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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Rebellious Read Alouds*.

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## WHY REBELLIOUS READ ALOUDS?

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The work in this book is completely inspired by the efforts and intelligence of Black women. Their tireless and often unrecognized work has shifted my thinking as an educator. Their teaching has awakened me, inspired me, and pushed me to be better and do better.

We often hear of the importance of offering students “mirror, window, and sliding glass door” opportunities. But where does this phrase come from?

Rudine Sims Bishop, who is known as the “mother of multicultural literacy,” coined the phrase in the early 1990s while examining children’s literature. Bishop expressed the need for children to be able to see their own lives reflected in the stories they read. It is of equal importance, Bishop wrote, for children to have exposure to books that are a window, or a view into a new world or new experience that may be greatly different than their own (Chenoweth, 2019).

In Bishop’s (1990) words, “Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange” (p. ix). She goes on to state:

These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created and recreated by the author. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. (p. ix)

These mirror, window, and sliding glass door experiences are the foundation of the rebellion. These experiences confirm our lives as important; they say our stories are ones worth being told and listened to (mirrors). They expose us to new worlds; they show us that we aren’t the only ones, that there is so much more than we know (windows). And these experiences let us imagine what could be, they give us hope, and they push us to look beyond ourselves and to reimagine something more (sliding glass doors). This is why reading books written about and by people in traditionally marginalized groups is crucial for every student.

But these mirror, window, and sliding glass door experiences cannot be done arbitrarily. The act of integrating diverse texts into our classroom libraries and conversations into our daily routine requires building relationships with our students and understanding their lives and experiences. It means looking at our students and our classroom through a culturally responsive lens. It takes learning, unlearning, and new learning in order to do what’s right and best for all students.

The lessons I’ve learned from Hammond’s (2015) book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and The Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* continue to push me as an educator. Hammond’s Ready for Rigor framework sets up a learning environment in which every child has the opportunity to be successful. Integration and interaction with children’s books about and written by people from traditionally marginalized groups fits into each part of Hammond’s framework:

- **Awareness:** Know and recognize your own cultural lens.
- **Learning partnerships:** Help students create a positive mindset.
- **Information processing:** Help students process new content using methods from oral traditions. (Hello, retelling a read aloud!)
- **Community of learners and learning environment:** Make room for student voice and advocacy. (Ask students: What stories are missing from our library? What stories do you want to hear/read? Is your story reflected in the books in our library?)

When we begin to truly value and understand the students in our classrooms, we can begin to engage with them academically. Hammond's work encourages us to learn our own culture, reflect and understand our bias, and respect and honor the cultures of the students in our classrooms. And by doing so we can push students' learning beyond the page as we create a world of possibilities for them.

And what about the practice of daily read alouds in general? I am sure it will come as little surprise to a rebel like you, but there is an overwhelming number of academic benefits that result from reading aloud with your students. In fact, Neuman et al.'s (2000) work on reading and literacy shows us that "the single most important activity for building . . . understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children" (p. 1). Here are just a few of the benefits that result from daily read alouds:

- **Comprehension skills:** Some students may struggle with reading independently; read alouds give them a decoding break and allow them to focus on the sequence, main idea, and other story elements as they listen to an engaging story (Gold & Gibson, 2001).
- **Vocabulary knowledge:** Research shows when young children have various and consistent access and experiences around reading and books, they build a larger vocabulary than students who do not (Kindle, 2009; Newton et al., 2008). And teachers can use read-aloud time to directly teach new words. (Just be careful not to overdo it—we want children to enjoy the story after all.)
- **Language development, especially in our youngest learners:** An insightful article titled "Reading Aloud to Children: The Evidence," by Duursma et al. (2008) states: "One of the most powerful pieces of shared reading is what happens in the pauses between pages and after the book is closed. The use of 'decontextualised' or non-immediate talk and active engagement has proven to be particularly beneficial for children's language enhancement. Non-immediate talk is talk that goes beyond the information in the text or the illustrations, for example, to make connections to the child's past experiences or to the real world (eg, 'you like ice cream'), or to offer explanations (eg, 'he cried because he was sad')" (p. 556).

- **Accessibility of new, complex concepts and higher level language:** Children can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It exposes less able readers to the same rich and engaging books that fluent readers read on their own and entices them to become better readers.

And beyond academics, read alouds can help children develop socially, emotionally, and creatively. Read alouds (and the conversations that come with them) help students develop empathy, self-awareness, and interpersonal skills.

I'm sure you didn't need much convincing, but you get the picture, right? Read alouds are not only empowering, they are necessary.

### Here are some online resources that offer suggestions for effective read alouds:

- "The Power of Reading Aloud to Your Students," International Literacy Association: <https://bit.ly/3BmgKY4>
- "Why Every Class Needs Read Alouds," by Laura Varlas: <https://bit.ly/31c9KAA>
- "What Is Interactive Read-Aloud?" Fountas & Pinnell Literacy blog: <https://bit.ly/3EFku9d>