books. If the child is offered a variety of books to choose from, her/his selection will provide a first glimpse of her/his interests and tastes.

## **Before You Read:**

*First, you can invite the child to look over the book and encourage her/him to talk about what she/he sees in the illustrations:*

- If the child is quite young, does she/he know which is the front cover, where the story begins?
- Does she/he register the main idea of each picture?
- Does she/he notice details?
- Does she/he connect the pictures to a kind of story sequence and/or talk about what she/he thinks is happening in the story?
- Does she/he connect what she/he sees to her/his own life experience?

*These responses give you some indication of how the child thinks, her/his personal learning style, and what she/he brings to the act of reading.*

## **While You Read:**

*How does the child behave while you are reading:*

- Does she/he look at the illustrations?
- Does she/he try to follow the print along with you?
- Is her/his visual focus elsewhere while she/he appears intent on hearing the story rather than looking at it?
- Does she/he volunteer questions?
- What kinds of questions? What is she/he interested in knowing about?
- Does she/he volunteer predictions of what's to come?
- Does she/he volunteer facts she/he knows or experiences she's had relevant to the story (or apparently unrelated)?
- Does she/he occasionally point out a word that she/he knows?
- If it is a book that contains repetitive and predictable patterns or rhymes, does the child eventually say the refrain along with the reader?

*Although it is best to interrupt the story as little as possible, at appropriate points the child can be asked one or two questions such as:*

- What kind of person (animal, etc.) do you think this character is?
- Do you know anyone like her/him?
- What do you think is going to happen?
- What would you do in this situation?
- Did this kind of thing ever happen to you?
- Did you ever feel this way?
- Does this remind you of any other stories that you know?

### **After You Read:**

*When you reach the end of the story, have a discussion with the child. Some children are eager to talk while others are more hesitant. This does not mean that the child does not have ideas. The discussion should be interactive, as opposed to a series of questions directed at the child. It often helps a more reluctant child if the adult comments on the story first. Some possible discussion points are:*

- What you think of that story.
- Favorite part or character.
- What you didn't like.
- What you think of the ending, was it what you expected to happen?
- Another way the story might have ended, what would make it a better story.
- Moral or lesson to be learned from this story.

*One way to gather information about a child's memory, sense of sequence, comprehension, and listening ability is to ask her/him to retell the story in her/his own words, as she/he might tell it to a friend or a younger sibling:*

- Does she/he use the illustrations to guide her/his recollection?
- Does she/he include the important details?
- Does she/he convey a sense of what is important in the story (as opposed to stringing together a series of events or details which all appear to have equal weight)?
- Does her/his retelling include ideas or opinions which were not explicitly stated in the text, but which can be logically or intuitively inferred?

This combination of activity and observation, besides being enjoyable to the child, helps to assess what a child already knows about the books and how the child will naturally approach the task of reading by virtue of who she/he is.