



Every Child a Talker

Sharing books with children

Most children love sharing books with adults. It can be one of the most effective and enjoyable ways of learning to talk. But there are quite a few children who don't enjoy it at all, whether it is in a large group, or on their own with an adult. There are two possible main reasons: *the type of book they are given* and *what the adults do*.

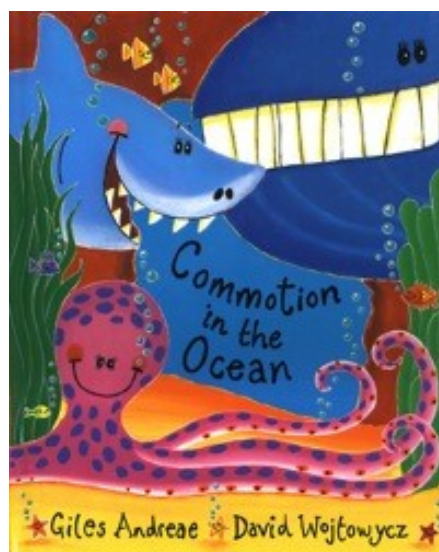
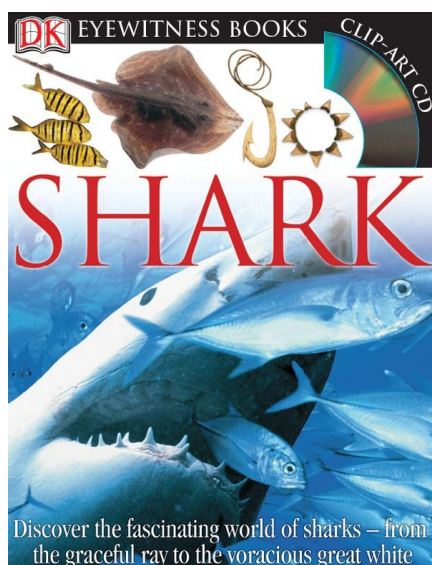
Fiction v information (expository) books

We assume that all children will be drawn into sharing *storybooks*. However, following a story requires an understanding of the vocabulary of the book, an ability to follow the narrative- the plot. Children also need to *remember* the narrative, as they will almost certainly be asked questions at the end. This type of interaction does not appeal to all children. Some children respond better to books that have lots of illustrations, photos and diagrams: information or *expository* books, such as the Dorling Kindersley Eyewitness guides. These books do not have a narrative, and children can look at any page in any sequence, and talk about *facts*.

Adult behaviour

A typical 'story sharing' session, is not actually sharing at all! The adult usually holds the book and the child is largely passive: listening to the adult, and answering questions. The child may have chosen the book, but often the adult chooses. This is, in fact, reading practice, and the child knows it.

If the adult allows the child to choose the book to share, and the child is encouraged to hold the book, the child becomes active, and the adult passive. The child is then free to talk about whatever he likes.



Dr Emma Huxter explored in her PhD thesis the impact of sharing expository books with children in reception classes. She spent twelve 15-minute sessions with individual children from two groups: those sharing fiction and those sharing expository books. The children sharing the expository books were encouraged to talk about their favourite pages. The children who shared expository books with Emma were found to have an increased vocabulary by the end of the project, compared with those in the fiction group. Boys were more attracted than girls to the expository books.

Some reflections on this research

- Fiction tends to be written in the past tense, while expository books are in the present.
- Expository books have specialist vocabulary and 'content' words.
- Expository books do not have fantasy, and do not have a narrative.
- Expository books often have very powerful images that children can get very excited about and want to talk about, bringing their own knowledge to the conversation.
- There may be less 'pressure' on children when sharing expository books, as they don't need to be able to read.
- Does the expository book encourage *shared sustained thinking*? (Shared sustained thinking is the basis of conversation development in children.)
- Can children who do not enjoy books be drawn into books through sharing expository books?
- Does a book that doesn't need to be read stimulate talk and vocabulary development more than a fiction book?
- Can children with language learning needs benefit from sharing expository books more than/as well as fiction?

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