



The Power of Reading With Book Buddies

The single most important condition for literacy learning is the presence of mentors who are joyfully literate people.

—Shirley Brice Heath



One to Know: Book Buddies

The Bring Me A Book (BMAB) Book Buddies program, founded in 2006, is an all-volunteer program developed for under-resourced preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Book Buddies engage in professional training with literacy experts who have perfected the art of the interactive read-aloud, using children's books that lend themselves to a read-aloud presentation.

During the read aloud, Book Buddies offer ideas that extend the story by engaging children with open-ended questions, such as, "What do you think is going to happen next?" "What surprised you?" and "Does this character remind you of anyone you know—and why?" Additionally, Book Buddies help children learn new words they may not know and help children connect the story to their own lives.

BMAB Book Buddies read aloud to their class 16 times a year; every book read aloud is gifted to the classroom library. And twice a year (if additional funding is available) each child receives a hardcover book to keep at home. Giving “take home” books is a joyful experience for both the Book Buddy and the children.

What to Do: Plan and Organize for a Successful Program

We launched our Bring Me A Book Book Buddy pilot program in 2006 and it continues to thrive in four counties in the San Francisco Bay Area. We’ve maintained an enthusiastic team of 30 volunteers who have read to hundreds of eager young children, mostly preschoolers, in dozens of schools each year. We are eager to share our experience so that other organizations can establish their own programs for young children as well as older children.

For those interested in creating a Book Buddy program in your own community, we share the steps we follow to create our successful Book Buddy Program:



Find Volunteers

Service organizations of all types are the likely places to find volunteer Book Buddies, such as:

- Rotary, Kiwanis, and other service clubs.
- Junior Leagues, AAUW, local corporations looking for meaningful volunteer opportunities.
- unaffiliated volunteers who have an interest in reading programs.

Provide Training

Online training videos are available on our website (for an example of an outstanding read-aloud, see [Vosa Cavu-Litman](#)), which give volunteers confidence, along with providing the following support:

Prepare before entering the classroom.

- Ask teacher for first names of students and try to learn them over time.
- Teachers may provide name tags for the children.

Present Book Buddy Volunteers With Guidelines

Provide all volunteers with guidelines and tips that appear at the end of this toolkit. Also be sure to give them contact information in case they have questions once the program begins.

Introduce the book and author.

- Bring the selected book in the same colorful bag to build curiosity about the new book.
- First and foremost, this is the time to bring out your inner actor. Read slowly, and speak up so all can hear you clearly, using facial expressions and body language. Have fun with the story and so will the children.

Engage children by following the ABC's: A in advance, B before or during, and C after reading the story:

- **A: ASK QUESTIONS** about what they think the story might be about from looking at the cover.
- **B: BUILD VOCABULARY** by introducing any unfamiliar words.
- **C: CONNECT THE STORY** to experiences in the children's lives—they love to share their stories.

Bring along anything you might have as a prop for the story.

- Some volunteers use felt boards, others use pictures, or anything that extends the characters and ideas of the story. It is helpful to have something that children can hold and pass along.



Choose the Read-Aloud Books

- BMAB has compiled a master list of books that have been used successfully in Book Buddy programs.
- Now, with our Bookelicious partnership, a Book Buddy can go online and seek out the best books for that classroom, ideally with the teacher's input. The books are delivered to the home of the Book Buddy.

Contact Partner Schools and Teachers

- Partner with schools in which the majority of children are under-resourced and where the classrooms have few books.
- The easiest way to find those schools is to search your community for those with Title I programs. Also, check in with local Head Start programs; foster care organizations, such as [National CASA/GAL Association for Children](#), and other programs that serve children most in need.

A note about choosing the books to read aloud

It is critical that the books that are used in the Book Buddy program are appropriate for the program. Not every book lends itself to an engaging read-aloud experience. Indeed, every year, the Bring Me A Book staff evaluates the books our Book Buddies read—and with our volunteers' thoughtful feedback—determines which books are keepers and should be added to our Bring Me A Book master list of outstanding read-aloud books.

Organize the Book Buddies

- It is ideal to bring the volunteers together in order to introduce your organization, to give them training, for them to get to know each other, so they feel connected to the organization and to each other.
- Distribute and go over the three pages of guidelines for Book Buddies that are at the end of this toolkit.

Meet as a Collaborative Team and Provide Volunteers With Recognition

- To fully support volunteers, dedicate time for debriefing and sharing tips for success. That collaboration ensures the volunteers feel valued.
- Provide additional training as needed.
- As a group, evaluate the books read and share suggestions for future titles to include.
- Thank volunteers for their time and efforts, perhaps having an end-of-year gathering to wrap up the school year.

Evaluate the Program

Criteria for Success

- If the Book Buddies are positive about their experiences that is one of the best measures that their efforts have been well received.
- Talk with teachers throughout the year for their feedback on what is—or is not—working well.
- Collect testimonials from grateful students, teachers, and families



More to Know: Older Children Can Be Readers, Too!

Bring Me A Book Franklin recognizes that parents and caregivers have many demands on their time and energy; additionally, some parents and caregivers may not feel comfortable reading aloud to their child, particularly if reading feels like a challenge.

With this in mind, Bring Me A Book Franklin also trains older children, typically fifth graders, to become Read Aloud Readers for the Pre-K and K children. The fact that young children “look up” to older children as role models adds special meaning to the Read Alouds. The program offers the added benefit of increasing the fluency and adding to the self-esteem of the older children.

Bring Me A Book Franklin trainers do the initial training after which the school or agency coordinates and directs the ongoing program. Read Aloud Reader programs are currently active at the Apalachicola Bay Charter School in Apalachicola and the Nest (after school program) in both Eastpoint and Carrabelle.

Read Aloud Readers log their reading time and are given Bring Me A Book t-shirts and business cards at important service milestones.

Explore Other Book Buddy Programs

Best Read Aloud Books found on this website and on the Bookelicious website.

[Chico Reading Pals](#)

[SMART](#)

See our Literacy Champion Toolkits!



Guidelines for Volunteer Readers

Your first visit to your classroom—prior to your first assigned read-aloud time.

This first visit will accomplish the following and will be invaluable for your preparation:

- Assure that you can find your way to this school and classroom and help you to know how long travel, check-in, and set up will take.
- Learn if you are required to sign in at the office before entering the classroom or any other site-specific requirement for volunteers.
- Meet the teacher and the children.
- Let the children know who you are and what you will be doing when you come for each visit.
- Learn from the teacher the age range of students and their English language proficiency so that you know that in advance.
- Ask the teacher what the children should call you. Follow the lead of what the children call their teacher (e.g., Ms./Mrs./Mr. Last name, Ms. first name, or other) and follow that lead.
- Confirm the day, date, time, and the length of your reading session at least for the first few months. We recommend sessions last between 20-30 minutes, depending on age and English language fluency. The agreed-upon length of time will also depend on the classroom schedule.

Start reading aloud to your class:

- Be sure you have practiced reading your story aloud.
- Be sure to let the children stretch between reading the book for the first time and your review or extensions. Choose a poem that involves children moving or a song that relates to the story.
- When you have finished reading and extending the book, ask a volunteer to place it in the classroom bookcase.
- Let the children know you will be back in two weeks (or whatever your schedule) and that you will have a new book to bring them.
- Relax, have fun, and watch how you begin to bond with those happy faces and they with you.

Tips for Before, During, and After Read Aloud

Before you go to the classroom: Do your homework!

- Read your book several times to build familiarity and develop your read-aloud style.
- Learn about the author and/or illustrator to help personalize the story.

Before you read: Get ready!

- If your teacher has name tags for the children that is ideal; otherwise we find that our making name tags for them becomes something meaningful for the children, and helps you learn their names.
- Draw your readers in and hold the book facing the children. Make eye contact and savor the moment as if you are about to open the best gift – because you are!
- Read aloud the title, the author's and illustrator's names, and the dedication if there is one.

During: Build language and spark imagination.

- Read slowly.
- Be silly, dramatic, have fun...pause, whisper, make eye contact.
- Interact with the story.
- Talk about the pictures.
- Savor and talk about words that may be new to the children.
- Encourage and praise children who look engaged.
- Repeat and talk about special words and new vocabulary in the story.

After: Build Comprehension.

- Have children retell the story in sequence, using the pictures to give them clues.
- Choose a favorite page or character to talk about.
- Connect to another story you have read to them.
- Connect the story to their real lives.



More for Book Buddy Volunteers

Here are some additional tips that can enhance the time you read with children.

- **Develop a warm and encouraging relationship with children and teachers.** Be sure to connect with your teacher via his or her preferred method of communication. Respect the teacher's time. Teachers have full demands on their before-, during-, and post-school day. Come prepared with your questions and clear communication about your purpose. Together, determine the best day of the week and time of day for you to come to read.
- **Keep in mind that some children need a transition, that is, time to settle in before starting the reading.** For young children consider asking them what they think the story is about based on the cover and /or the title. If you are reading with an older child, you might ask him or her to recall what happened in the book you last read together.
- **You might want to include a transition song to help children settle in for listening.** Consider, for example, the "A, B,C Song," "Good Morning to You," or "Open, Shut Them," to prepare children for attentive listening.
- **Reading the name of the author and illustrator is important** because it lets children know that that books are created by people just like them. It is also a way to give the children "book smarts," an appreciation for the work that goes into creating books.
- **If you are reading a picture book,** position yourself and the book to be sure that all children can see the pages.
- **If you are reading a chapter book, choose a stopping point**—usually at the end of a chapter—to make your listeners eager to continue in the next read-aloud session.
- **Don't forget to add some spice to your reading.** Use lots of expression as you read. Create a mood, perhaps by building suspense with pauses or changes in tempo.
- **Take your time.** Don't rush through your reading. Children will want to absorb the illustrations and text.
- **It is OK to interrupt your reading with questions,** such as, "What do you think will happen next?" That is a way to keep children engaged in the story.
- **Leave time to talk after the reading,** allowing children to share their ideas about the story, including sharing their own related experiences.
- **Some volunteers have found that singing after the reading is very effective as a transition.** Consider fast-paced songs that require movement, "If You're Happy and You Know It," and/or "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes."

