



Read Aloud Program

Impact Report

ALL PARTNERS

2022 - 2023

READ ALOUD PROGRAM IMPACT REPORT 2022 - 2023

Why Reading Aloud Matters

The ability to read is a gateway skill to positive life outcomes, and the development of that skill begins early and continues throughout a student's scholastic career. It is widely accepted that children who are read to regularly have larger vocabularies, higher levels of phonemic awareness, and are better at decoding words.

Engagement with reading is fostered when children are encouraged to make connections between the stories and characters and their own experiences. As Dr. Enid Acosta-Tello shares in the *Research in Higher Education Journal* (November 2019), "the effectiveness of reading aloud can be increased if we create situations in which children are engaged in and can participate in the read-aloud experience."

At Words Alive, we believe that empowering experiences turn students into agents of change and advocates for their own education, and we strive to cultivate spaces of high reading engagement for children, teens, and families. We know that when people read together, whole communities thrive! Through our Read Aloud Program, we bring reading alive by inviting caring adults to be reading role models who share stories with the same children, week after week, for an average of 30 weeks per school year, inspiring those children to be curious, adventurous, and imaginative young dreamers by exploring diverse and relevant books together.

In this research-based program, trained Words Alive volunteers team up with groups of elementary-age children for high-caliber read-alouds that bring books alive. This program is tailored to meet children where they are - in classrooms, virtually, or at after-school sites. Regular program sessions, aligned with Common Core standards, provide 15 hours of English Language Arts enrichment over the academic year and include engaging read-alouds, connecting art and reading, relationship building, and new books for children to keep.

PARTNERS

- BIPOC Support Foundation
- Boys & Girls Club of San Marcos
- Boys & Girls Club of Vista
- Burbank Elementary
- Carver Elementary
- Central Elementary
- Edison Elementary
- Emerson Elementary
- Felicita Elementary
- Freese Elementary
- Hamilton Elementary
- Harriet Tubman Village Charter
- Ibarra Elementary
- Normal Heights Elementary
- Perkins Elementary
- Porter Elementary
- Rolando Park Elementary
- San Diego Unified School District
- SDUSD Virtual Academy
- United Way of San Diego County
- Walker Elementary
- Washington Elementary
- Webster Elementary

The Words Alive Way

READ ALOUD PROGRAM

SCHOOL YEAR 2022 - 2023

Bring People Together

2,300 students in 98 classrooms, from Universal Transitional Kindergarten (UTK) through 3rd grade, participated in the Read Aloud Program.



Create Access

Participants took home over 7,000 books, each paired with a learning kit to grow their personal libraries and enrich their reading experience.

Build Habits

Children and volunteers shared an average of 30 engaging read aloud sessions together, totaling 1,400 hours of stories.



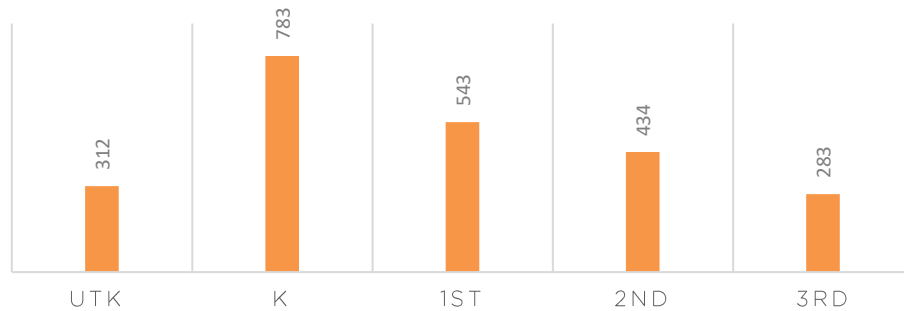
Practice What Works

48 volunteers were trained to use evidence-based read aloud strategies that make connections to our world and honor children's innate sense of wonder.

Who We Served

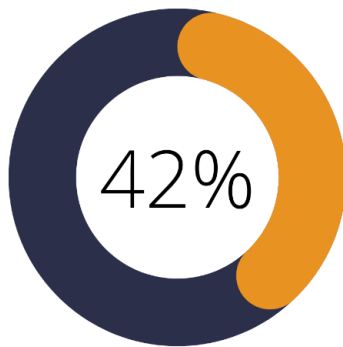
During the 2022-2023 academic year, Words Alive partnered with like-minded leadership at 23 Title I elementary schools, out-of-school time providers, and community-based organizations to deliver our Read Aloud Program, serving 2,355 students in preschool through third grade.

SUM OF READ ALOUD PARTICIPANTS FOR SCHOOL YEAR 22-23 BY GRADE

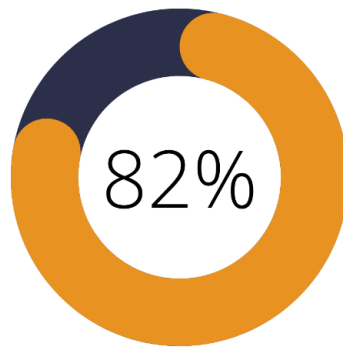


Most of the young people we serve through the Read Aloud program during the regular school year reside in communities impacted by the effects of institutional racism and income inequality, as well as the justice, housing, and foster care systems.

Over a third are English Language Learners or speak a language other than English with their families, and around 8 in 10 students qualify for the federal government's free or reduced-price meals program.

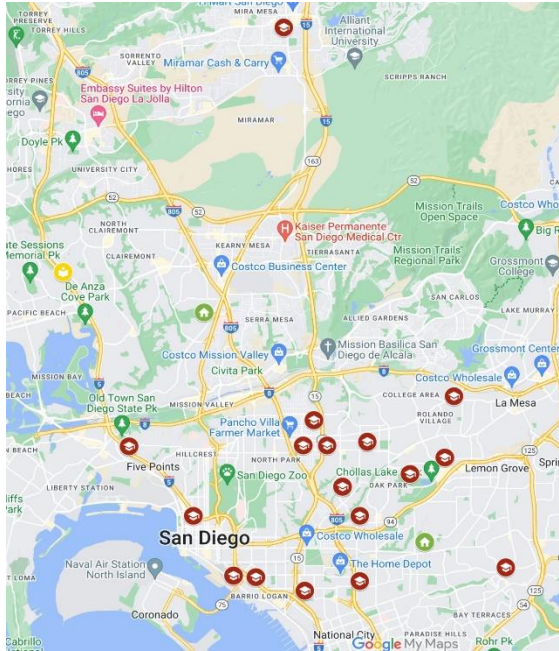


of students in Read Aloud during the school year are English Language Learners or speak a language other than English at home



of students in Read Aloud receive Free or Reduced Lunch during the school year

Below is a Google Map of the schools we serve through our partnership with San Diego Unified School District. To explore the full map, visit <https://bit.ly/ReadAloudSites> or use the QR code.



Supplemental Programming: Summer Camps Enrichment

Over the summer, Words Alive partners with community organizations to connect young learners with experiences to read, think, and create while school was out of session. To support reader development, Words Alive distributed over 250 books and 1,000 learning kits to 70 children, in grades 1-3, in day camps with BIPOC Support Foundation at Valencia Park Elementary School (left) and City Heights Library with United Way of San Diego County (right), where local author Claude Jones took questions from young readers and engaged them in making more connection between what they read and their own lives.



Impact Framework

Reading is a non-negotiable skill set for personal agency and self-sufficiency. It is also through knowing the stories of others that we deepen our humanity and connection to one another. Words Alive's work connects people to the power of reading through the simple, essential, and effective act of reading together.

Using research-based program models and tools identified or developed by our third-party evaluative partners at the University of San Diego and Dialogue in Action, our Read Aloud Program focuses on three key areas of impact. That students:

Develop an enduring commitment to reading.

Objective: Students internalize the value of reading as they explore new ideas and topics through in-depth, shared reading experiences and discussion with their peers and caring adults.

Become life-long learners.

Objective: Students experience positive attitudinal shifts about learning and recognize their own ability to develop a sense of curiosity and active imagination, seek out information to solve problems, sharpen critical thinking skills, and make circular connections between texts, self, and their world.

Become advocates for themselves and their future.

Objective: Students build their vocabulary and abilities of self-expression, becoming empowered to invest in their futures by increasing self-confidence and clarity as readers, writers, and speakers.

Across our programming, Words Alive supports student achievement, and inspires a motivation to read, through five learning anchors:

1. **Read:** We read fresh and relevant texts that reflect the communities we serve.
2. **Talk:** We talk about what we read to build vocabulary and sharpen self-expression skills.
3. **Write:** We write about the stories we read to think through and present our ideas. Our youngest learners draw until we are ready to write.
4. **Connect:** We place the stories we read within the context of our lives, our community, and our world.
5. **Do:** We do something with what we read to play with ideas and bring it all together.

Methods and Process Conditions

During the 2022-2023 program year, our Read Aloud Program supported the *strategic goals of our partners* to develop programs, competencies, and linkages that support and promote student empowerment and self-sufficiency, as well as *commonly adopted school readiness goals* including social and emotional readiness, language awareness, and approaching to learning such as persistence, engagement, curiosity, and initiative.

Read Aloud is designed to meet the *process conditions* needed to build the strong engagement that leads to positive learning routines and improved achievement. Each of our program sessions are:

- *Linked to Learning:* Content and activities are directly connected to age-appropriate developmental milestones and what students are expected to do academically.
- *Relational:* Activities help participants build relationships, get to know one another, and build trust.
- *Developmental:* Participants are learning new skills, and after participating, better understand how those skills support reading achievement.
- *Collaborative:* Participants are working together to learn new skills as a group, with caring adults.
- *Interactive:* Participants practice new skills and have opportunities for corrective feedback.

Building Literacy Rich Environments

Gifting books to learners to keep is an important way that the Read Aloud Program helps build personal libraries for the children served, which helps them connect books to their lives while nurturing their personal identity and confidence as young readers.

Pairing books with an activity helps young readers make connections between the stories, themselves, and their worlds, which can enhance feelings of belonging and generate enthusiasm for the practice of reading. To this end, the Read Aloud Program helps students explore themes and characters through both books and learning kits. Learning kits contain supplemental materials for families and children and are designed to empower young readers to focus their learning, form new ideas, and develop their creativity.

That is why the Read Aloud Program distributed *over 7,000 books and 8,000 learning kits* between Fall 2022 and Summer 2023. During summer camps, titles were paired daily with corresponding learning kits, while book giveaways occurred weekly, which gave us a unique opportunity to distribute more learning kits than books and supported our partners in their programmatic goal of educational and creative enrichment for public school children during the summer months when regular instruction is not an option. This differs from the typical school year distribution schedule of three titles paired with a kit for each child seasonally in Fall, Winter, and Spring.

Reading Role Models

In 2022 – 2023, 47 Read Aloud Program classroom volunteers took on an active role in nurturing a community of young readers. These caring adults share stories that inspire children to be curious, adventurous, and imaginative readers and dreamers, and, in so doing, function as reading role models for young children every week, for an average of 30 weeks per year.

Words Alive volunteers participate in rigorous training and clearance processes, which include background checks as well as reading engagement strategies, and inclusive language training. They are dedicated individuals who are committed to making reading matter for kids. Classroom Volunteers include but are not limited to both working professionals and retirees, including former school staff members, administrators, and teachers.

Each weekly classroom reading is around 30 minutes, or the length of one book, and is supported by a classroom reading guide unique to each title that is backed by Common-Core curriculum standards. Reading role models receive these guides at the beginning of the school year to support their preparation and planning for weekly sessions.

Volunteers not only share stories but also facilitate three book giveaways annually on behalf of Words Alive, helping distribute over 7,000 books and corresponding learning kits, collectively, each year, to **over 2,300 children across 98 public school classrooms** from San Diego to Escondido.

What Teachers Said – Survey Summary



98% of teachers reported their students enjoyed the books read aloud each week, and shared that participation in the Read Aloud Program impacted their students' ability to demonstrate understanding of a story, a skill which is tied to critical thinking and reading comprehension.

Overall, responses from teachers indicated the Read Aloud Program had a positive effect in three key areas that promote literacy in young readers.

1) Foundational reading engagement

When content and activities are directly connected to age-appropriate developmental milestones and academic expectations, young readers can thrive. Teachers indicated that the program encouraged children to practice their communication and comprehension skills while building confidence as readers.

I love your lesson plan. I can't wait to read it and be impressed with your knowledge of literacy and our students.

The extensions from discussing the story in a whole group help build language amongst the shy students.

They act out the stories and notice print all around them and have embraced the love of reading.

It has taught them how much fun reading can be. As well as different ways to make reading fun, no matter what kind of book it was.

Words Alive has helped them grow their love of reading and realize they can engage in any book, even if it is not at their level. All they want to do is read. Independent reading, read aloud and shared reading is their favorite part of the day.

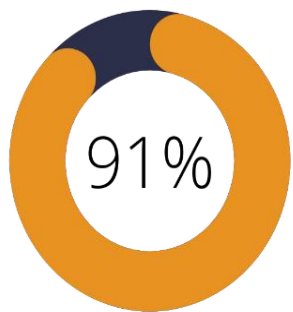
2) Extended learning opportunities.

Learning outside of school time has proven benefits to students' social-emotional skill development, overall family engagement, and individual confidence building. Words Alive provided these opportunities to over 2,300 children, distributing 7,000 unique books, each paired with a learning kit to take with them from the classroom.

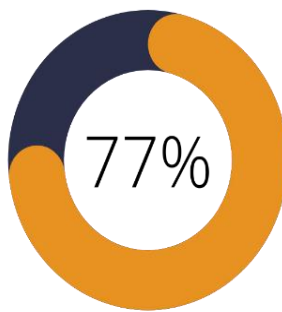
I love the program. Students benefit from read-aloud books in many ways. Students are being motivated and encouraged by the stories. They also build language.

The students liked the questions being asked and talking about the pictures.

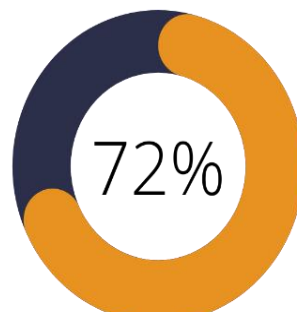
My students love reading and would be excited when books were introduced.



91% of teachers indicated that their students shared their book giveaway with their families



77% of teachers reported that Read Aloud sparked their students' imagination and curiosity through the crafts created with each book giveaway.



72% said that their students had asked to re-read the books

Learning kits were distributed in both Spanish and in English and contained suggestions for further engagement with each title that could be completed outside of school, with other reading role models from students' care communities.

91% of teachers reported that students shared their book giveaways with their families.

- *Enthusiasm for learning* generates improved outcomes around school participation and attendance.

77% indicated that book giveaways had sparked their students' imagination and curiosity through learning kit crafts.

- *Activation of children's imagination and curiosity* equals more fun and produces positive outcomes around reading and learning.

72% said that their students had asked to re-read the books in class.

- When young readers discover and make *connections to the stories being read with them*, they increase their sense of personal identity as readers and enhance their sense of belonging in the classroom.



When asked about the impact of gifting books paired with learning kits for children to keep, teachers' responses were 100% positive, highlighting the influence on student interest, connections to classroom content, and engagement with families outside of class.

Teachers said:

The book giveaway is always popular.

They always enjoy when another adult reads to them.

Several students reread the book at home to their parents!

3) Developing a positive culture of reading.

Access to high-quality enriching experiences enhances learning outcomes for young learners and can help build enthusiasm for learning and development within their families.

Their reader was so great about prepping the kids for the story, asking questions throughout, asking students to share any personal connections, and helping students identify the lesson from the story. The students knew week to week that she would do this with a different book, so it really helped them stay focused and be thoughtful.

They see reading as a fun activity. The students also really look forward to their reader coming to read to them.

When students get a new book, they want to have a safe place for it. A lot of kids are in unstable households and are moving around a lot so the kids keep their books in their backpacks all year long.

They keep their prized items in their backpacks, so it won't get left behind or lost when going to their aunt's house, or Grandma's house across the border, and when I check their backpacks at the end of the year, I find all their Read Aloud books in there.

Teachers reported that having a regular reading role model made the experience special. When asked how having a dedicated Words Alive reading role model helped cultivate their students' relationship with reading, teachers' responses illustrated the value of volunteers and the impact of Read Aloud in building a positive culture of reading among learners.

I really do appreciate the volunteers that take their time to come to our class to read. It's nice that our students get to have another adult read to them. This really supports the goal of having students get excited about reading.



LACK OF DIVERSITY

Diverse characters are scarce in kid's books.
In a survey of book titles published in 2022:

14.2% were about the Black Community

10.7% were about the Asian Community

6.9% were about the Latine Community

1.7% were about the Indigenous Community

0.4% were about the Pacific Islander Community

0.7% were about the Arab Community

FIRST BOOK 

Source: Cooperative Children's Book Center, 2023.

Teachers reported that the program exposed their students to a diverse range of stories, characters, and topics. This is important because while 53% of school-age children are children of color, multicultural content can be hard to come by due to both lack of access to books and the systemic underrepresentation of communities of color in the publishing industry. [1]

When young readers can see themselves reflected in the stories we read, inclusion and belonging are cultivated.

Words Alive remains dedicated to providing fresh, relevant texts to the people whom we serve through our programs. This year in Read Aloud, we read many dynamic titles featuring characters from diverse backgrounds with life experiences relevant to their own, which had a direct impact on the world of the young readers in the program, demonstrated in the following story, shared by a volunteer reading role model.

My classroom of students started a big discussion after the book that we read on disabilities.

We have a young TK student in a wheelchair who has brittle bone disease, and the students related that book to her, which then prompted them to approach her and say hello and be friendly with her.

Reading that book really motivated them to extend a friendly gesture to her and become friends with her after having understood her situation a bit more. They were always aware of her and seeing her on campus, but now they all reach out and look for her to go over and say hello! It is a heartwarming thing to see.

[1] First Book Research and Insight. (2023). The Impact of a Diverse Classroom Library.

What Volunteers Said

Volunteer mobilization is at the core of Words Alive's mission. Raising a community of readers is highly collaborative work, and the reading role models understand this on a fundamental level. They read weekly to nearly 100 classrooms across San Diego, practicing reading engagement strategies for early literacy success.

By showing up, week after week, volunteers demonstrate their consistency and dedication to bringing Words Alive to their young readers. Volunteers continue to embody the mission of Words Alive by positively impacting participants' thoughts, behavior, and attitudes around reading.

Influencing thoughts

This month I focused my read aloud on Black History Month. My third grader students had prior information and understanding coming from Martin Luther King's Day.

I was able to add to their knowledge of other African Americans that are not as well-known but deserve to be. Students enjoyed Ron's Big Mission, Hidden Figures, The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind and Of Thee I Sing.

Each week students participated in lively discussions sharing their thoughts on how these pioneers reached their dreams in spite of the many obstacles in front of them. Well done students!

Influencing behaviors

After reading The Noisy Paintbox to my 2nd grade class, the teacher, Mrs. Zammit had the class make Kandinsky style valentines. I submitted some of the results to the office. (below)



Influencing attitudes

Each week at the end of my storytelling I ask the students a question that challenges their deep thinking. It typically relates to the story obviously.

The answers that the children give are eye-opening, and typically blow me away. Especially the week we read "I am Enough," I asked them what particular gift they could bring to the world that was special only to them. Each one of them opened their eyes widely and, with great pride, told me what was unique to them.

I love my second-grade class, and Miss Gomez is an absolutely phenomenal teacher. I wouldn't give it up for the world, no matter how busy life gets.

REFLECTIONS

In the beginning, they didn't want to read; now, at the beginning of the day, they pick up a book and start reading. This behavior happened over time during the year.

-Classroom Teacher

At Words Alive, we continue to observe that supporting student engagement in reading development, through access to enriching stories and experiences, creates positive impact in the lives of participants. Young learners continue to demonstrate changes in their habits, attitudes, and behaviors around reading, proving the program's effectiveness in cultivating the necessary conditions under which a culture of reading can thrive.

As the Read Aloud Program continues to expand, we are constantly seeking areas and opportunities to improve the program to deepen our impact. To better do that as we look to the future, we plan to:

- 1. Ask the Kids.** A small sample group of young readers will be asked to complete a pre- and post-program survey designed to gauge changes in their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors around reading. This survey was piloted during Summer camp with BIPOC Support Foundation and has since been revised to better analyze behavior and attitudinal change.
- 2. Introduce More Authors & Illustrators to Children.** By developing consistent and more frequent opportunities for learners to meet authors and illustrators throughout the school year, Words Alive can inspire future generations of book lovers and creators. An impactful priority would be more visits from authors of the titles that readers are gifted copies of to keep.

3. **Grow the Program.** By partnering strategically with schools and organizations to help produce a culture of reading for the children we collectively serve, while continuing to leverage the connective power of technology and identify partners, and stakeholders, who already work within those schools. Using this approach, we will deepen our roots where they are while thoughtfully expanding our network of partners to include additional out-of-school-time providers, multilingual volunteers, authors, publications, and Universal Transitional Kindergarten classrooms.

SPECIAL THANKS

Words Alive and participating families share deep gratitude to the philanthropic leaders who invest in our movement to make reading matter and who ensure that each child participates in the Read Aloud program at no cost to schools or families.

Literacy Legends (\$100,000+)

- Bentivoglio Family Fund
- Karen & Jeff Silberman

Transformational Leaders (\$50,000-\$99,999)

- Century Club of San Diego
- Dr. Seuss Foundation
- San Diego Foundation
- William Gumpert Foundation

Impact Investors (\$25,000 - \$49,999)

- Carleton Management Inc.
- The Conrad Prebys Foundation
- Walter J. & Betty C. Zable Foundation

Learning Advocates (\$10,000 - \$24,999)

- Christensen Family Foundation
- The Fischer Family Fund *
- The LJ Galinson Advised Fund*
- Hologic
- Nordson Corporation Foundation
- PNC Foundation
- Karen & Jeffrey Silberman Family Fund*
- Walter J. & Betty C. Zable Foundation

Reading Patrons (\$5,000 - \$9,999)

- Anonymous
- The Baratz Family
- S. Bernstein Fund*
- Boys and Girls Foundation
- Cushman Foundation
- Toby Eisenberg
- Roberta & Mark Emerson
- Marjory Winkelman Epstein
- Samuel H. French & Katherine Weaver French Fund
- Kimberly & Jeffrey Goldman
- Norm Hapke
- Hunter Industries
- Gail & Don Kohn
- Leslye & Scott Lyons and family
- PGA Tour Wives Association, Inc.
- Lorne Polger & Lori Weiner
- Rice Family Foundation
- The Schoenith Foundation
- David & Tina Thomas Family Charitable Fund **

* Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego

** Fund of the San Diego Foundation