Read Aloud Activities for the Elderly

Reading aloud is an activity that most people are familiar with. Reading storybooks to children and grandchildren is a time for bonding, warmth and love. However reading aloud is not only for children; adults enjoy it too.

For the elderly who loved to read all their lives, listening to someone read to them can bring profound comfort and joy. Sometimes read-aloud activities are lacking in nursing homes and assisted living facilities - however this can easily be changed.

Why not start a Read-Aloud Readers Group activity at your facility; a Book Club with a difference! Read-aloud activities are an intervention well worth pursuing.

The Benefits of Reading-Aloud to the Elderly

There are many different reasons why the elderly may give up reading. Common barriers include poor vision, lack of strength to hold up a book, tremors, dementia, and other medical reasons.

Giving up reading does not mean that they have lost interest in books, magazines, and newspapers however. In fact, losing the ability to read often leaves people feeling withdrawn, sad and isolated.

Shared group reading can improve quality of life and wellbeing. It may also:

- Stimulate memories and creativity
- Improve mood and concentration
- Increase social interaction

Reading Aloud for Families

Reading-aloud activities should also be suggested to families of clients who may at times run out of topics of conversation when visiting loved-ones. Reading-aloud is an intimate shared activity that promote feelings of closeness and attachment.

How to Find Suitable Reading Material

Books chosen for read-aloud activities should be mainly literature-based, however other types of reading material is also necessary to attend to individual tastes.

Ask clients what type of stories, news, and poems they enjoyed reading and make a plan for the group session.

For clients who were never interested in reading books, see if you can spark their interest with books about hobbies, politics, current news, religion or cooking.
Read Aloud Activities for the Elderly

Suggested reading material:

- Poems – known and unknown poems
- Newspapers columns – Gossip & Gardening columns for example
- Short Stories – Covering a range to topics; Humour, Mysteries, Fables
- Historical tales
- Biographies – Presidents, scientists and other famous people
- Religious passages – Bible, Quran
- Personal letters and Celebration cards
- Catalogues – Clothes, furniture, pets
- Plays – Hamlet, Silas Marner, A Streetcar Named Desire
- TV Programs – Choose what to watch in the coming week
- Travel Brochures – Find places that clients visited
- Magazines – Specialty magazines: boats, fishing, motor-houses
- Comics – Borrow old style comics from libraries
- Recipe books – Very popular with some clients

Read-Aloud Books for Dementia Care

There are books available that have been written specifically for dementia care. One of them is “Loving Voice: A Caregiver’s Book of Read-Aloud Stories for the Elderly” compiled by Carolyn Banks and Janice Rizzo. This book can be purchased online from Amazon:. 

By C. Banks Loving Voice II: A Caregiver’s Book of More Read-Aloud Stories for the Elderly (1st First Edition) [Paperback]
Types of Reading Activities for Elders

Remind clients that it is important to have fun! Having fun is a good source of relaxation and stimulation. The goal of read-aloud activities is for clients to enjoy themselves.

**Audience participation Stories**

An audience participation story engages the audience in the story. It is a fun activity that promotes focus and creativity. Clients may repeat a word or phrase throughout the story: sing, gesture, or act. (Example supplied below.)

**Reading and Reminiscing**

Read storybooks favourites that clients read as children such as:
Read Aloud Activities for the Elderly

- The Faraway Tree
- Treasure Island
- Alice in Wonderland
- Pippi Longstocking
- The Hidden Staircase
- Anne of Green Gables
- and many many more

Read interesting and funny passages from these stories and talk about the book and the era in which it was written.

Open-Ended stories

Open-ended stories provide a creative way to engage clients in a story. Read a short story where the ending is inconclusive or incomplete. Clients may speculate how the story can continue, or how the problem can be solved. Write client answers on a white board and read them out at the end of the activity. (Example supplied below).

Chapter books

Chapter books are for clients who can reasonably follow the stories. Just recap the plot at the beginning of every session and proceed with the next chapter. Clients may enjoy authors such as:

- Raymond Chandler
- J.K. Rowling
- Anton Chekhov
- Arthur Conan Doyle
- Roald Dahl
- and many others

5 Attributes of a Good Reader

Activity Coordinators may delegate reading-aloud activities to a willing volunteer after some training and observation. It is important to find someone willing to go to the trouble to prepare for the task.

Both intonation and pitch can considerably influence how a story is received and comprehended. Here are some strategies that can make reading-aloud more effective.
Read Aloud Activities for the Elderly

**Prepare**

Read the story several times beforehand, become familiar with it. Practice the rhythm you intend to use; pauses and tone.

**Practice Mindfulness**

Being present while reading is very important. Clients will lose interest if they perceive you are indifferent to the story or running on autopilot.

**Intonation**

Intonation is key to reading aloud. Read with your voice as well as your eyes - express emotion. Make the most of sentence structures, commas and interrogation marks.

**Pitch**

Pitch is important especially when reading to clients that may have hearing deficits. Make sure you read loudly and clearly.

**Pauses**

Adding pauses for emphasis is important to transport clients, momentarily, to the author’s world portrayed in the book.

**Evaluation**

Observe if clients talk about the session amongst each other or with relatives. Keep note of the stories that attracted the most interest to read to others.

Showing interest may mean a smile, a gesture, or a calm state of being during the session. Document findings.

**Read-aloud Stories to get started with**

- Open-ended Story
- Audience Participation Story
- Short Story: The Runaway Train
We'd love to hear your feedback!