

# CREA

## CREATIVE READING EUROPEAN ACTIONS





# Co-funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union. The views and opinions expressed are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or of the Erasmus+ Youth and Sport France Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible.

This manual was developed as part of the programme Erasmus+ Small-Scale Partnerships (KA210)  
PROJECT: 2024-1-FR02-KA210-YOU-000245573



[www.laforetenpapier.com](http://www.laforetenpapier.com)



[www.damatra.com](http://www.damatra.com)

Graphic work by Nathalie Eyraud @nathalie\_illustrations  
Thanks to Olivier Chapus for his valuable contribution to the read-aloud guides.

# CREA – CREATIVE READING EUROPEAN ACTIONS

## FOR A CREATIVE READING THAT FOSTERS CONNECTIONS, IDEAS, EMOTIONS, AND WONDER.

Access to cultural and artistic practices is essential for children's development and well-being. Among these practices, access to books and reading holds a particularly important place. Books are not only academic tools but also gateways to art, culture, imagination, and cultural diversity. They facilitate intergenerational dialogue, stimulate critical thinking, and help form informed and engaged citizens. The disparities in access to books and the growing gap in reading performance between children from advantaged and disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are a particular concern.

To address these disparities, the association La Forêt en Papier (in France) and Damatrà Onlus (in Italy) have, over the past twenty years, implemented multiple intervention methods and tools in their territories to support access to books and promote reading skills among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. More specifically, these methods aim to develop skills that precede formal reading acquisition.

The CREA project builds on the potential of these methods and tools to implement them on a larger scale, independently of local specificities. The priorities of the methodological approach are as follows:

**Create motivation for reading through read-aloud sessions for children of all ages,** providing a unique moment of exchange and enjoyment between the adult, the book, and the child.

**Support learning through a creative approach to books via artistic workshops,** allowing children to express themselves personally and develop their perspective on both books and the world.

**Anchor reading practices within the family through parent-child workshops.**

**Establish a pedagogy of listening to adapt to children's needs,** notably through the use of techniques for collecting children's voices and opinions.

Our CREA project focused on:

- Moments of practice exchange between partners.
- The organization of round tables in each country with educational communities.
- Co-facilitating artistic and reading workshops for children and families in each country.

The motivation for this project stems from an observation shared by both organizations. The partners identified common obstacles to access to books and the development of reading skills in each country, including:

- Limited access to books
- Lack of regular read-aloud sessions
- A predominantly academic view of reading, mainly associated with the school context
- Frequent absence of reading practices within families, due to various factors
- A disconnect between reading and artistic practices that encourage active, expressive, and creative engagement

The findings of the two organizations align with those of the European Community: according to a study on educational outcomes ("A comparative analysis of PIRLS results in the EU," European Commission, 2023), reading skills declined between 2016 and 2021, and socio-economic status is a significant predictor of these skills.

The objectives of our organizations and this project are consistent with the recommendations from this study, by:

- Establishing a daily reading time for children
- Promoting a family environment that supports this practice
- Encouraging interest in reading
- Placing the child's needs at the center of education
- Allowing the implementation of flexible and personalized approaches

We structured our work around:

- Defining a common methodology for read-aloud sessions and book-centered artistic workshops
- Providing examples of reproducible reading sessions and artistic workshops
- Sharing techniques for gathering children's feedback
- Formulating key recommendations for education professionals

Here, we offer a presentation of our work, organized into four chapters: the first focuses on reading, the second on workshops, the third on methods for collecting children's voices, and the fourth introduces our organizations.

Each chapter is complemented by practical sheets, designed not as models to follow strictly, but as tools to inspire action and encourage ongoing reflection on the most appropriate and effective ways to intervene, depending on context and audience.

Our two associations have collaborated for many years around children's picture books. Over time, we have learned to recognize the richness and expressive power of images.

This is why we chose to share our approach through beautiful photographs, taken in both countries during our exchanges by two highly sensitive photographers: Alice Durigatto and Yohanne Lamoulère.

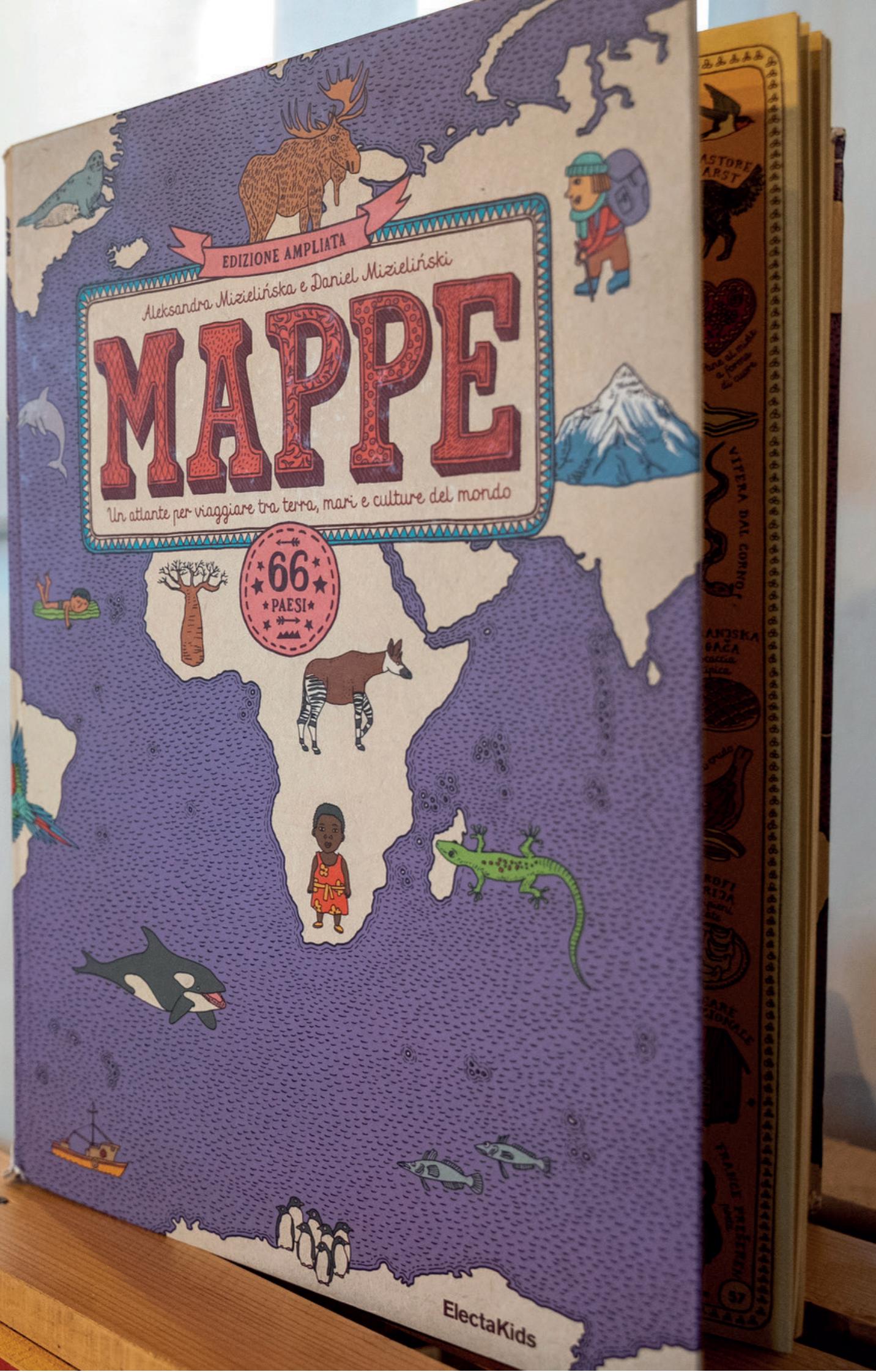
We invite you to take your time exploring these images, placed at the end of each chapter, and to read the short texts that accompany them.

We have called these sections the Illustrated Promptarium<sup>1</sup>.

*Here, it's not just about what we do, but especially about how we do it.  
And—between us—it's precisely this detail that makes all the difference.*

<sup>1</sup> A promptarium is a collection of "prompts" or cues designed to stimulate creativity, reflection, or action.





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## 1) Reading Aloud Picture Books

- Introduction
- Sheet: "Preparing a Read-Aloud Session"
- Sheet: "Reading a Picture Book Aloud"
- Illustrated Promptarium – Read-Aloud

## 2) Workshops around books

- Introduction
- Sheet: "Night Creatures Workshop"
- Sheet: "Woodland Creatures Workshop"
- Illustrated Promptarium – Night Creatures
- Illustrated Promptarium – Woodland Creatures

## 3) Listening to Children

## 4) The Two Organizations

- La Forêt en Papier
- Damatrà\*



READING ALOUD  
PICTURE BOOKS

# READING ALOUD PICTURE BOOKS

Numerous scientific studies<sup>1</sup> conducted in different countries highlight the importance of reading aloud for children and adolescents. According to experts, when practiced regularly and in a spirit of enjoyment, this activity promotes the development of cognitive, emotional, and social skills. It also stimulates critical thinking and the intellectual autonomy of listeners.

Reading aloud to children and young people, regardless of their age, is a powerful practice. Through the magic of books, read-aloud sessions create a shared narrative universe, structuring common virtual spaces and collective moments rhythmically guided by the story.

Our two organizations have been working on this practice for several years. We are convinced that the pleasure experienced by the reader and shared with the audience is the most powerful driver of this activity, capable of creating connections, transforming habits, and opening up new horizons.

However, this seemingly simple practice actually requires significant preparation and an active awareness of its purpose, its stakes, and the relationship we maintain with both children and books.

Here are some fundamental elements that good preparation should focus on:

## Understanding the dynamics of the picture book

In the practices we propose, the picture book is the guest of honor. In a picture book, the story is built through the interaction between text, image, and the physical format, requiring constant interplay between these elements. During read-aloud sessions, it is therefore essential that children can see the illustrations to fully understand the story. When reading to a single child, this is not an issue. However, reading to a group is more complex. The book must be handled in a particular way—held open toward the group while reading the text upside down or sideways.

## Being aware of the specificity of each picture book

Each picture book is a universe in itself that requires special attention in terms of handling, understanding the relationship between text, image, and format, and respecting the natural rhythms of reading. Each book therefore requires time for study and assimilation. Given the variety of

formats and the richness of literary production, it is essential to take this time in advance. It also allows for selecting books that are most suitable for the audience, while still offering stimulating challenges. The choice of book should also consider children's attention span as well as their need for variety and rhythm. And of course, one must not forget a crucial element: the reader's pleasure in reading the text aloud.

## Creating a dedicated space and time for reading aloud

Introducing reading as a special moment in the daily routine is essential to facilitate access to this narrative universe. This involves thinking about the organization of the space, the welcoming of the children, and their seating so that they can comfortably see the book. Establishing small rituals that mark the transition to this privileged moment seems important.

## Opening exchanges with children

Welcoming moments of discussion and dialogue with children is fundamental. After capturing their attention, it is up to us, the adults, to listen to them. After reading, how can we create an atmosphere conducive to mutual and respectful exchanges?

## Stimulating the desire to read after the read-aloud session

Consider ways in which, after the read-aloud session, children can be given personal time to explore books independently.

## Allowing for an extension

Design and structure creative workshops linked to the reading as a moment to expand the book's universe: to create, question, transform, and explore its ideas, themes, and emotions through multiple languages (drawing, sculpture, etc.).

Through the sheets "Preparing a Read-Aloud Session" and "Reading a Picture Book Aloud", we aimed to offer guidance and highlight aspects that we consider essential in this practice. Aware that there are multiple ways to read aloud, our goal is not to suggest that one method is better than another, but rather to invite everyone to take the time to reflect on their own relationship to reading and their intentions.

*Our compass is to ensure that every child has access to the magic of storytelling.*

*Our way of achieving this is to put ourselves at the service of the book.*

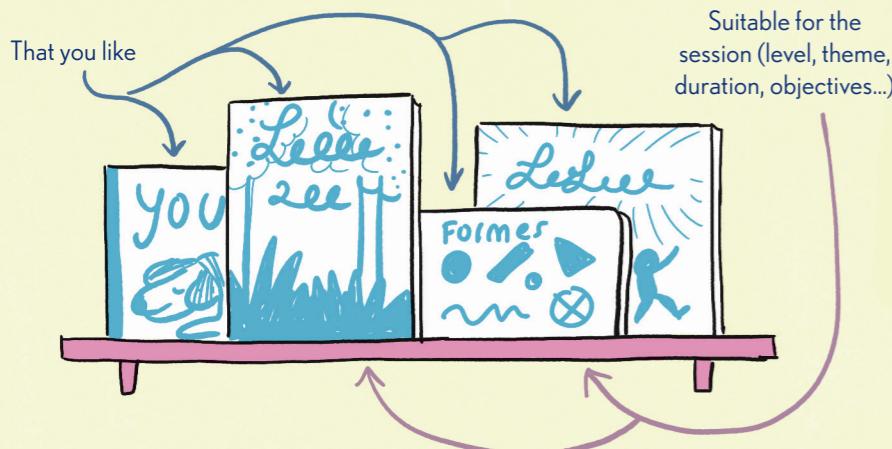
<sup>1</sup>Batini, Federico. La lettura ad alta voce condivisa. Shared Reading Aloud. Atti del Secondo Convegno Scientifico Internazionale (Perugia, 4-6 dicembre 2024). Perugia: Università degli Studi di Perugia, 2024.



# PREPARING A READ-ALOUD SESSION

## WELL IN ADVANCE

### CHOOSE A PICTURE BOOK



### IDENTIFY THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BOOK

Handling (special format, pop-up, stubborn pages, illegible text?)



Reading the images (pointing out who is speaking or details, ambient sounds, bringing the image to life?)

Reading the text (difficult pronunciations, character voices, meaningful typography, play with sounds?)

Narrative structure (repetitions, climax, pauses, relationship between image and text, comprehension difficulties?)

### PRACTICE!



**TIPS** - Get help from a supportive colleague  
- Test with children

## ON THE DAY ITSELF

### CHOOSE YOUR OUTFIT

Comfortable (avoid tight clothing, loose sleeves...)



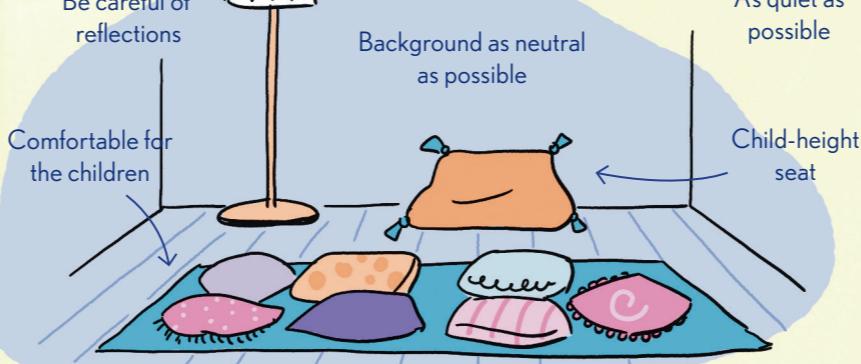
Neutral, so as to highlight the book

Tie your hair back

Avoid distracting jewelry

Be careful of reflections

Comfortable for the children



### PREPARE THE SPACE

Background as neutral as possible

As quiet as possible

Child-height seat

### PREPARE THE BOOK

Clearly visible?  
(on a shelf, on a stand...)

Decide where to place the book:

Hidden? (in a nice box, under a cloth, behind the seat...)



**TIPS** - Open stubborn pages fully  
- Use sticky tack for the pages you won't read

### TAKE SOME TIME FOR YOURSELF

Warm up



Refocus yourself



Review the beginning



Remember to turn off your phone!

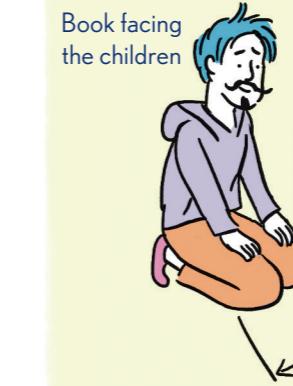
## DURING THE SESSION

### WELCOME THE CHILDREN

Introduce yourself and provide the context:  
what are we going to do? Until when?



### TAKE THE TIME TO POSITION THEM



### GET EVERYONE CALM



### CREATE A 'TIMELESS' MOMENT



Draw attention to the book by looking at it before picking it up

Be aware of your movements and gaze: slow, smooth gestures



Look at the pictures, not the children



### GET STARTED

Let the children react.  
Interact as little as possible



### ALLOW TIME FOR SHARING

Wait for the children's reactions

Ensure a space conducive to exchange

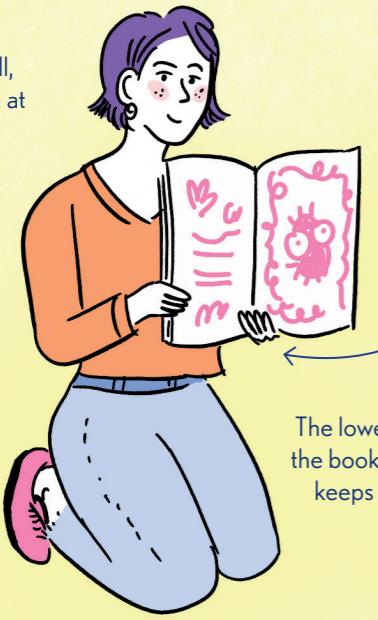


Do not force the interaction

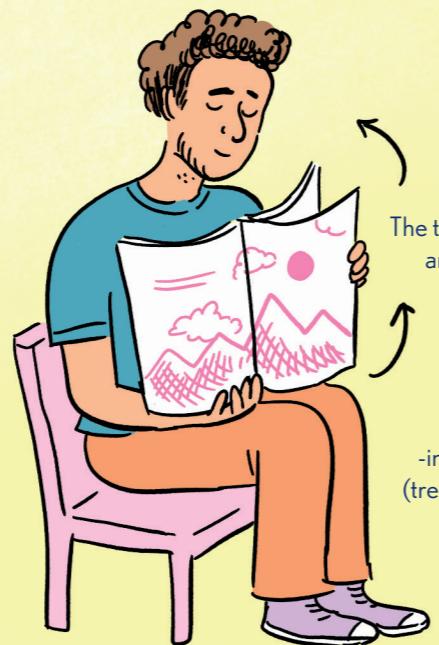
# READING A CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOK ALOUD

## HANDLING THE BOOK

Keep the book still,  
facing the children, at  
their eye level



The lower hand 'supports'  
the book in the middle and  
keeps the pages open



The top hand turns the pages  
and "reads" the image

How to turn the page:  
-in a neutral way?  
-in connection with the story  
(trembling, without hesitation...)

### ATTENTION

- Do not stand in front of the book
- Do not turn it toward yourself
- Do not let it tilt to the side or backward

### TIPS

- If needed, calmly readjust your hands so as not to draw attention
- Specific handling may sometimes be required (pop-ups, flaps...)

## STARTING AND FINISHING

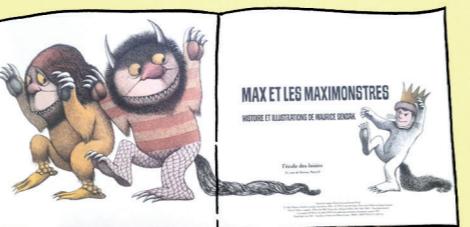
### PAY ATTENTION TO THE BEGINNING



Read the title and the authors' names.  
Does the cover invite a playful interaction?



Read the endpapers.  
Give them some time.



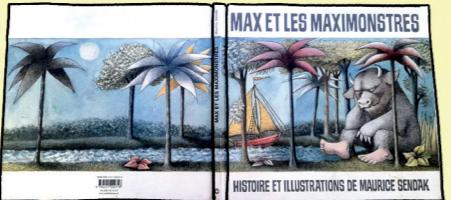
Reread the title with the intonation suggested by the illustration.

### PAY ATTENTION TO THE ENDING

Does the story finish? Last page? Endpapers? Cover? Couverture ?



Read the illustration (does it echo the opening endpapers?).



Is there any point in showing the unfolded cover?



Continue turning the book in the reading direction.

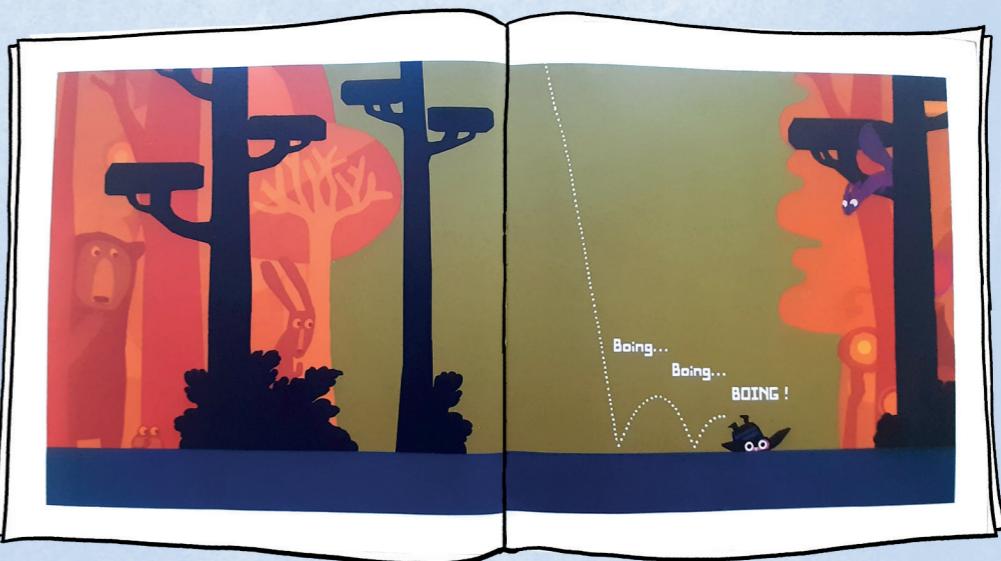
## READ THE ILLUSTRATIONS

### READ WITH YOUR HANDS TO:

-Set up the scene  
(point out the trees,  
the plants...)

-Point out a hidden detail  
(the various animals hidden  
behind the trees...)

-Accompany im-  
portant movements  
(mime the fall with  
your fingers...)



### READ WITH SOUNDS TO:

- Highlight the  
sounds related to  
the actions (the fall  
of the tree...)

- Amplify the  
characters' emo-  
tions (surprised  
onomatopoeia...)

- Set the atmosphere  
(noises of footsteps,  
wind, animals...)

### TIPS

- Take the time to rediscover the image each time: this is the time needed by someone seeing it for the first time.
- Should you read the image before the text? After? At the same time? Alternating?
- Some images may be confusing: trust the book.

## READ THE TEXT

Adjust your way of reading the text accordingly to:

-Typography and  
punctuation

-Repetitions and  
sound patterns

-Different voices  
for each character



-The meaning of the  
text and its nuances

- The relationships  
between the image  
and the text

### TIPS

- Take your time. Don't be afraid of pauses.
- Draw inspiration from the style of the book (realistic, cartoon, poetic, absurd...).

# ILLUSTRATED PROMPTARIUM- READ ALOUD



## IT ALL BEGINS WITH THE BOOK

This photo captures the immense pleasure we feel in exchanging ideas around books. They are a source of connection and dialogue, a kind of bridge between us. And this can be seen in the way we look at the book.

## PREPARING THE READING TIME

Reading is a moment suspended within the daily flow, a time set apart. It is beautiful to give it a beginning and an end, a sense of boundaries. This can take many forms. Here, we see a little warm-up that precedes the reading: arms raised toward the sky, stretched and swaying like the branches of a tree—or even better, those of a forest. In this way, we set our imagination in motion to prepare to dive in together in the world of books.



## THE POWER OF THE STORYTELLING WORLD

During this session, the same picture book was read in two languages (Italian and French). Reading a picture book is already, in itself, a multilingual experience, thanks to the interaction between text and image. But this photo also makes us aware of other forms of language: the body, expressions, and glances. All of this serves the extraordinary power of the book, which, once opened, captures our full attention and carries us straight into the heart of the story.



## READINGS IN TWO VOICES

Try, make mistakes, try again, make better mistakes. Reading the same story in two languages at the same time was a valuable experience. It was fascinating to observe how the reading changed from one language to the other, then to transform them together, intertwine them, and finally find the right way for them to dialogue with each other.

## PARALLEL LIVES

While we, the adults, are there to lead and supervise, the children fortunately manage to live a parallel life among themselves, full of small exchanges and brief conversations. This is not disruptive or inappropriate when it happens in a harmonious and meaningful way. We must respect their need to talk and listen to one another.



# WORKSHOPS AROUND BOOKS



# WORKSHOPS AROUND BOOKS

Many artists and educators have questioned the meaning and educational potential of the workshop, seen as a space where children can give form to their thoughts and construct meaning. From the experiments of the artist Bruno Munari<sup>1</sup> to the reflections of the educator Loris Malaguzzi<sup>2</sup>, a common vision emerges: the workshop is a generative space where ideas are born, transformed, and shared. A place to experiment, imagine, explore, and create representations of the world in connection with others. A space also to think, create, and grow through books.

Reading awakens curiosity, raises questions, evokes emotions, and activates connections. The workshop thus becomes the natural extension of reading: a space to reflect together and alone, experiment with materials, organize thoughts, exchange viewpoints, or simply give form to the desire to create inspired by a beautiful story.

Drawing on their experiences, our two organizations have reflected together on the fundamental questions of practice that must be continuously asked in order to revisit and adapt them for each workshop.

## First of all, why run a workshop connected to books?

A workshop is a valuable opportunity to:

- Stimulate creativity and the ability to find personal solutions and pathways from a common proposal linked to reading
- Share ideas, creations, and emotions with others
- Put the manual dimension of expression and exploration back at the center, often neglected today
- Provide new tools to express oneself and listen to others
- Share a suspended, comfortable time where one feels at ease
- Give a three-dimensional dimension to one's thoughts
- Value the plurality of expressions and differences
- Create opportunities for beauty
- Imagine a habitable, welcoming space capable of activating resources

These reflections materialize in several essential dimensions: the organization of the space, the choice of materials, the structure of the workshop sequence, the organization of interactions, and the educator's approach.

## How to Arrange the Workshop Space?

The organization of the space is a central dimension. The concept of space as a "third teacher" is a fundamental principle of the Reggio Children<sup>3</sup> pedagogy, developed by Loris Malaguzzi. This approach considers the child's physical environment as a full participant in the educational process, alongside the educator and the child. From this perspective, the space must be carefully designed and organized, as free, open, and uncluttered as possible. An environment that highlights what is truly necessary, capable of accommodating each child comfortably and according to their needs. A space that illuminates, reveals, and enables.

## How to Prepare and Present Materials?

Similarly, the choice and presentation of materials play a key role in the quality of the experience. Materials should be accessible, visible, and stimulating. Beautiful, unusual objects that immediately spark the desire to experiment.

Ideally, each child has what they need, but the intentional absence of certain tools can also become an opportunity: to learn to wait, share, cooperate, and find solutions together.

## What Are the Roles of Children and Adults in These Spaces?

The workshop space shapes the relationship between the child and the adult.

The child is at the center: free to explore, experiment, find unexpected solutions, or even do nothing. There is no single "right" way to participate; children engage in the workshop in their own ways, including in ways the adult may not have anticipated.

The adult is a discreet yet attentive presence: facilitator, observer, caring presence. They may suggest paths if necessary, but most of the time, they aim to stimulate the child's autonomous exploration. The adult prepares extensively beforehand and then steps back. They are present when needed, allowing everyone to fully experience the workshop. They are close without being intrusive, supportive yet offering a different perspective. They listen, marvel, and observe.

Below, we present two practical sheets: "Night Creatures Workshop" and "Woodland Creatures Workshop", designed by the two organizations as part of our project. These workshops, designed for a limited duration, were also intended to involve families, as the workshop space is a precious opportunity to strengthen bonds between adults and children, parents and kids..

1 Sperati, Silvana, Il Metodo Bruno Munari: Assunti principali del metodo ed esempi di applicazione, Associazione Bruno Munari 2020

2 Malaguzzi, Loris, I cento linguaggi dei bambini – The Hundred Languages of Children, Reggio Children, 1996

*In a workshop, more than the "what," it is the "how" that makes the difference.*



## MATERIALS

- Black paper, 240 g (small format, 10 x 5 cm)
- Colored pencils and oil pastels tested for black paper
- Colored washi tape
- Glow-in-the-dark paint
- Glue and strips of paper for binding

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Select a variety of books on the theme to read aloud: classics, new releases, books addressing complex issues, with diverse rhythms and graphic styles, blending humor and seriousness. But above all, choose books that you enjoy reading and that are suitable for reading aloud.

## ICONOGRAPHY

Select images extracted from these books, scan them, and print them in color. Enrich this iconographic base with other images, for example from art history, which will serve as inspiration for the workshop.



# NIGHT CREATURES WORKSHOP

FOR ALL AUDIENCES (PARENTS AND CHILDREN, ALL AGES)

**Suggestion: "On a piece of night (a small black paper), draw a creature"**

## INTRODUCTORY READINGS (15 MIN)

(for example: *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak and *Dans la forêt invisible* by Julia Woigner)

## CREATION (60 MIN):

### Steps:

- 1) Each participant chooses a "piece of night" (black paper attached to the wall with repositionable washi tape).
- 2) Free exploration of the tools (colored pencils and oil pastels) available on the table.
- 3) Participants draw inspiration from the images (iconography) displayed on the wall to create their creatures. Thanks to the repositionable washi tape, they can remove the images and bring them to the table for closer observation.
- 4) Participants create several drawings, returning to the wall to hang their creations and take a new piece of night.
- 5) A final piece of night is distributed, with white eyes drawn in glow-in-the-dark paint. The child completes this piece with their final creature.

## FINALIZATION AND PRESENTATION (30 MIN):

With dimmed lighting to observe the works illuminated by the glow-in-the-dark paint, each child presents their creature.

Books are made available, allowing a time for free reading.

## OPTIONAL (30 MIN):

To move from the individual work to the collective work, the final drawing will be used to create a collaborative book assembled with strips of paper.



# ILLUSTRATED PROMPTARIUM- NIGHT CREATURES WORKSHOP

## TAKE CARE OF TRANSITIONS

Here, we can see how we paid attention to the transition between the reading session and the workshop. A small tunnel was built to invite the children to pass through it and enter the workshop space. This setup encourages reflection on how to move, both mentally and physically, from one activity to another. It also highlights children's needs for differentiated spaces and times during an activity.



## CHILD'S AUTONOMY, ADULT'S AVAILABILITY

Here, we can observe that all the children are focused on their work, while the adult remains in the background, available to listen and observe. The more the child is placed in a situation of autonomy, the more the adult can devote themselves to attentive observation, fully present to support whatever emerges.



## BEING AMAZED BY THE CHILD'S WORK

Being amazed by the child's work means recognizing the spaces of freedom and experimentation they have been able to claim, while being careful not to show preferences within the group. In this creation, titled *Fire Black*, the child experimented with several techniques using colored pencils on black paper. Sharing with the group the discoveries and solutions found by the children allows everyone to benefit from each other's ideas and experiences.



## PAYING ATTENTION TO THE PRESENTATION AND CLOSING

Here, we can see that the adults have created a small collective book with the creature drawings made by the children. While the children remain absorbed on their own drawings, often guided by a "this is mine!" dynamic, it is the perfect moment for the adult to gently highlight the transition from the individual perspective ("this is mine") to the collective perspective ("this is ours"). This process takes shape in a small book, an object capable of bringing different viewpoints together.

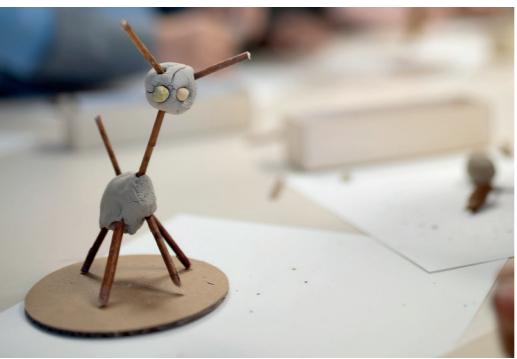


## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Select a variety of books on the theme to read aloud: classics, new releases, books addressing complex themes, etc., with diverse rhythms and graphic styles, combining humor and seriousness. But above all, choose books that you enjoy and that are well suited for reading aloud.

## REFLECTION

Participants can be invited to find a place in nature to "release" their creature (the hollow of a tree, a root, a bush). The creatures are biodegradable, made from natural materials, and can return to nature. If they contain seeds (native species), they might even germinate.



## MATERIALS

- Scrap paper as an individual workspace
- Small cardboard support
- Clay cube
- Containers/displays
- Sorted small natural materials (seeds, twigs, leaves, bark, etc.)
- Beige paper, 240 g (small format, 10 x 10 cm)
- Black pens

# WOODLAND CREATURES WORKSHOP

FOR ALL AUDIENCES (PARENTS AND CHILDREN, ALL AGES)

**Suggestion:** "Create an imaginary creature using natural materials"

**INTRODUCTIONS (5 MIN):** Each participant receives a magnolia leaf (*Magnolia grandiflora*), which they place into a small cube of clay while introducing themselves. The leaves will form a forest, which will serve as the setting for the story.

**INTRODUCTORY READINGS (15 MIN):** Read-aloud of a book on the theme of the forest or the creatures that inhabit it (for example: *Dans la forêt sombre et profonde* by Delphine Bour-nay).

### CREATION (60 MIN) :

#### Steps:

- 1) Participants settle into their individual workspaces (scrap paper, cardboard base, clay cube).
- 2) Introduction to the workshop and presentation of the available materials, with an emphasis on careful observation (e.g., a leaf can resemble a leg, an ear, or a pair of horns depending on the angle of view).
- 3) Free exploration and manipulation of the clay and natural materials, sorted and made available on the table.
- 4) Participants create an imaginary creature using the clay as a base and natural elements as components.
- 5) They draw their creature faithfully on a sheet of paper using a pen.

### FINALIZATION AND PRESENTATION (30 MIN):

The creatures are placed in the "forest" used as the initial setting. Each creature is presented by the children, followed by collective observation.

### OPTIONAL (30 MIN):

Final reading of a wordless picture book (for example: *Hank Finds an Egg* by Rebecca Dudley). Books are made available, allowing time for free reading.



# ILLUSTRATED PROMPTARIUM- WOODLAND CREATURES WORKSHOP



## THE JOY OF THE MEETING

Welcoming those who come from afar, with emotion and joy. What a beautiful lesson! This photo shows the first encounter between the French children and the Italian adult team. The image reflects the children's great openness to meeting others. Through the language of their bodies, we can perceive strong emotions, keen curiosity, and slight shyness. They form a group – and a group can be created in many ways; here, through the sharing of emotions, energy, and a common experience.



## WELCOMING

The opening of the workshop is a pivotal moment for establishing an atmosphere of attentive listening and setting the right mindset—it lays the foundation for the entire experience. To honor each participant, we began with individual introductions. Each child received a magnolia leaf in exchange for pronouncing their own name, a simple yet meaningful gesture that recognized their individuality. All eyes were attentive during this delicate moment, reflecting the care and significance of the encounter. By welcoming each child with a personal token, we acknowledged and valued every individual even before the workshop officially began.

## GETTING DOWN TO THE CHILD'S LEVEL

The Italian team, not speaking French, had to explore other forms of communication with the children: body language, gestures, and expressions. A dialogue made possible by the children's natural openness to meeting and sharing. In this photo, we can see that the adults naturally lower themselves to the children's level.



*"You say: it is tiring to be with children. You are right.*

*Then you add: because you have to get down to their level, stoop, bend, crouch, make yourself small.*

*Now you are wrong. That is not what is most exhausting.*

*It is rather the fact of being forced to rise to the height of their feelings.*

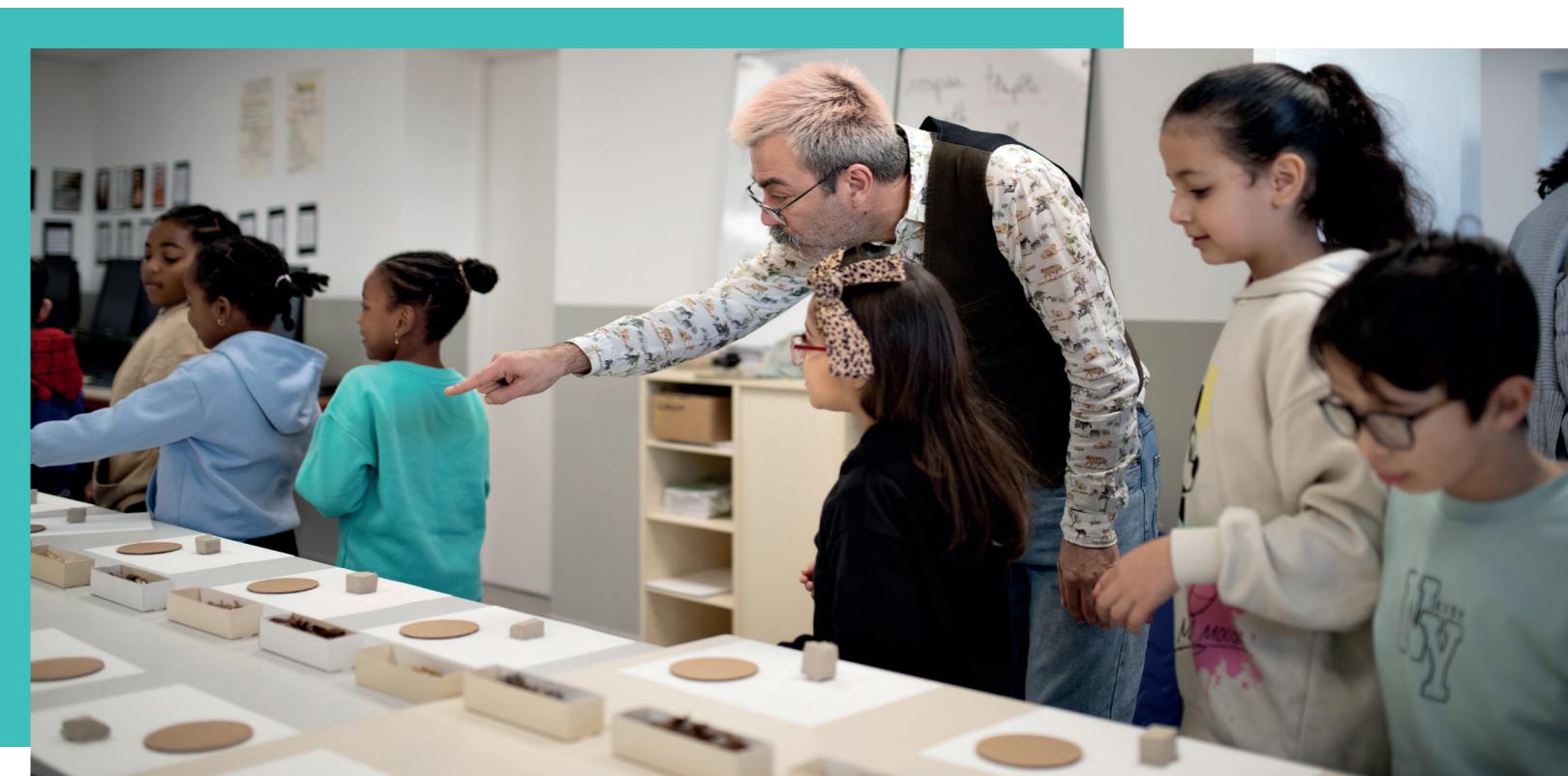
*To stretch, to lengthen, to stand on tiptoe.*

*So as not to hurt them."*

*Janusz Korczak, When I Become Little Again, 1925*

## ENCOURAGING OBSERVATION

In this image, we see the transition moment between the reading space and the workshop space. Attention is given to each child as they enter this new area; everyone is welcomed and invited to carefully observe the thoughtfully arranged materials. We can also observe how the adult's gesture is reflected in that of the little girl in blue, who shares an observation with the others.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING UP THE SPACE

The space is the third teacher, and much thought has been given to how to arrange it: the placement of materials, the reasons for defining an individual space within a collective area, and how to ensure that everyone has equitable access to the chosen materials. These are fundamental questions in a creative workshop. Carefully considering the layout of things immediately communicates each person's place within the workshop, as well as their opportunity to express themselves, connect with others, and be understood.



## AN ECO-RESPONSIBLE PRACTICE

The materials chosen for the workshop leave no ecological footprint. No waste was produced. Choosing natural materials is an important value today and can prompt reflection on environmental issues. The creature created by the children can ultimately return to nature since it is made from natural materials, yet it leaves a lasting impression on us through the experience we have shared.



## THE MATERIAL COMES BEFORE THE WORDS

This photo invites us to reflect on the attractive power of a carefully arranged space and interesting materials. The adults are watching the adult out of frame who is explaining the workshop, while all the children observe the natural materials laid out on the table. A simple, ordinary material, presented as if on a grandly set table, irresistibly captures their attention and arouses desire.



## EACH PERSON MOVES AT THEIR OWN RHYTHM

Although everyone began with the same clay cube, the resulting creations reveal a variety of approaches: one cube remained untouched, another was barely handled, and yet another was held so long that it dried out. Creativity unfolds at its own pace, and each child engaged with the clay differently, enjoying the process to varying degrees. The figure in the bottom left illustrates this perfectly: the child added two elements hastily at the very last moment. In a creative workshop, the focus lies not on the final product, but on the experience, the manipulation, and the exploration itself.



## GIVING VALUE TO SIMPLE THINGS

The adult holds a leaf in their hand, an object we encounter frequently. Attached to a tree with other leaves or lying on the ground in a pile, its particularities often go unnoticed. However, when isolated, attention is drawn to its uniqueness. Something as simple and natural as a leaf, removed from its context, becomes precious, becoming an object of observation. Using modest materials is also a political act: beauty is accessible to everyone.

# LISTENING TO CHILDREN



# LISTENING TO CHILDREN

During our CREA project, we reflected together on the value of children's thinking and why it is essential to listen to them and give it space. The words, gestures, drawings, and marks left by children reveal how they experience and interpret the world; they allow us to better know them and recognize them as active participants in the process.

Listening to them is not only a pedagogical act but also a political and democratic one: it means giving voice to a minority often overlooked and offering opportunities for awareness, empowerment, and participation. At the same time, for adults, it becomes a learning opportunity: an invitation to improve practices and enrich themselves through the children's perspectives.

In this reflection, we drew inspiration from two fundamental approaches that recognize the importance of children's voices: the Reggio Children<sup>1</sup> experience, with its pedagogy of listening and documentation, and Danilo Dolci's<sup>2</sup> "maieutic" approach.

Building on these roots, we identified three key axes of work that we consider essential in our shared reflection:

## **Giving Voice**

How to create conditions for children to freely express themselves about the cultural processes that concern them.

## **Valuing the Process**

How to recognize the value of their thinking, highlight it, reflect on it together, and give it visibility.

## **Co-Designing and Co-Creating**

How to involve children in shared construction processes, recognizing them as co-authors.

During our exchanges in Italy and France, we experimented with different ways of gathering children's voices. In each country, we offered a creative workshop introduced by a reading session. The collection of their voices, limited by the time available, was partial, but the experience proved to be very enriching.

In Italy, the activity was followed by a questionnaire for the children, consisting of questions about their experience, which they could answer in writing or through a drawing. This allowed them to express themselves freely and creatively.

In France, we chose to conduct short individual interviews with the children at the end of the activity. These interviews made their creative process visible, showing not only the final results but also the

steps and thoughts that guided them.

However, the children's voices also emerged in more spontaneous forms, through the small drawn gifts they exchanged using us as intermediaries—simple gestures capable of carrying deep and personal meanings, reflecting their unique ways of communicating and connecting with others.

In the photo in this chapter, we see the beautiful banner that the Italian children prepared for their French peers, in response to the question: "What is a book?" One child's answer says it all: "For me, a book is the teachers."

This same spirit is found in the words of children when they talk about their creations:

"I listen to my mind and then I create. I do what my mind tells me to do!"  
— Kais, 7 years old

"I imagined a creature with branches. I've seen it on YouTube, but I've never met it. I am a bit at the service of YouTube, but also of my brain."  
— Jaser, 7 years old

These few words from children remind us that reading and creating can be spaces for encounter and listening, where relationships, ideas, emotions, and wonder are woven together.

*These moments of creative reading are, for us, precious opportunities for encounters between adults, books, and children. And also for encounters with oneself.*

<sup>1</sup>Rinaldi, Carlina, In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, Researching and Learning, 2 édition, Routledge, 2021

<sup>2</sup>Dolci, Danilo, Ciò che ho imparato e altri scritti, Mesogea, Messina, 2008.



## LA FORêt EN PAPIER

An association for book and reading mediation, created in Marseille in 2006.

*The book, as a trigger of ideas and imagination, allows dialogue to open between the adult world and the child's world, and awakens young people to art and culture while developing their critical thinking.*

La Forêt en Papier carries out a variety of actions aimed at helping people discover the book as a source of pleasure, imagination, and personal growth. Its means of action include:

- Conducting readings and workshops within the framework of artistic and cultural education (EAC).
- Providing training in children's literature and book mediation.
- Publishing works through micro-editions.
- Organizing socio-cultural actions around books.

Since its creation, La Forêt en Papier has focused its actions in Marseille neighborhoods where social and cultural vulnerability makes encountering books more difficult. In these actions, creative work based on images serves as a gateway into the world of books.

Artistic practice allows children to refine their perspective on books and on the world, develop their own means of expression, and cultivate critical thinking.

La Forêt en Papier's activities are aimed at both children and the adults around them (families, educators, librarians, teachers...), as their involvement is fundamental in fostering encounters with books and art.

In priority neighborhoods, the main guidelines of our actions are:

- Establishing a traveling exhibition presenting works by a children's author.
- Organizing meetings with children's authors, preceded by artistic and cultural education programs.
- Transmitting book culture through trainings and workshops to develop a network of educational and social actors dedicated to the promotion of books and reading.
- Participating in the provision of books to partner organizations.

## OUR VALUES

- A project serving the growth and emancipation of the child.
- A commitment to working in sensitive neighborhoods, always in connection with families, institutions, and local actors.
- A pursuit of quality in project implementation, in the chosen works, and in the skills of our team.



## DAMATRA

Founded in 1987 in Udine, Damatrà was created with the idea of bringing cultural activity expertise to the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, particularly in the field of reading and culture for young generations.

The organization has focused on cultural and educational research in favor of children and youth, supporting their right to actively participate in cultural production processes.

Its main activities are:

- Reading promotion initiatives (ages 0-18) in schools and libraries
- Creative workshops focused on arts and crafts
- Peer education projects around books and reading, including for vulnerable youth
- Community events
- Training for teachers, educators, librarians, and families

Damatrà collaborates with 187 public libraries, which, since 2015, have been an integral part of the regional reading promotion program LeggiAMO 0/18. Within this program, several initiatives have been implemented to foster social inclusion and the dissemination of books in vulnerable contexts:

- "Su e giù per le storie": bringing books and reading to children and adolescents living in social housing or marginalized urban areas (Gorizia, Udine, Trieste)
- "La tribù che legge": peer education pathways in which young people under juvenile court supervision become active participants in reading promotion activities
- "Bestiario Immaginato": a cultural project that gave rise to a true community process
- The creation of the "Casa delle Culture Bambine": a cultural center for new generations, active since 2018

The name Damatrà encapsulates the poetic spirit that drives it. In the Milanese dialect, damatrà means: listen to me, trust me, follow me. Listening is at the heart of our work: listening to children, their potential, their creativity, and their knowledge.

The Damatrà team has an interdisciplinary experience ranging from art to literature, theater to animation, pedagogy to craftsmanship.

