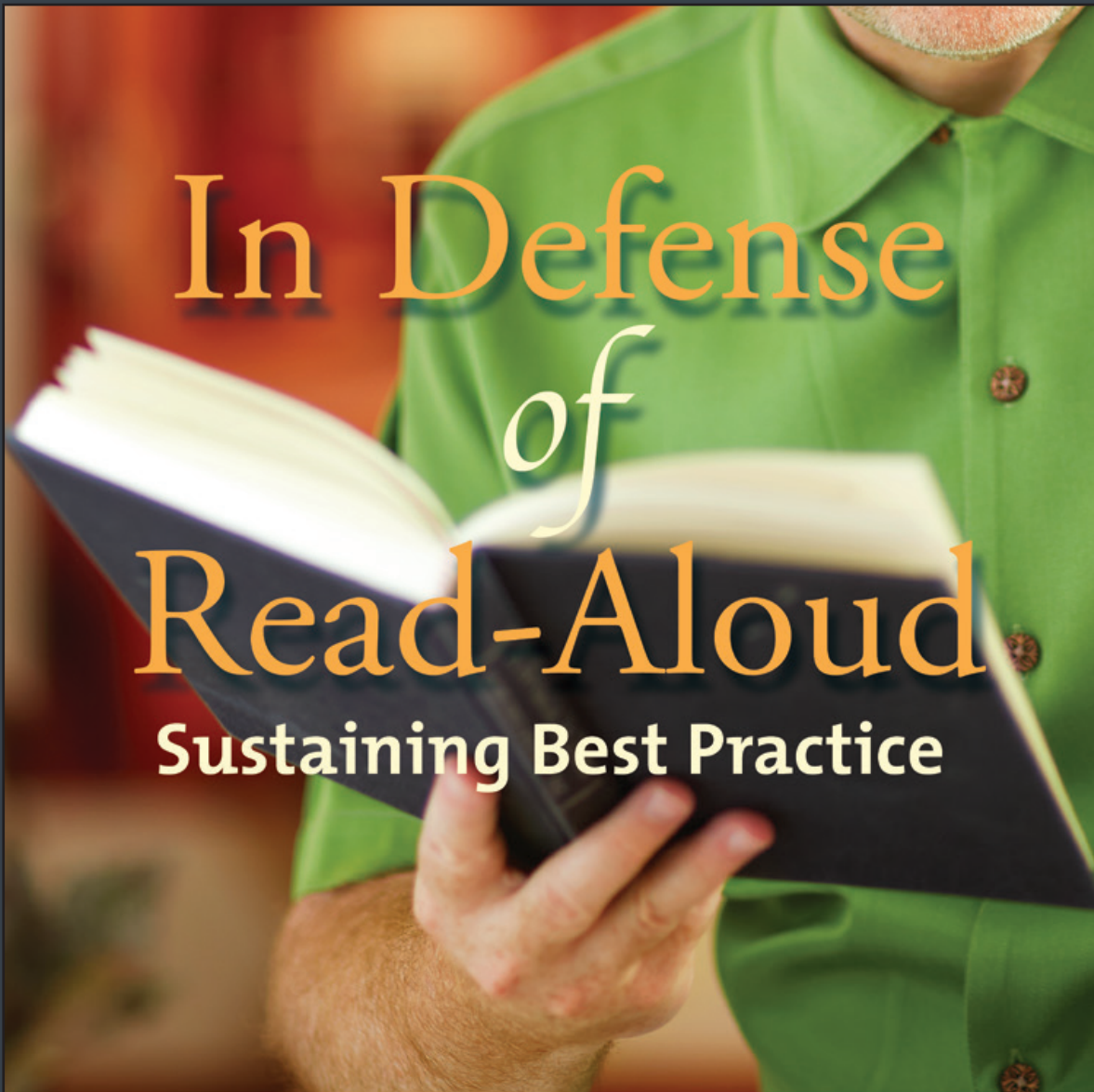


Study Guide



In Defense  
of  
Read-Aloud  
Sustaining Best Practice

STEVEN L. LAYNE

Foreword by Regie Routman

Professional development training for  
teachers provided by Stenhouse Publishers



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## SUMMARY

Why does read-aloud—one of the most widely used, beloved, and beneficial practices in a balanced literacy program—need to be defended? Steven Layne believes it's because too often teachers have let misguided naysayers dismiss the instructional strategy rather than define its importance to students of all ages and in all subject areas. In this book, he shares research and best practices that help make the case for read-aloud across the curriculum.

As accountability measures for schools and teachers continue to grow, instructional practice is under the microscope. The practice of reading aloud to children and teens may be viewed by some educators as an “extra”—a bit of fluff used solely for the purposes of enjoyment or filling a few spare minutes. But researchers and practitioners stand in solidarity: the practice of reading aloud throughout the grades is not only viable but also best practice.

*In Defense of Read-Aloud* reinforces readers' confidence to continue the practice of reading aloud and presents the research base to defend the practice in grades K–12. Steven also offers significant practical insights to strengthen instructional practice—answering questions of “Why should we?” and “How should we?”—and provides practical advice about how to use read-alouds most effectively.

The following are suggestions to help groups of educators read, discuss, and extend the ideas from the book into classrooms. These ideas will come to life as teachers are given opportunities to put them into practice with their own students. For each chapter, we have provided discussion questions, meaningful quotes, and professional development ideas that will enable participants to reflect on the text as well as the reading lives of their students. We encourage groups to try out some new practices in their classrooms. The suggestions offered in the guide are designed to foster collaboration and spark new thinking.

## CHAPTER ONE: WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT READING ALOUD?

### Questions for Group Discussion

- What are your beliefs about read-aloud?
- How does read-aloud fit within your overall literacy programming?
- How has read-aloud helped you find the stories of your students?

### Quotes to Ponder

*Reading aloud should take place daily at all grade levels, including junior high and high school. –Regie Routman (8)*

*The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children. –Becoming a Nation of Readers (9)*

*Reflective practitioners not only ponder why what's working is working or why it's not, but know why they are doing what they are doing in the first place. The kind of leaders I am talking about have a rationale that they can articulate with confidence to anyone who asks (11).*

### Professional Development

- With your colleagues, reflect on the role read-alouds played within your own schooling? What memories do you carry? How are these similar and/or different to your current use of read-aloud within the classroom?
- Start a list of some of your favorite read-alouds used in the classroom. Hold onto the list for reflection as you work through this text.
- With your colleagues, discuss various ways that administrators, parents, or even other teachers have criticized or minimized read-aloud practices in your classroom or school. On chart paper, make a list of the “arguments” and then offer reasoned counterarguments. Use the list to generate an evidence-based manifesto in support of read-aloud that you can collectively refer to and distribute to those who may question the practice in the future. For support and models, refer to research cited in the book and the “ten reasons why teachers should read aloud to students” list (16) offered by Jerry L. Johns, past president of the International Literacy Association.
- Steven believes that teachers must take charge of their own professional

development. “And I don’t mean for one year, I mean for the rest of your life” (11). If you have not created a one-year plan for professional learning, start now. Ask team leaders, instructional leaders, and university faculty for advice. You might also consult colleagues you’ve met through social media and professional associations. When you have completed the one-year plan, begin expanding your vision to include long-term goals.

## CHAPTER TWO: ESTABLISHING A SUCCESSFUL READ-ALLOUD TIME

### Questions for Group Discussion

- What considerations do you give to the environment for read-aloud?
- What strategies do you use to launch your read-alouds?
- How do you plan for read-aloud?

### Quotes to Ponder

*My goal here is not to provide you with some type of failsafe number; rather, it is to heighten your awareness that there are many key considerations to successfully launching a read-aloud—far more than some teachers consider (30).*

*Every stopping point is a secret reading-skill reinforcement lesson just waiting to happen (34).*

*When we finish a book, it's a time to sigh, it's a time to think, and it's a time to talk—we must teach kids to do this and model it with them (36).*

*One key benefit of a consistent read-aloud is that kids enjoy being with text; this affects attitude, and attitude precedes action. Kids don't take books home and read if they never have any pleasant experiences with books. In a world that is busier and busier, we need to be very mindful of just how important it is for our students to have some positive and enjoyable experiences with text (36-37).*

### Professional Development

- Think through a recent read-aloud, including your before, during, and after read-aloud strategies. How did you launch the book? What went well? How might you launch the book differently? How did you determine stopping points during the read-aloud? What strategies did you use to conclude the book?
- Consider the environment and seating plan for read-aloud time in your classroom. Put yourself inside the heads of selected students and think about how they might feel in the current setup (or ask them directly). You also might observe the way colleagues use their spaces. Are there ideas from this chapter that you can use to make appropriate adjustments?
- In this chapter, Steven stresses the importance of carefully planning the launch of each new read-aloud book. Create a two- or three-column planning sheet that you

can use to design your read-alouds. The sheet might include the following categories mentioned in this chapter (as well as others you think are necessary): preview of the book, anticipation activities, special genre considerations, background information students will need, stopping points planned for the reading, appropriate scaffolding, time management needs, reading skills introduced or reinforced during the reading, and concluding questions and activities. In the other columns, you can leave space to include activities and lessons for specific books, as well as indicators of how students responded to them.

- Review the FAQs about read-aloud time (37-44), as well as Steven's responses. Which comments particularly resonated with you? What new insights did you gain? Do you have additional questions or need clarification? Share and discuss as a group.

## CHAPTER THREE: SELECTING THE APPROPRIATE READ-ALLOUD

### Questions for Group Discussion

- What read-alouds do you remember from being in school? What made them memorable?
- How do you select read-alouds for your classroom?
- Is the reading level of the book a consideration when selecting read-alouds?

### Quotes to Ponder

*Our experiences, beliefs, dispositions, and passions all play a role in how we experience a text, so it would only be natural that we would disagree with one another about which books are great for which grade levels, which titles are better for read-alouds versus which are better for novel study, and so on (54).*

*Louise Rosenblatt (1938) reminds us that what we bring to the text as readers is an important consideration in the transaction that occurs during the reading process. The meaning on the page has not been brought to life until my experience as a reader begins to interact with it (54).*

*When the text selected for read-aloud time has students “listening up” one to two grade levels, teachers become the medium for exposing those students to more natural vocabulary, more complex literary devices, and more sophisticated sentence structures than they would be finding in the grade-level texts they could navigate on their own (55).*

*If reading aloud to kids is instruction, then having intimate knowledge of the text (which requires a minimum of one full and thorough reading on your own before reading the text aloud to the students) is non-negotiable (66).*

### Professional Development

- Review David Alan Smith’s letter (50–51), where he shares his read-aloud experiences with the author of *The Rules of Survival*. Were you surprised that a high school English teacher reads aloud to his students? How did his explanation inform your own exploration of read-aloud? Consider adding his reasoning to the manifesto you wrote in response to Chapter One.
- In Chapter Three, Steven shares research findings that students’ listening levels



for text are generally about two years higher than their silent reading levels. Were you aware of this research? If so, have you allowed it to impact your practice? In what ways? If you were surprised by this information, how would you like it to impact your practice? How will you make that happen? With your colleagues, discuss how you can use read-aloud time to advance students' reading skills through "listening up"(55).

- Which genre(s) do you struggle to incorporate into your classroom read-alouds? Ask each teacher in the group to write his or her non-favorite genre as the heading on a blank piece of paper and pass the sheets around. Under each heading, teachers can take turns sharing good read-aloud books from that genre. Use these resources to deepen your knowledge of all genres.
- Go back to the list of favorite read-alouds that you started. Narrow the list down to the "top five" favorite read-alouds you use or have used in the classroom. Take some time to reflect on the list. Why did these titles make the list? What factors do you consider when choosing a read-aloud? How do the reading levels of the books compare to the silent reading levels of the students you teach? What consideration do you give to the content of the book? Do you include a variety of genres? Non-fiction? What about genres that you don't really like yourself as a reader?
- Steven encouraged readers of this book to do some "trolling and doling." *Troll* through the library of your typical read-alouds and *dole* out some teacher tough love to yourself. How many of those titles are genuinely stretching your students? Are your kids listening up *most* of the time? Ask yourself how often you want your students listening up? Have a conversation with colleagues and compare rationales behind read-aloud lists and thoughts about having students "listen up."

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE ART OF READING ALOUD

### Questions for Group Discussion

- Expression, phrasing, word color, enunciation, volume, pace tone, and pitch all influence the delivery of a read-aloud. Do you consciously model these elements for students? Do you find that you have to work harder at some elements than others?
- Steven promotes reader's theater as an instructional strategy to improve oral reading fluency. How is reader's theater used in your classroom? What do you see as the benefits of reader's theater for students?

### Quotes to Ponder

*Keep in mind that the overall goal of expressive reading is to make the author's message clear to the listening audience (84).*

*It has always amazed me that calling on random kids, some of whom are dysfluent, to read aloud in front of the entire class could be viewed as sound practice (86)*

*A strong teacher must understand and make use of both phrasing and word color to bring the message forward, and masterful enunciation as well as proficient use of volume, pace, tone, and pitch will clarify the message and allow for the "voicing" of characters (91).*

*Getting into and out of exciting or troubling situations with a character or discovering something new about someone or something somewhere in the world are two of the many reasons that students look forward to read-aloud time and to reading on their own, whether at school or elsewhere. Through read-alouds students who struggle to read independently or who are learning a new language have the opportunity to enjoy texts that might otherwise not be available or accessible to them. Their ears are filled with the rhythms of fluent reading, and they are able to share with peers their enjoyment of reading, perhaps by laughing together at a character's outrageous actions, by nudging a friend to take notice of a wondrous piece of information about an animal, or by chiming in with classmates and the teachers on an alliterative phrase that tickles the tongue –Shelley Stagg Peterson (93-94).*

### Professional Development

- Do an honest appraisal of your comfort and skill with read-alouds. Jot down

any apprehensions but also note the strengths you have or could draw upon. Have someone videotape you while reading aloud in the classroom. Review the tape. What do you see as your areas of strength? What do you see as areas where you might want to improve in your delivery?

- Review Steven’s suggestions for becoming a true “teacher diva”(83). Commit to developing a plan to improve your read-aloud skills. Integrate the goals and strategies with the professional growth plan you developed as part of the Chapter One activities.
- In Chapter Four, Steven shares the elements that contribute to expressive reading including *phrasing*, *volume*, *pace*, *tone and pitch*, and *inflection*. At your next collegial gathering, ask teachers to choose one of the elements and demonstrate it using a read-aloud passage from a variety of genres. Invite people to share the qualities that make each element an important part of expressive reading. Use the elements and comments to create a rubric that can guide your self-evaluation of read-alouds. Add it to your professional growth plan.
- Consider reviewing additional resources that can help you and your students with expressive reading, including Erik Palmer’s books *Well Spoken* (Stenhouse, 2011) and *Digitally Speaking* (Stenhouse e-book, 2012).

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE BOOKS WE LOVE TO READ ALOUD

### Questions for Group Discussion

- Steven speaks of choosing read-alouds with intention and purpose. How might your criteria change for read-aloud selection now that you have finished *In Defense of Read Aloud*?
- As you read through the favorite read-alouds in this chapter, notice the books shared and the grade levels in which they are used. What patterns do you notice? What do you wonder?
- If you were to add your own favorite read-aloud to this section of the book, what title would you share and why?

### Quotes to Ponder

*The best way to cultivate their tastes is to read to them, starting at birth and keeping on and on. ‘Let me hear you read it’ is a test. ‘Let me read it to you’ is a gift.”—Katherine Paterson (103).*

*There are moments of deep reflection—a time to discuss that this is much more than a funny story about a wild boy and his tame cousin. No, this is a story about what it means to belong, to be loved, to have a family. It is one of my favorite examples of powerful writing, and it is made all the more pronounced when we experience it together. A farm isn’t typically the place you find a lot of razzle-dazzle, but in the case of this book, there’s definitely some read-aloud magic that will happen as soon as you take to the stage (146).*

### Response

- Read through Chapter 5. Choose at least one book that was recommended as a favorite read-aloud. Read and/or reread this book through the lens of a potential read-aloud taking into account all the important considerations Steven has shared when selecting read-alouds.
- Using the reflections in Chapter Five as a guide, write about your “most favoritest read-aloud ever” (103), and take turns sharing your title and others mentioned by your colleagues.
- In addition to the “treasure trove of read-alouds from an interesting and highly diverse group of people” (103), what new insights did you gain from other

literacy professionals? How can you integrate some of the recommended resources and tips into your classroom?

- Initiate a “What’s New in Children’s Literature” group with a few of your colleagues. Choose a common text monthly to discuss. It’s a great way to focus on children’s books and find potential read-alouds!

