

Children Are Storytellers

Hints and tips

Beginnings

"If you've got their hands and voices, you've got their minds"

It is good to begin any storytelling session or group with children by encouraging them to participate. Participation within a group is a good springboard to the children having confidence to tell stories on their own. Songs, rhymes, jokes and riddles all make excellent beginnings.

Try this riddle:

*"Creaking, cracking, crunching
flesh inside its bones
Eyes upon its back and hands
that can crush stones"*

(Answer: a crab)

Helping children to develop storytelling skills

When describing to children what they need to be good storytellers I take out a big set of ears, two eyes and a tongue. I use these items to illustrate listening skills, the importance of eye contact in storytelling and the importance of telling a story naturally and in your own words. I then talk to the children about the magic box inside their head which contains their imagination. A good way to put the children more in touch with their imagination is to take them through a guided fantasy to the place they are happiest in the whole world - this is their land where stories grow.

Helping children to learn stories

Begin by immersing the children in a wide variety of stories, try to have visiting storytellers to expose them to different styles of storytelling, as well as different types of story. Once each child has found a story which they would like to retell, the following exercises are useful as memory aides.

- Pin up a clothes line. Help the child to break the story down to its 'bare bones', ie. main characters and event, write each 'bare bone' on a piece of card and ask the child to arrange the cards in sequence along the clothes line.
- Ask the children to sketch their story as a comic strip or draw one section of the story in detail to add some flesh to the bare bones.
- Record the children on audio or video cassette and play back the recordings.

Creating stories

Story in a circle

Begin a story with a sentence such as "There was once a wee girl called Angela and one day she went outside in the pouring rain and"

Ask each child in the circle to add a sentence about what happened next until the story reaches a conclusion. This exercise can be simplified by making it word-based, e.g. pack a suitcase around the circle with each child adding an object – you can ask them to describe their object, e.g. colour, size etc.

Story Bag

Pass around a bag full of interesting objects and ask each child to create a story about the object they have chosen. To make this exercise more difficult and to add some excitement, ask each child to tell a story including three objects out of the bag and use an egg timer. The story must be complete before the timer is out.

Story Cakes

Give each child a cake with a small object inside wrapped in tin foil. Warn them to be careful when eating the cake as there is the seed of a story inside it. Ask them to create a story around the object in the cake.

Story Smells

Stories might also be inspired by a box of smells, i.e. bottles of essential oil or a box of cloth in different textures.

Drama and Improvisation

Many children love dressing up and acting out the characters in a story. This can help with the learning of a story as well as the dialogue – it is often easier to know what a character would say when you have become that character. Some children enjoy improvising and creating a story as they go along. This type of work can be a good starting point for creative writing.

Family and personal stories

An excellent source of stories lies within each child's personal and family experience. Encourage the children to collect and retell stories from parents and grandparents – invite the families in to hear their stories retold. The children might like to retell the stories in some art and craft work to complement the verbal retellings.

A Story Calendar

Give each child an A4 piece of card with six windows in it like an advent calendar. Ask the children to draw a picture on each window of the calendar to represent a story from their life, e.g. baby story, holiday story, birthday story, an accident, my baby brother etc. This is a good exercise for getting parents involved as the children can ask their parents for details about their childhood stories and add a new story to their calendar every day/week.

Extract from *Telling Tales*, Scottish Storytelling Centre