

# The Importance of Reading Aloud to Children

Based on the Jim Trelease  
seminar and The Read Aloud  
Handbook, 2019, eighth edition

Presented by West Hialeah Gardens Elementary School  
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# Why is Read Aloud Effective?

- As lumber is the primary support for building a house, words are the primary structure for learning. There are really only two efficient ways to get words into a person's brain: either by seeing them or by hearing them. Since it will be years before an infant uses his or her eyes for actual reading, the best source for vocabulary and brain building becomes the ear. What we send into that ear becomes the foundation for the child's "brain house."
- Those meaningful sounds in the ear now will help the child make sense of the words coming in through the eye later when learning to read. We read to children for all the same reasons we talk with children: to reassure, to entertain, to bond, to inform or explain, to arouse curiosity, and to inspire. But in reading aloud, we also:
  - build vocabulary
  - condition the child's brain to associate reading with pleasure
  - create background knowledge
  - provide a reading role model
  - plant the desire to read

# Listening Vocabulary

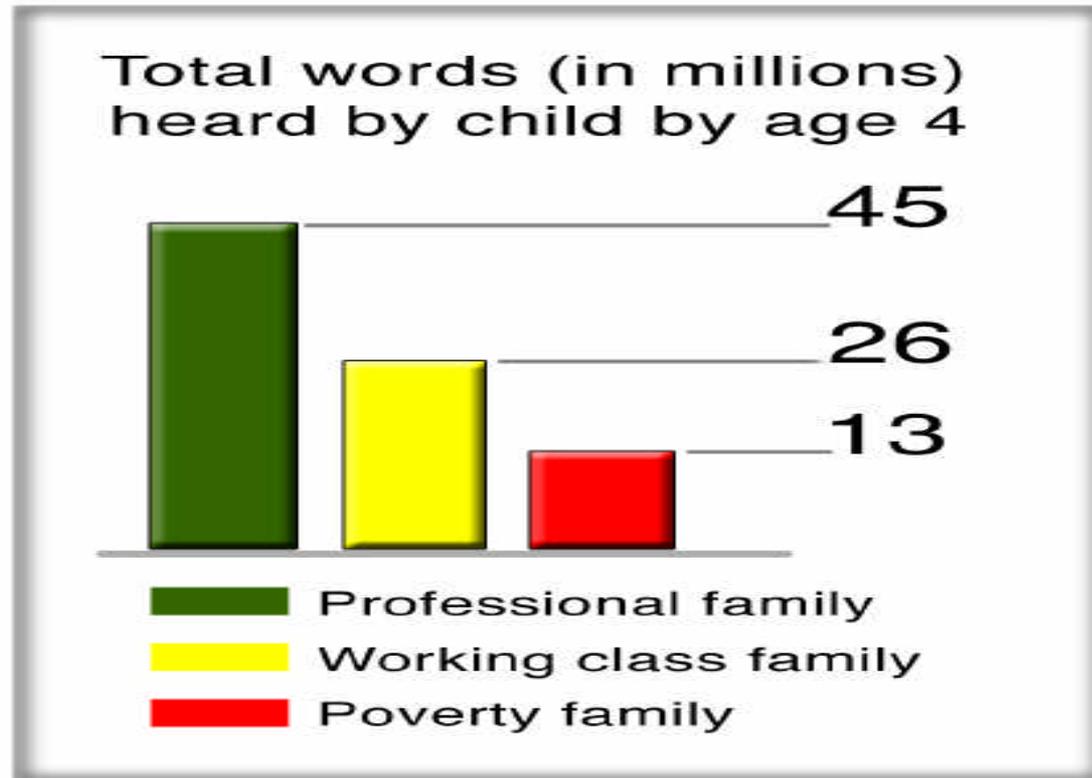
- Inside a child's brain there is huge reservoir called Listening Vocabulary. These are the words that a child hears before they enter Kindergarten. The more words they hear, the more they will know.

Researchers began by identifying forty-two normal families representing three socioeconomic groups: welfare, working class, and professional. Beginning when the children were seven months old, researchers visited the homes for one hour a month and continued their visits for two and a half years. During each visit, the researcher tape-recorded and transcribed by hand any conversations and actions taking place in front of the child.

Through 1,300 hours of visits, they accumulated 23 million bytes of information for the project database, categorizing every word (noun, verb, adjective, etc.) uttered in front of the child. The project held some surprises: Regardless of socioeconomic level, all forty-two families said and did the same things with their children. In other words, the basic instincts of good parenting are there for most people, rich or poor.

Then the researchers received the data printout and saw the “meaningful differences” among the forty-two families. When the daily number of words for each group of children is projected across four years, the four-year-old child from the professional family will have heard 45 million words, the working-class child 26 million, and the welfare child only 13 million. All three children will show up for kindergarten on the same day, but one will have heard 32 million fewer words.

# Total words (in millions) heard by child by age 4



*SOURCE: Betty Hart and Todd Risley, Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children (Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 1996)*

As seen in Jim Trelease seminar/  
*The Read-Aloud Handbook*  
(Penguin Books, 2006)

# Speaking Vocabulary

The next level would be the **Speaking Vocabulary**. You pour enough words into the child's Listening Vocabulary and it will overflow and fill the Speaking Vocabulary pool— thus the child starts speaking the words he's heard. It's highly unlikely you'll ever say a word if you've never heard the word. More than a billion people speak Chinese— so why not the rest of us? Because we haven't heard enough Chinese words, especially in our childhoods.

# Reading Vocabulary

The next level is the **Reading Vocabulary**. It's nearly impossible to understand a word in print if you've never said the word.

# Writing Vocabulary

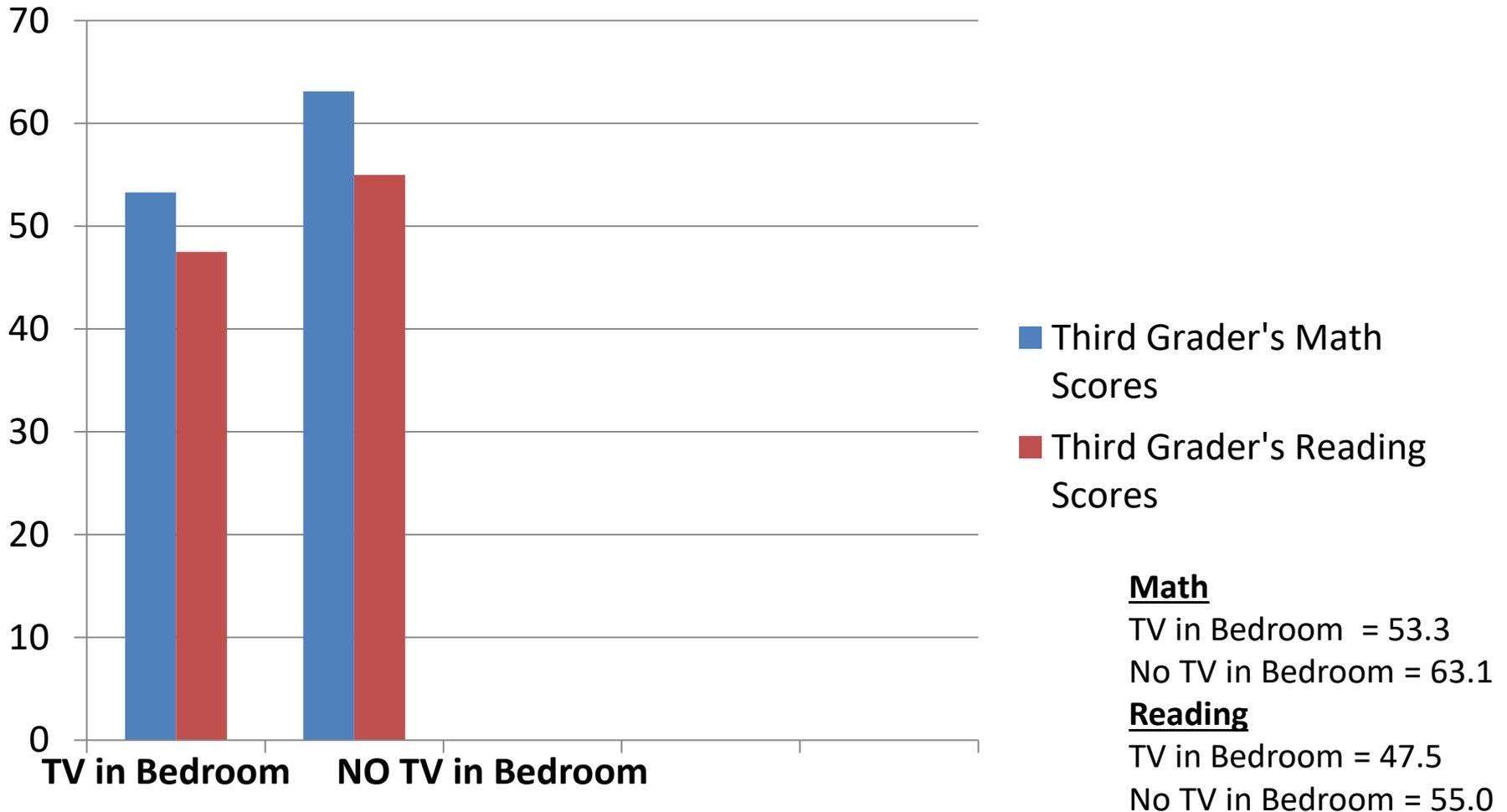
And finally there's the **Writing Vocabulary**. If you've never heard the word, said the word or read the word, how in the world will you be able to write it? All the language arts flow from the Listening Vocabulary— and that has to be filled by someone besides the child. Simple.

As you read to a child, you're pouring into the child's ears (and brain) all the sounds, syllables, endings, and blendings that will make up the words she will someday be asked to read and understand. And through stories you are filling in the background knowledge necessary to understand things that aren't in her neighborhood—like war or whales or locomotives.

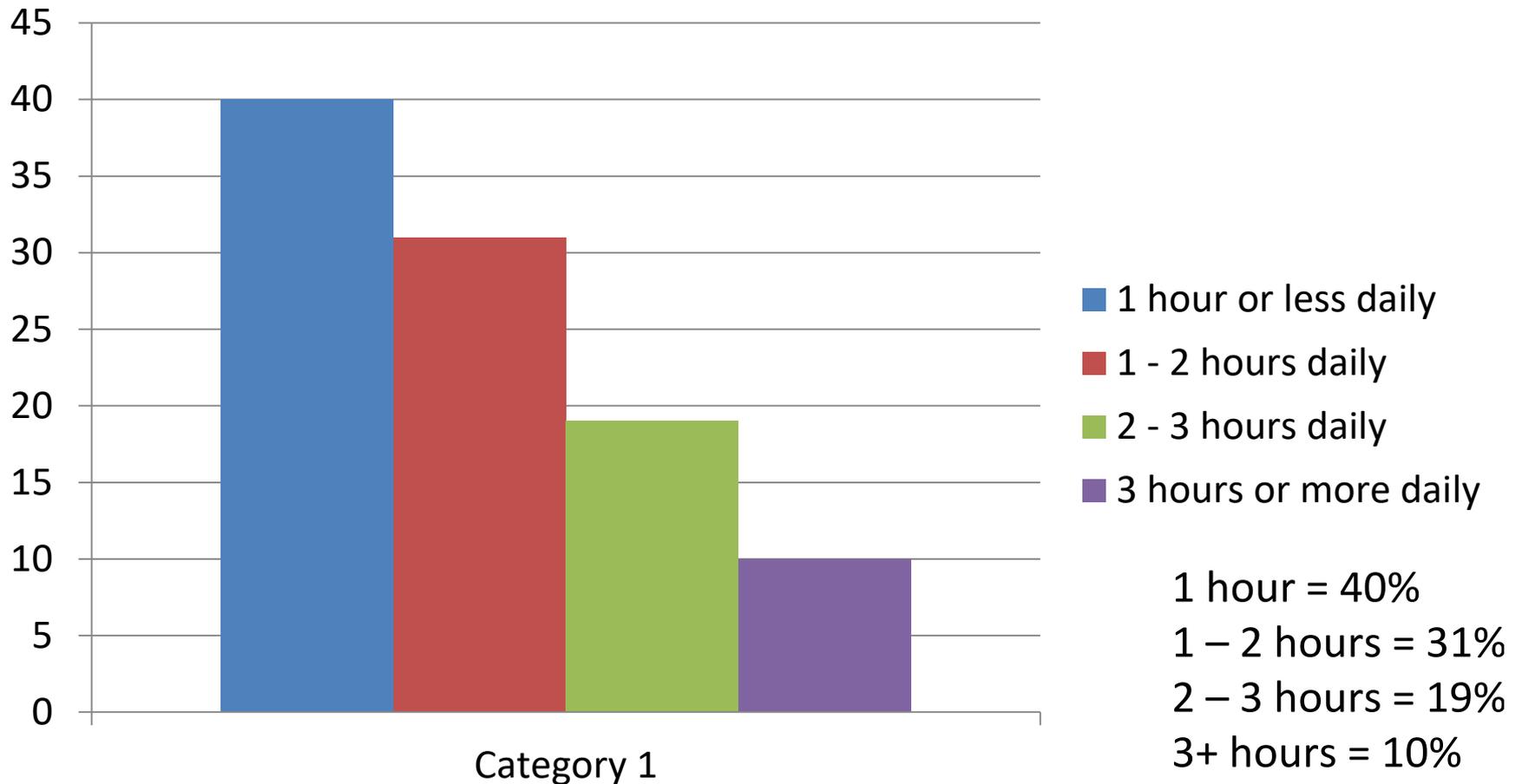
The one prekindergarten skill that matters above all others, because it is the prime predictor of school success or failure, is the child's vocabulary upon entering school. Yes, the child goes to school to learn new words, but the words he already knows determine how much of what the teacher says will be understood. And since most instruction for the first four years of school is oral, the child who has the largest vocabulary will understand the most, while the child with the smallest vocabulary will grasp the least.

Once reading begins, personal vocabulary feeds (or frustrates) comprehension, since school grows increasingly complicated with each grade. That's why school-entry vocabulary tests predict so accurately.

# School Scores and TV in the Bedroom



# TV viewing in childhood and adolescence correlated to achieving a bachelor's degree by age 26



- Screen time for TV, video, DVD for average child =

**1,460 HOURS YEARLY**

*or*

the equivalent of watching...



**392x**

# 21 Kindergarten Classes:

## Home Differences in Kindergartners' Book Interests

Number of books in home

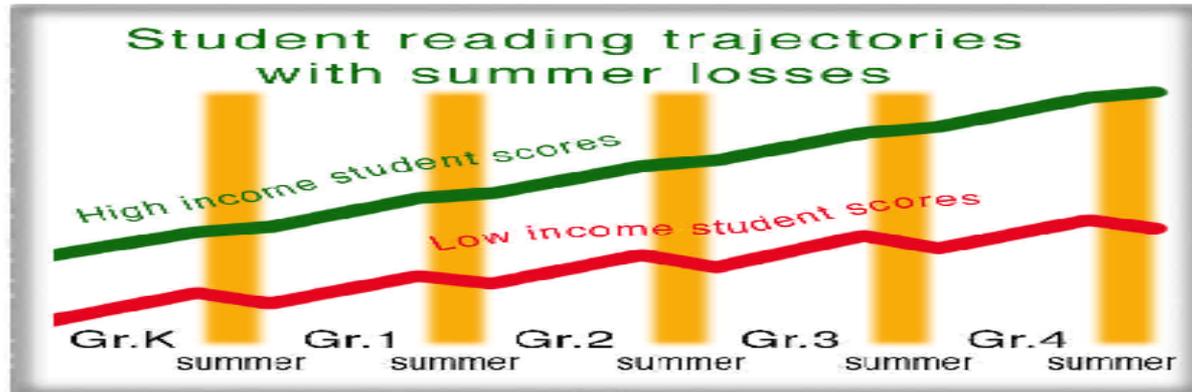
Child owns library card

Child is taken to library

Child is read to daily

| HIGH     | LOW      |
|----------|----------|
| 81 Books | 32 Books |
| 37.5%    | 3.4%     |
| 98.1%    | 7.1%     |
| 76.8%    | 1.8%     |

# Summer Reading



**SOURCES:** Chart—Center for Summer Learning, Johns Hopkins University; see also Richard L. Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen, "The Impact of Summer Setback on the Reading Achievement Gap," *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2003, pp. 68-75.

As seen in Jim Trelease seminar/  
*The Read-Aloud Handbook*  
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# How Can I Help My Child Be a Better Reader

Since parents often think there are quick fixes they can buy, some kind of kit or phonics game to help a child do better at school, think about what did you have in your home as a child that helped you become a reader? Besides the library card which is free, there are the Three B's, an inexpensive "reading kit" that nearly all parents can afford:

The first B is **books**: Ownership of a book is important, with the child's name inscribed inside, a book that doesn't have to be returned to the library or even shared with siblings. There is a clear connection between book ownership (or access) and reading achievement.

The second B is **book basket** (or magazine rack), placed where it can be used most often; Put a book basket in a variety of locations, stocked with books, magazines, and newspapers.

The third B is **bed lamp**: Does your child have a bed lamp or reading light? If not, and you wish to raise a reader, the first order of business is to go out and buy one. Install it, and say to your child: “We think you’re old enough now to stay up later at night and read in bed like Mom and Dad. So we bought this little lamp and we’re going to leave it on an extra fifteen minutes [or longer, depending on the age of the child] if you want to read in bed. On the other hand, if you don’t want to read— that’s okay, too. We’ll just turn off the light at the same old time.” Most children will do anything in order to stay up later— even read.

# Reading in the Digital Age

It's possible that e-fans are overestimating both the gadgets and the kids. If the challenge is juggling, then a digital device is like a rubber ball that you're juggling between your hands. Add another ball to the mix and the process becomes more challenging. Add a third or fourth and you've got your hands full. It gets harder and harder to add more.

Now think digital devices juggled by the brain. Today's teenager is regularly juggling e-tablets, smartphones, and laptops, along with the TV in their bedroom. From 2,272 text messages a month in 2008, American teenagers (ages 13–17) ballooned to 3,339 messages a month in 2010, an average of six per waking hour. Simply put, students in one of the most formative periods of their intellectual and emotional lives are interrupted 118 times a day for messages, totaling 90 minutes.

Still juggling the twenty-four-hour day, let's look at what the student is also doing while texting. The longest-running examination of children's media consumption is the Kaiser Family Foundation study. When Kaiser reported on children's media multitasking in 2009, researchers found a daily increase of more than two hours since 2004: 10.7 hours of multimedia packed into 7.5 hours—all of it devoted to movies, music, TV, videos, and a little print. And that was before the birth of smartphones or e-tablets like the Kindle and iPad.

# The Free Reading Tutor

Let's begin in the place that has achieved the highest performance with the device, Finland. Finland's children don't start formal schooling until age seven, yet they achieve the highest reading scores in the world. Part of that success can be attributed to a mechanical device that Finnish children use, perhaps more often than any other nation.

Surprisingly, these high-scoring children also watch fairly large amounts of television— far more time than they spend reading books. Their daily viewing is about two-thirds of what American children watch, which is the highest in the world.

The device used to be pretty expensive in the United States (\$250), but the price has dropped since 1993— when it went to zero dollars. Free. In fact, it comes built into every television set sold in America. It's the closed-captioning chip you access through the TV remote.

# Resources

- ❖ [www.trelease-on-reading.com](http://www.trelease-on-reading.com)
- ❖ [www.dadeschools.net](http://www.dadeschools.net)
- ❖ [www.fldoe.org](http://www.fldoe.org)
- ❖ [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)
- ❖ [www.ed.gov/parents/read](http://www.ed.gov/parents/read)
- ❖ [www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org)
- ❖ [www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)