



Books Are Our Co-teachers for Lessons in Literacy & Life

by JOELLEN McCARTHY

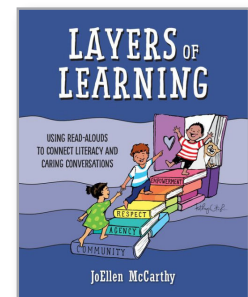
Read aloud to blur the lines between lessons in reading, writing, and life. When we use powerful picture books and their mentor authors as co-teachers, we can explore opportunities to grow readers' skills, opening their minds and hearts. Carefully chosen literature can also impact our relationships and empower us to challenge ideas or accept new realities, pushing us to grow—page by page, and story by story.



LITERACY CHAMPION: JOELLEN McCARTHY

JoEllen McCarthy is a lifelong learner, educator, and literacy specialist who spends her days teaching and learning alongside students, teachers, and administrators. Equally passionate about teaching and learning together, as a literacy consultant, JoEllen supports districts, families, and professional learning communities. As a Book Ambassador and member of the Educator Collaborative, she facilitates workshops, webinars, and collaborative

coaching conversations on best practices, centering students as the most important aspect of any curriculum. JoEllen always connects her work to powerful picture books that honor the lived experiences of all children. She champions the power of read alouds and explores her vision for this work for teachers, families, and students in the book, *Layers of Learning: Using Read Alouds to Connect Literacy and Caring Conversations*. She recently launched a video series in collaboration with Stenhouse, in which she interviews own-voice authors and illustrators to go "[Behind the Book](#)," with the creators of some of her favorite co-teacher books.



One to Know: The Power of Picture Books

Our libraries and bookshelves contain the most powerful tools for teaching, but it's not just about what books we use—it's about how we use them. When we connect academic and social and emotional needs, our conversations become richer, and learning becomes more meaningful. Books can help foster these conversations and provide children of all ages an opportunity to learn from relatable, three-dimensional characters. These connections offer

opportunities for layers of learning across the three areas of reading, writing, and thinking. Beyond the book, some of the most important lessons we can teach are often those led by children, stirred by a read aloud.

As you search for your “co-teachers,” consider texts with the following characteristics.

- **Offer an opportunity to explore and manage emotions through characters in texts.** Share books filled with illustrations (even wordless books) and invite readers to examine picture clues. Focus on facial expressions to discuss “all the feels,” and the ways those images bring the stories and characters to life.
- **Celebrate the beauty of words and language.** Provide playful opportunities for children to explore learning about language, story structure, letter sounds, vocabulary, and word play through joyful stories.
- **Embrace the unique qualities that make each of us who we are as individuals and as members of a learning community.** Read aloud books that celebrate our unique identities and honor the beauty in our differences.
- **Encourage readers to reflect and revise their thoughts based on new interpretations and explore concepts around point of view, experiences, and biases that can shape perspectives.** Research and discuss how the author’s and/or illustrator’s own experiences may have influenced the text or images and how their work might affect the reader’s point of view.
- **Invite children to grow their ideas across the pages and across texts.** Pause to reflect and talk about ideas in texts, including connections to children’s own lives, to the lives of characters in the stories, or the creators of those stories.
- **Create the space for caring conversations.** Use books as a springboard to foster kid-centered inclusive conversations about community, agency, respect, and empowerment and the range of ways to interpret those aspects in texts and in life. Books plant seeds for conversations that will grow over time. Powerful literature serves as a unique entry point to begin this work.

What to Do: Action Items for Educators and Families

- Think about the resources in your community of practice. Tap into the vast knowledge of your school and public librarians, and other trusted reading advisors in choosing your books as “co-teachers.”
- Use [Bookelicious](#) to get book recommendations, create wish lists, or connect with caregivers and educators to “Feed your read.”
- Find support from a professional literacy community to participate in chats, follow threads of conversations, and be part of ongoing reflections to think beyond book lists.
- The following twitter handles and hashtags are a great place to start:
 - @TheEdCollab #TheEdCollab
 - @nerdybookclub #nerdybookclub
 - @DisruptTexts #DisruptTexts
 - @ncte follow #BuildYourStack
- Visit [Social Justice Books](#) to learn about their guide for selecting anti-bias children’s books, anti-bias book talks, and additional support from trusted reading advisors.

More to Know and Do

Check out these additional resources for recommendations, story time for viewing at home or in school, and to get free access to powerful picture books:

- **KidLit TV:** www.kidlit.tv/ A winner of the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) for a best digital tool for teaching and learning, here you can find book trailers, tv shows, interviews, read alouds, and activities connected to kid lit. Sign up to receive the KidLit TV [newsletter](#) to further “explore the world of children’s literature.”
- **Netflix Bookmarks:** www.netflixbookmarks.com/ A Netflix original series celebrating black voices provides FREE read aloud videos where “Celebrity readers share children’s books by Black authors to spark kid-friendly conversations about empathy, equality, self-love and antiracism.” Share these resources to learn more from these coteachers and spread the joy and power of picture books.
- **Layer Affective Considerations with Academic Learning:** Consider the way your text selections can impact elements of CARE: community, agency, respect, and empowerment in order to connect academic and social-emotional learning. Check out [Layers of Learning: Using Read-Alouds to Connect Literacy and Caring Conversations](#) to find more than 200 new and connected texts, authentic classroom examples, and ideas, as well as discussion possibilities to help extend these conversations.
- **Host a BYOB (Bring Your Own Book) meeting:** Get together with other educators—or at a family literacy night—to share new, or new-to-you books, and discuss the ways you could use the texts to find lessons in reading, writing, or life.
- **Research kids and books:** Search for those texts that feel right and necessary in the moment.

How to Reach JoEllen McCarthy

You can find JoEllen tweeting about new-must-have titles, sharing ideas to adopt or adapt through literacy snapshots, and more on [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#).

If you’d like to reach out to JoEllen, visit her website: www.joellenmccarthy.com/. You can more about her book, *Layers of Learning* via Stenhouse Publishers: <https://www.stenhouse.com/content/layers-learning>, Amazon, or your favorite public library.