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A FREE LIST FROM MARGIN

Books worth reading **out loud.**

These are the books that have held a room at our house. Fifty-eight of them, sorted by the age they land best, with a line on each one so you know what you are getting before you order it. Enough to keep you going for years.

Before the list.

Five things worth knowing, then the list.

Reading aloud is the one school subject that never stops working. A child who cannot yet read a word can follow a story years above her own reading level. An eleven-year-old who claims to hate books will sit down for a chapter if somebody else is doing the work.

Read above their level. A read-aloud is not reading practice. It is where a child meets sentences she could not yet decode on her own, and that is the whole point. The ages on this list are about what a child can understand and sit still for. They are not reading levels.

Mix the ages. If you have four children, read to the middle one. The youngest picks up more than you expect and the oldest is rarely as bored as he pretends. A book that suits everybody perfectly usually suits nobody.

Quit a book that is not working. Ten pages is a fair trial. Putting one down teaches nothing bad. Grinding through one for six weeks teaches a child that books are a chore, which is the opposite of the thing you were going for.

Read the same one again. A four-year-old will ask for the same story forty times, and the fortieth is doing something the first could not. That is not wasted time and it is not a reason to worry.

A word on the older books.

Several of these were written a long time ago.

Some of the best read-alouds were written a century or more ago, and a few carry attitudes their authors never questioned. Reading them aloud is the easiest possible place to meet that. You are right there, and you can stop and say what you think. That is a better education than a shelf where nothing awkward happens.



A read-aloud is the one subject that never stops working.

Ages four to six.

Short chapters, or no chapters at all. Read one twice.

Picture books that survive the fortieth reading

- **Make Way for Ducklings** · Robert McCloskey
A duck family stops traffic in Boston. The pictures do half the telling, so it works before a child can follow much plot.
- **Blueberries for Sal** · Robert McCloskey
A girl and a bear cub get quietly mixed up on the same hill. Gentle suspense a four-year-old can feel.
- **The Story of Ferdinand** · Munro Leaf
A bull who would rather smell flowers than fight. Funny, and the shortest book here.
- **Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel** · Virginia Lee Burton
An old machine proves it is not finished. The repetition is built for reading out loud.
- **The Tale of Peter Rabbit** · Beatrix Potter
Still the best first taste of real sentences. Potter never wrote down to a child.
- **Frog and Toad Are Friends** · Arnold Lobel
Five small stories about friendship that are far wiser than they look. Perfect length for one sitting.
- **Corduroy** · Don Freeman
A department store bear looking for a missing button. Quiet and kind.
- **A Bear Called Paddington** · Michael Bond
The first real chapter book for most families. Each chapter is its own small disaster.

First chapter books

- **Winnie-the-Pooh** · A. A. Milne
Funnier for the adult reading it than for the child listening, which is why it lasts.
- **My Father's Dragon** · Ruth Stiles Gannett
A boy rescues a dragon with a knapsack full of odd supplies. Short chapters, real momentum.
- **The Story of Little Babaji** · retold, ill. Fred Marcellino
The old tiger story with its ugly history stripped out. Tigers turn into butter. Children love it.
- **Little Bear** · Else Holmelund Minarik
Four tiny stories, Sendak pictures. Good for the night when nobody has patience.
- **The Velveteen Rabbit** · Margery Williams
What it costs to be loved. Read it before you need it, not after.
- **Mr. Popper's Penguins** · Richard and Florence Atwater
A house painter ends up with twelve penguins. Silly on purpose and it never sags.

Ages seven to nine.

Long enough to live in for a month. This is the sweet spot.

The ones almost every family finishes

- **Charlotte's Web** · E. B. White
Still the best-built children's novel in English. Read the last chapter yourself first if you cry easily.
- **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** · C. S. Lewis
Short chapters, a clear shape, and it asks more of a child at the end than at the start.
- **Little House in the Big Woods** · Laura Ingalls Wilder
Almost no plot, and children stay for it anyway. How a family fed itself through one year.
- **The Trumpet of the Swan** · E. B. White
A swan born without a voice learns the trumpet. The quietest of White's three, and the most overlooked.
- **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory** · Roald Dahl
Mean in the way children find delicious. Every chapter ends on a hook.
- **The Mouse and the Motorcycle** · Beverly Cleary
Short, fast, and a reliable choice for a child who says he does not like being read to.
- **Stuart Little** · E. B. White
Odd, and it ends without tying up. Worth having the conversation that causes.
- **Pippi Longstocking** · Astrid Lindgren
A girl with no parents, a horse on the porch, and no interest in being told anything.

Worth the reach

- **The Wind in the Willows** · Kenneth Grahame
Slow, and the language is thick. Read it aloud and it opens. Read it silently at eight and it does not.
- **Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH** · Robert C. O'Brien
A widowed mouse, a laboratory, and rats who learned to read. More serious than it first appears.
- **The Cricket in Times Square** · George Selden
A cricket, a mouse and a cat in a subway station newsstand. Warmer than its setting.
- **Homer Price** · Robert McCloskey
Six tall tales from a small town, including a doughnut machine nobody can stop.
- **Farmer Boy** · Laura Ingalls Wilder
A year of Almanzo's boyhood, mostly food and work. Boys who resist Little House often take this one.
- **The Family Under the Bridge** · Natalie Savage Carlson
A tramp in Paris and three children with nowhere to go. Short, and it earns its ending.
- **Detectives in Togas** · Henry Winterfeld
A mystery set in ancient Rome that turns a history lesson into a whodunit.

Ages ten to twelve.

Old enough for a hard ending. Young enough to still sit for it.

Stories

- **The Hobbit** · J. R. R. Tolkien
Written to be read aloud, by a father who did it. The songs are easier if you just say them.
- **Treasure Island** · Robert Louis Stevenson
The book every pirate since has copied. Long Silver is one of the great characters in English.
- **Where the Red Fern Grows** · Wilson Rawls
A boy and two hounds in the Ozarks. Everybody warns you about the ending and they are right.
- **The Secret Garden** · Frances Hodgson Burnett
A sour, unloved girl and a walled garden. The Yorkshire dialect is a pleasure to read out loud.
- **Carry On, Mr. Bowditch** · Jean Lee Latham
An indentured boy teaches himself navigation and rewrites the sailor's handbook. True, and a good antidote to "I can't."
- **The Bronze Bow** · Elizabeth George Speare
A boy in occupied Galilee who wants Rome dead. What it costs him to put the hate down.
- **The Witch of Blackbird Pond** · Elizabeth George Speare
Colonial Connecticut, an outsider girl, and a town that turns. Tense without being grim.
- **Johnny Tremain** · Esther Forbes
A crippled hand, a proud boy, and Boston in 1773. The best novel about the Revolution for this age.
- **Number the Stars** · Lois Lowry
Denmark, 1943, and a girl asked to be brave without being told why. Short, and gentle enough for ten.
- **The Phantom Tollbooth** · Norton Juster
Wordplay stacked on wordplay. Funnier out loud than on the page, and it rewards a reader who hams it up.
- **Rascal** · Sterling North
A year with a pet raccoon in 1918 Wisconsin. True, and it ends the only way it honestly could.
- **The Great Brain** · John D. Fitzgerald
A ten-year-old con artist in small-town Utah. Very funny, and the morals arrive sideways.
- **Adam of the Road** · Elizabeth Janet Gray
A minstrel's son searching thirteenth-century England for a stolen dog. Medieval life without a textbook.
- **The Penderwicks** · Jeanne Birdsall
Four sisters and a summer cottage. Written on purpose to feel fifty years older than it is.

Thirteen and up.

Where a read-aloud becomes the thing a family talks about at dinner.

The long ones

- **A Christmas Carol** · Charles Dickens
Dickens wrote it for performance and toured reading it himself. Five short staves. Start here if you have never read him aloud.
- **Great Expectations** · Charles Dickens
Long, and worth every week. The voices are so distinct that reading it aloud is easier than reading it silently.
- **The Count of Monte Cristo** · Alexandre Dumas
A prison escape, a fortune, and twenty years of patience. Get an unabridged translation and take the year.
- **The Moonstone** · Wilkie Collins
Often called the first English detective novel. Told by a rotating cast, which makes it a gift out loud.
- **Jane Eyre** · Charlotte Brontë
A governess who will not be made small. The first hundred pages are a childhood worth reading on their own.
- **Pride and Prejudice** · Jane Austen
Nearly half of it is dialogue. Boys who groan at the cover often come round by the third chapter.
- **To Kill a Mockingbird** · Harper Lee
A Southern childhood and a trial. Reading it aloud means you are there for the hard parts.
- **The Hiding Place** · Corrie ten Boom
A Dutch watchmaker's family hides their neighbors. True, and unsparing about what forgiveness costs.
- **Killer Angels** · Michael Shaara
Three days at Gettysburg from inside the heads of the men deciding. Fair to both armies.
- **Animal Farm** · George Orwell
Ninety pages. A week of reading and a month of arguing about it afterward.
- **The Screwtape Letters** · C. S. Lewis
Letters from a senior devil to his nephew. Read one at a time. Thirty-one of them, so it fits a month.
- **Cry, the Beloved Country** · Alan Paton
South Africa, a father, a son, and a crime. The prose has a rhythm that only shows up out loud.
- **The Odyssey** · Homer, tr. Fitzgerald or Wilson
It was spoken for three hundred years before anybody wrote it down. It has never worked better than aloud.
- **Hamlet** · William Shakespeare
Hand out the parts and read it around the table. It is a script, and it stops being homework the moment you do.
- **All Creatures Great and Small** · James Herriot
A Yorkshire vet, told in short chapters. The right book for a family that keeps missing nights.

Making it actually happen.

The list is the easy part.

- **Pin it to a meal.** Read-aloud time that floats never happens. Read-aloud time attached to lunch happens most days, because lunch happens most days.
- **Fifteen minutes counts.** A chapter a day finishes a long novel in a season. Waiting for an unhurried hour means you never start.
- **Give their hands something.** Duplo, drawing, folding laundry. A child who is allowed to move listens longer than one who is told to sit still.
- **Do the voices badly.** Nobody is grading it. A bad accent held all the way through a book becomes a family joke, and the joke is half of why they remember it.
- **Let an audiobook take a week.** Long car trips, a sick week, a season when your voice is gone. It is still the book.
- **When you miss two weeks, pick it up where you left off.** Do not start over, and do not quietly abandon it. Say one sentence about what happened last and keep reading.

That last one is the whole idea behind Margin.

Margin is a homeschool planner that does not punish you for the week you missed. Fall behind and it does not hand you an eraser and a guilty conscience. It gives you three ways to catch up, you pick one, and the rest of the year is redone for you. It runs on plain arithmetic, not AI. Your children's schedule is never sent to an AI, stored by one, or used to train one.

Free for 14 days at marginplanner.com

\$80 a year for the whole family, however many children.



Plan the whole year. Then let it **move with you.**

Margin lays out your entire school year before the first Monday, so you can see all of it at once and know you will finish when you meant to. When the week goes its own way, Margin moves the rest of the year for you in a second or two.

It keeps your attendance and subject records while you teach, so the page your state or association asks for is one you print rather than build. And your children's schedule stays yours. No AI, ever.

\$8 a month

for your whole family, however many children you have. Fourteen days free at marginplanner.com.