

## “I CAN’T READ.”

### BUILDING A STRONG IDENTITY AS A READER

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This is a common reply from young children when I ask them to read me a book. I’m sure you’ve heard it many times too. When this happens, we usually offer to read the book to them, in order to engage in a valuable and enjoyable literacy experience. However, I want to suggest there’s a more powerful response we can make.

“Would you read a book to me, Oliver?” I asked the enthusiastic four year old who had been playing with me in the block area of his Kindy (preschool).

“But I can’t read,” was his (perhaps) predictable reply.

“Oh, yes you can! Let me show you how other four year olds read. I’m sure you’ll be able to do it too.”

Oliver gave me a “*are-you-kidding-me?*” kind of look.

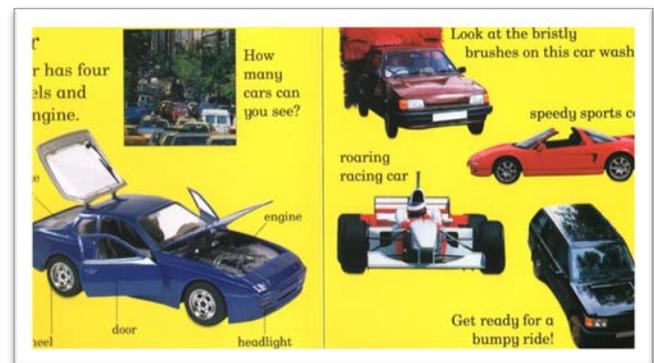
We looked through the book shelves together and Oliver chose a book. I asked him if he knew this book and discovered it was unfamiliar. I enquired why he chose that book to read - it was because it had a motorbike on the cover.

“Let me show you, Oliver,” I began my demonstration. “A lot of four year old readers, like you, read the pictures. So they look at the pictures on each page say something about them. Most four year olds aren’t reading all the words yet and that’s okay because they’re four. They haven’t been at school very long to learn to read the words yet. Watch me, I’ll show you how easy it is.”

I showed Oliver what I meant by demonstrating with the first page. I pointed to each picture and said one thing about each one. Actually, that’s a lie. I didn’t get any further than the second picture before Oliver started reading them himself! I let my voice trail off and listened intently as he read the entire book to me by reading the pictures.

At the end of the book, Oliver beamed with pride. I wish I had a photograph of his face to show you!

“See! You can read the pictures, Oliver. That’s what four year old readers do. And now you can do that with any book you choose. You can read like that to your friends.



To your family. You can even read like that to your dog!”

More beaming.

And what did Oliver do as soon as our interaction was over? He chose another book to read just for the pure pleasure of being a reader. And then another...all by himself.

This brief interaction set Oliver up to view himself as a reader. This means he’ll most likely choose to engage in reading again of his own accord - after all, that’s what readers do. They don’t just talk about looking at books - they READ them. Again and again and again. Of course, this regular reading will benefit Oliver’s language and literacy growth in many ways. All from a place of building his identity as a reader first.

Please don’t mis-understand: I think it is essential to read TO children. Every day. As much as possible. But if we only read TO children and never empower them to be the holder of the book, the turner of the pages, the reader of the text, then we risk the child thinking that only adults do the reading and they can’t.

Reading the pictures IS reading. Oliver used so many reading strategies as he read the pictures of the various picture books from his Kindy shelves. He inferred, predicted, made connections and asked questions as he constructed meaning from the text. He even monitored his comprehension by turning back a page to check his understanding at one stage. The only thing he is not yet doing is decoding the words. But he most certainly IS reading - making meaning from text.