

I've often said that reading aloud may well be the best way to put children off reading. Much depends on why you're listening to them in the first place and what you say, do and infer while they're performing. I say 'performing' deliberately because that's what it is - not reading silently which is what most of us do most of the time, but having to concentrate on a performance, sometimes to the detriment of searching for meaning. The requirement to read aloud at the same time as trying to process meaning is asking the child to do two things at once.

So how can we make the experience a positive and beneficial one for children and teachers? Above all we should be listening to what the child is trying to do. The reading researcher Kenneth Goodman called miscues 'a window on the reading process at work'. Another analogy would be our own 'Freudian slips' which can reveal the way our minds are working. When children read 'house' for 'home' we can deduce that they are (a) searching for meaning, (b) that they realise that a noun is called for, and (c) that they are monitoring the visual configuration of words - the shape of 'house' and 'home', in terms of ascenders and descenders, is very similar. But if they read 'horse' for 'house' then (a) is not the case whilst (b) and (c) are. Knowing what are the key issues helps us as teachers to know how to support children in their search for accuracy and/or meaning.

And what if children read 'rieded' for 'rode'? That tells us that they are processing written language because they understand what the meaning of the verb should be although they are relating its form to an over-generalisation (in their oral language) that all past tense verbs have 'ed' endings. One of the best ways to 'teach' the irregularities of English is exposure to plenty of examples through our spoken language and, crucially, by children reading as much as possible and by having print read aloud to them. That's sufficient reason in itself for teachers reading aloud to children at every opportunity.

Before I finish, I would like to mention that at the back of every Collins Big Cat book you will find pages which support reading by inviting recall, interpretation and comprehension of what the book has been about. These pages are ideal for checking the child's understanding of what they've just read (aloud) to you. They also provide invaluable follow-on speaking and listening activities, for example, retelling Bill's journey in *A Day Out* (pp.14/15) saying what the bear was up to along the way; or expanding on the flow chart in *How to make Storybooks* (pp.22/23).

So, when you do listen to children read aloud, do just that - listen!