

Read-Aloud Companion

Zoe and the Great Summer Jubilee · Merevale Creek Farm · Book 1 of 4

Before you begin

Book 1 is designed to be read in twelve sessions, one chapter per sitting. Each chapter is roughly 900–1,100 words and takes 8–12 minutes to read aloud at a comfortable pace. There is no cliffhanger pressure. Each chapter resolves cleanly, making it easy to stop and talk.

Reading age: 6–9 years for read-aloud; independent reading from around age 8. The vocabulary is deliberately slightly above independent reading level, reading aloud closes that gap and models fluency at the same time.

The gate creak: every chapter begins with the farm gate. It creaks differently each time. You don't need to point this out, children who notice it feel clever. Children who don't will still enjoy the story.

Sensitive themes & how to handle them

Prejudice and being judged on appearance. Zoe is a Rottweiler. Most animals on the farm are afraid of her before she has said or done anything. This is handled gently and without anger, Zoe never complains about it. If a child asks why the animals are scared, the honest answer is: "They've heard things about Rottweilers that aren't true about Zoe. It takes time to find out the truth about someone."

Being falsely accused (Chapter 10). Mayo implies Zoe damaged the wreath. She didn't. She says nothing and lets her actions speak. Some children find this frustrating. That frustration is the point, and it is worth sitting with. If it comes up: "Sometimes being patient is harder than arguing. Does it feel fair to you?"

The storm (Chapter 11). The storm is dramatic but not frightening. All animals survive. The danger is real enough to matter; contained enough to feel safe. No additional framing needed.

Discussion starters, all chapters

One question per chapter to open conversation after reading aloud.

Chapter	Question
Ch 1 · The New Arrival	How do you feel when you go somewhere new and you don't know anyone?
Ch 2 · The Lost Lantern	What happens when someone tells a lie, even a small one?
Ch 3 · The Great Race	Is the fastest person always the best at a race?
Ch 4 · The Stubborn Gate	Can you think of a time when waiting worked better than rushing?
Ch 5 · The Clever Solution	Has anyone ever surprised you by being really good at something you didn't expect?
Ch 6 · The Prize Stall	If you had to choose between something that looks amazing and something that tastes amazing, which would you pick?
Ch 7 · The Sour Berries	Have you ever wanted something and then decided you

	didn't want it any more when you couldn't have it?
Ch 8 • The Tug of War	Can you think of something that only works if everyone tries together?
Ch 9 • The Goose's Warning	Has anyone ever warned you about something and you didn't listen? What happened?
Ch 10 • The False Accusation	What would you do if someone said you did something wrong and you hadn't?
Ch 11 • The Great Storm	What does it mean to be brave when you are also scared?
Ch 12 • The Jubilee Parade	If someone who had been unkind to you said sorry, how would you know if they really meant it?

"What if my child gets stuck?"

Unfamiliar words: Don't stop to define them mid-sentence. Read through, then ask "did anything sound unusual?" after the page. Context usually does the work.

Long sentences: Book 1 has some sentences up to 51 words. Slow down slightly on these and use natural breath pauses at commas. The rhythm will carry a child through.

"Why doesn't Zoe just explain herself?": This is the right question. Resist the urge to answer it. "What do you think?" is always the better move.

If a child loses the thread: The gate creak at the start of each chapter resets the scene. Re-reading just the first paragraph of a chapter is usually enough.