Amari’s Adventure
By Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School
Illustrated by Maurice W. Jackson, Jr.
Amari’s Adventure is more than the story of a trip to the zoo. It’s also the story of a young child realizing her own ability to impact the lives of others, regardless of her age or size. Amari is a fearless child who is finding her voice and the power of that voice. By encouraging her curiosity and having meaningful conversations with Amari, Mama plays a tremendous role in helping Amari find her voice.

At the Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School, we want all children to be like Amari and to find their voices for a lifetime. And, we know the game changing impact parents have in making this possible. That’s why we created the READ strategy, a research-based approach parents can use to read books with their children. By using the READ strategy, parents can engage children in conversation, nurture critical thinking, build language and vocabulary, and help children realize the power of their own voices.

The ultimate goal of the READ strategy is for children to become the storytellers. In other words, as we read the story with children over and over again, they develop the tools to talk about what’s happening in the story, to use the same vocabulary from the book, and to make important connections. Having these key skills will also benefit children as they continue on in school and will provide them a strong foundation for learning to read and, later, reading to learn. The transition to reading to learn, which happens during the 3rd grade year, is an important milestone for children. When children enter 3rd grade, they’re expected to read more complex books and they’ll need a strong foundation for learning to read and, later, reading to learn. So, using the READ strategy for you:

On the next page, we’ll share details about the READ strategy and suggestions for using this book. You may wish to practice before reading this book with your child for the first time. We’ve prepared some videos to help demonstrate the READ strategy for you:

1 - Events Read
2 - Thoughts & Emotions Read
3 - Child Tells the Story

Videos are also available at: www.atlantaspeechschool.org/amarilinks

We hope you’ll enjoy reading Amari’s Adventure with your child and that you’ll find delight in using the READ strategy to help your child find his or her voice for a lifetime.

Sincerely,
Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School

How to Use this Book

R - Repeat the Book
Researchers tell us that repeating books with young children is important for getting them ready to read to learn (Wasik et al., 2006). We encourage you to read this book at least 3 times with your child, focusing on events, first, thoughts and emotions next, and finally, letting your child tell the story to you. Throughout the book, we encourage you to think out loud to help your child make connections from one page to another. Thinking out loud just means that you can talk with your child about what the characters might be feeling or why they made certain decisions. When we think out loud, we say things like, “I notice...” “I think...” or “I wonder...” Throughout the book, you’ll notice we’ve written in some ideas of things to say. When you see speech bubbles, those are places where we’ve suggested ways you can think out loud after you read that part of the story. These are only suggestions of things you might want to discuss with your child as you’re reading. We hope you’ll come up with other ideas based on your child’s interests.

E - Engage and Enjoy Be silly! Have fun! Try using different voices for each character. Researchers tell us that most families read books with their children because it is fun, so make this a fun time in your home, too (van Kleeck et al., 1997). This is a good time to teach your child new words. A strong vocabulary is important for later reading (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; NRP, 2000). Throughout this book, you will see words underlined with suggestions below them. If you see this, it means that these are important words in the story, and you can PAT this vocabulary to help your child learn the word. To PAT vocabulary, you just: PAT the Vocabulary (adapted from Lee McGee):

1. Act out the word and encourage your child to act it out too.
2. Tell a child-friendly definition of the word.

A - Ask Questions
We provide questions at the end of the story that you can use to help your child learn to be a critical thinker about stories you read. Researchers tell us that, when we ask a variety of questions to children and help them learn to answer those questions, we are preparing them to think about books and stories in a way that will be very helpful for their school success (van Kleeck, et al., 2006; Yoder & Davies, 1998). You will likely need to help your child come to the correct answer by giving just enough help, but not too much.

D - Do More with the Book
Children learn new vocabulary best when they are exposed to it in a variety of different situations and activities (McKoon, et al., 2002). We provide a list of ideas at the end of the book that you can use to make the words in this book come alive for your child.

To learn more about the READ strategy, visit www.atlantaspeechschool.org/read
The Rollins Center for Language & Literacy at the Atlanta Speech School created Amari’s Adventure and the accompanying learning guide for parents and teachers as a gift to the City of Atlanta in celebration of the School’s founding 75 years ago by Katherine Hamm and the Junior League of Atlanta. The Atlanta Speech School dedicates this book to all of Atlanta’s children. We are committed to joining with others across the city to help each and every one of you to read on grade level by third grade and to live your life and all its adventures to your fullest potential. We are honored that our book has been chosen to be distributed as part of the Mayor’s Summer Reading Club led by the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students. The Rollins Center thanks our colleague, TJ Ragan, for her work on this book and for her unfailing dedication to Georgia’s children.
“Amari,” called Dad from downstairs, “Wake up. It’s your special day with Mama & Will!”

But Amari was already awake. She sat up in bed, hugged Tiger, and whispered, “Today’s the day!”
Amari and Will followed Mama toward the bus stop. Amari studied the reflections in the windows. Her brother’s head bobbed tall above hers.

Tell: “Notice there’s a statue of Martin Luther King Jr. He was a great leader who helped people.”
Point to Amari’s reflection in the window.

Will and Mama walked faster than she did, so Amari skipped her feet every few steps to keep up.
The bus soon arrived. Amari chose a seat beside Mama.

Will stood and gripped a silver pole for balance.

Tell: “It soon got there”
There was a sturdy log fence at the elephant exhibit. Will barely noticed the fence, but Amari had to stand tall on her tiptoes to see over it.

“Know what?” said Will. “I read at school that elephants can eat up to 600 pounds of food a day—things like honeydew melon, celery, lettuce, and sweet potatoes.”

“Just like we dig up in the community garden!” laughed Amari. “So, they eat their fruits and veggies, just like us,” she giggled.

The Zoo was a busy place. Amari and Will bumped their heads together looking at the map.

“Where are the tigers?” asked Amari.

“We’ll see them after the parakeet house,” answered Mama. Amari sighed.

“I wonder if Amari is comparing herself to Will, and thinking about how they are different.”

“I bet she is thinking, ‘I’m so much smaller than Will! Hmmph!’.”

“I think Amari is excited, really happy, to be at the zoo, but I think she really wanted to see the tigers first.”

“Act Out: Point to the map in Amari’s hand. As you read ‘Where are the tigers?’ ask Child, ‘Can you sigh, too?’”

“Act Out: Breathe in & out slowly.”

“Tell meaning: ‘An exhibit is a place to see interesting things.’”

Act Out: Point to the tigers in the picture. As you read “Just like we dig up in the community garden!” ask Child, ‘Can you sigh, too?’”

“I wonder if Amari is comparing herself to Will, and thinking about how they are different.”

“I bet she is thinking, ‘I’m so much smaller than Will! Hmmph!’.”

“I think Amari is excited, really happy, to be at the zoo, but I think she really wanted to see the tigers first.”

“Tell meaning: ‘An exhibit is a place to see interesting things.’”

Act Out: Point to the tigers in the picture. As you read “Just like we dig up in the community garden!” ask Child, ‘Can you sigh, too?’”
Finally, she reached under the fence and held out her stick to a teal parakeet on the ground. He gobbled the seeds greedily.

Tell meaning: “He ate the seeds fast.”

Act out: Ask child “Can you pretend to gobble with me? Yum, yum, yum.”

11

The parakeet house was next.

Amari and Will each got a little seed stick covered in birdseed.

Will held his stick near a tree full of hungry parakeets.

But no matter how far she stretched, Amari’s arm was too short to reach the tree.

After you read this page, say:

“I’m wondering if Amari is feeling frustrated—feeling upset that she keeps trying to reach the parakeets, but it doesn’t work.”
A crowd was gathered at the window of the tiger exhibit. "The highlight of our adventure!" said Mama happily.

Tell meaning: "A crowd is a group of many people close together."

Tell meaning: "A place to see interesting things."

I remember that Amari has been looking forward to seeing the tigers all day! So this crowd being in her way is a real problem!

Make a connection: After you read this page, flip back to the 1st page of the book, and say:

"Amari saw the sign before Will did. "The tigers!" she shouted. "The highlight of our adventure!" said Mama happily."

Tell meaning: "The best part!"

Tell meaning: "An adventure is an exciting time."

A crowd was gathered at the window of the tiger exhibit. Their bodies made a wall and blocked Amari's view.

Tell meaning: "A crowd is a group of many people close together."

Tell meaning: "A place to see interesting things."

I bet Amari is thinking, "Oh, hooray! The tigers are my favorite! I'm so excited! I'm really happy!"
Then, she noticed something. There, at the bottom corner of the window, was an empty space in the crowd. "I’m small enough to fit there," she thought.

"All day, Amari has been comparing herself to her brother, thinking how she is different than he is because she is small, but now, her being small is helping her solve her problem."
A young tiger sat off to the side by himself. Suddenly, he looked up at Amari. Their eyes met. Amari held her breath. Tell meaning: “or, all at once”  

Act Out: holding breath  

Ask child: “Can you hold your breath, too?”

So, she wiggled through the crowd (making sure to say, “Excuse me.”). Once she reached the window, she stared in awe at the group of tigers on the other side of the glass.

“Amari is determined to see those tigers. She is working hard at it until she gets to see them.”

After you read this page, say: “Amari is determined to see those tigers. She is working hard at it until she gets to see them.”
I wonder if it makes Amari feel big to help that little girl get to see the tigers. Sometimes when we are proud, or feel good about something we have done, it makes us feel big.

“Amari is so excited—she’s really happy to see the tigers!”

Amari is bigger than the little girl. She was the leader here, and I wonder if she feels proud of that, or happy that she did something good.

“A baby tiger! Wow!” whispered the little girl.

“He’s looking right at us!” replied Amari. “He’s beautiful.”

A small girl had followed Amari through the crowd to the window. Amari saw her eyes widen as the tiger looked toward them.

“A small girl had followed Amari through the crowd to the window.”

Tell meaning: “The girl had gone behind Amari.”

Act Out: make fingers of one hand pretend to walk behind fingers of the other hand.

Tell meaning: “through the group of many people together.”

Amari saw her eyes widen as the tiger looked toward them.

“When a small girl had followed Amari through the crowd to the window.”

Tell meaning: “Amari saw her eyes widen as the tiger looked toward them.”

Act Out: eyes get big and widen.

Tell meaning: “Amari saw her eyes widen as the tiger looked toward them.”

Amari saw her eyes widen as the tiger looked toward them.
Later, Mama spread out their picnic blanket by a big oak tree at the park. Amari lay down on the sunny part of the blanket, closed her eyes, and smiled.

“What are you thinking about, my little problem solver?” whispered Mama, looking up from her sandwich.

Tell meaning: “A problem solver is someone who fixes things when they go wrong.”

I think Mama must be so proud of how Amari solved that problem. She must feel like Amari did something good.

Later, Mama spread out their picnic blanket by a big oak tree at the park. Amari lay down on the sunny part of the blanket, closed her eyes, and smiled.

After you read this page, flip back to the page where Amari got to see the tigers, and say:

“I’m wondering if maybe Mama is remembering, or thinking back, to when Amari found a way to see the tigers, even when the crowd was in her way. That was a problem, but Amari solved it.”

Make a connection: After you read this page, flip back to the page where Amari got to see the tigers, and say:

“I think Mama must be so proud of how Amari solved that problem. She must feel like Amari did something good.”
Amari shivered. It was getting late. Mama wrapped her up in their big purple towel and rubbed her back to warm her up. “We’ve had quite an adventure today,” Mama said.

After you read this page, say: 
“Amari shivered. It was getting late. Mama wrapped her up in their big purple towel and rubbed her back to warm her up. “We’ve had quite an adventure today,” Mama said.

At the Splash Park, Amari took her shoes off and jumped in the puddles. But not Will. He just laughed at her wet shorts and shook his head.

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22

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23
Back at home, Amari couldn’t stop talking. “Mama, that really was an adventure!” she said.

“Told meaning: ‘That really was an exciting time’”

“I’m remembering, or thinking back to, when Amari’s mom asked her a question earlier during their picnic. Amari didn’t respond to her mom then—she was quiet. But at the end of the day, she was so talkative and excited to remember their adventure! They had such an exciting time!”

“We both fit in that tiny spot by the window,” Amari remembered, “and the little tiger looked right at us!”

“Told meaning: ‘that group of many people together’

“I was so upset because of that crowd!

But that corner spot was empty.

And just the right size for me! And Mama, did you see? I made two friends today!”

“Told meaning: ‘There was nothing there’

“I notice that Amari used the word ‘adventure’ here. I remember that her mom used that word several times today. I’m thinking that Amari learned that word ‘adventure’ from her mom today!”

“Yes, when you found your way to the window, you also helped another little girl find her way,” Mama said, and wrapped her arm around Amari’s shoulder.

“I’m remembering, or thinking back to, when Amari’s mom asked her a question earlier during their picnic. Amari didn’t respond to her mom then—she was quiet. But at the end of the day, she was so talkative and excited to remember their adventure! They had such an exciting time!”

After you read this page, flip back to the picnic page, and say:

“Told meaning: ‘That really was an exciting time’

“I was so upset because of that crowd!

But that corner spot was empty.

And just the right size for me! And Mama, did you see? I made two friends today!”

Make a connection: After you read this page, flip back to the picnic page, and say:

“I’m remembering, or thinking back to, when Amari’s mom asked her a question earlier during their picnic. Amari didn’t respond to her mom then—she was quiet. But at the end of the day, she was so talkative and excited to remember their adventure! They had such an exciting time!”
So, why was Amari so excited and talkative at the end of the day?

Then give just enough help (but not too much) to help your child answer:

• Because she had such a fun adventure that day;
• Because she had been so excited to see the tigers and she was able to see them;
• Because she had done so many wonderful things that day and had a real adventure.

After you read this page, ask:

“So, why did Amari say she felt big today?”

Then give just enough help (but not too much) to help your child answer:

• Because she solved a problem on her own, which made her feel grown up;
• She led another little girl to see, too, which made Amari feel big and special;
• When you are proud of yourself, it can make you feel big.

After you read this page, ask:

“I wish I had seen that tiger, Amari,” Dad said. “It sounds like it was a real adventure.”

Snuggling in close to Mama, Amari said, “I’m smaller than Will, but today, I felt big.”

Amari grinned, then glanced up at Will brushing his teeth across the hall. He stood tall, leaning toward his reflection in the mirror.

Tell meaning: “A reflection is what you see when you look in the mirror.”
1. Point out city buses as you see them and discuss how Amari and her family rode a bus to Zoo Atlanta.
2. Visit Zoo Atlanta and talk about how you are doing the same thing Amari did in the book.
3. Have a picnic outside (on the front steps, in the yard, at a park) and talk about how Amari and her family had a picnic too.
4. Measure how tall your child is using a measuring tape, and talk about whether your child is taller or smaller than siblings, cousins, or friends.
5. Watch birds outside and see if any of them look like the birds in the story. Talk about how they are different.
6. Sprinkle birdseed outside and see if any birds gobble it up like the parakeet in the story. Talk about how birds eat different things than we do.
7. Visit the public library and check out information books about tigers. Talk about where tigers live in nature, how Zoo Atlanta works to protect tigers, what tigers eat, how big tigers are compared to humans.
8. Visit a splash park, set up a sprinkler outside, or let your child play with water in the bathtub or sink. Talk about how much fun it is to splash in water just like Amari did.
9. If you notice your child becoming frustrated about something, point out how hard it can be to work hard at something and still have it not work. Talk about a time you were frustrated but determined, and eventually solved a problem.
10. Look at photo albums or old photos of your child as a baby, and talk about how much bigger your child is now compared to a few years ago. Talk about how proud you are of how your child is growing up.

11. At dinner, ask each person at the table to tell something that they were proud of and frustrated by that day. Talk about how doing our best is something to be proud of, even if we don’t solve every problem.
12. When shopping, point out reflections in windows or mirrors. Talk about how reflections are mirror images, and how we only see reflections in shiny things like puddles, windows, and mirrors.
13. In the car or bus, talk about what you have planned to do that day, and call it an adventure. Talk about how even a normal day can be an adventure if we make it fun and exciting.
14. When you are brushing teeth and getting ready for the morning, encourage your child to tell you what he/she is excited about for that day. Talk about how being excited means being very happy about something.
15. At bedtime, point out your child’s favorite stuffed animal, and talk about how our favorite things make us happy because we love them best. Talk about how Amari’s favorite thing was probably her stuffed animal, Tiger, and how excited she was to see the tigers at Zoo Atlanta.
16. Visit a community garden or just go outside at a playground or park and dig in the dirt, just like Will and Amari talked about digging in a garden.
17. Check out other books related to this book from the library, such as: Goodnight Gorilla by Peggy Rathmann, Dear Zoo by Rod Campbell, We Eat Food that’s Fresh by Angela Russ-Ayon, etc.
18. The possibilities are endless… Let us know what YOU chose to do to make this book come alive for your child! Contact us at rollinsinfo@atlantaspeechschool.org

Do More with the Book!

Here are some ideas of things you can do to make this book come alive for your child:
Amari is excited to go to the zoo with her mom and brother. But will she be able to see her favorite exhibit—the tigers?

Amari’s curiosity and spirit will delight and inspire readers both big and small. Amari’s Adventure also includes ideas for adults to use while reading, to build their children’s language and vocabulary skills and to prepare them to be on a path to “read to learn” by 3rd grade.