

Telling children stories

Soft toy stories

Soft toys make an excellent focus for storytelling because they engage children's emotions. Select a character that appeals to you, because this helps you believe in your character and tell your story well – if you don't believe in it, your listeners won't! Find a special bag from which to produce the toy when it makes its first appearance as this heightens the excitement. Tell the children that you have someone special that wants to meet them, then slowly reveal the toy. Floppy, soft toys are best as they are easy to manipulate. Sit the toy on your hand and use your other hand to move the head as you tell your story about the character (practise in front of a mirror – you'll be amazed at the range of expressions you can achieve).

Puppet stories

All that has been said about soft toys also applies to puppets. Once you have one or two popular characters, your stories can go on and on. You can create your own soap opera, and the more the children hear about your characters, the more they will want to hear!

Make the most of your camera

Take your puppets and toys out into the community and the wider world and photograph them in different settings – people might stare, but who cares! Such photographs create the basis for many exciting stories.

Pictures and artifacts

You can also illustrate a story with picture cards, postcards or pictures from old calendars. A series of pictures can really spark the imagination. You can peg them along a clothesline as the story progresses, to help children remember the sequence of events. Artifacts can be even more effective, as children can handle them as you tell the story. Start making a collection of interesting objects and let your imagination run wild!

Story sacks

These take time to put together, but if everyone contributes and the work is shared, you can soon build up a collection to go with picture books.

Plots

When it comes to a plot, keep it simple. Here are two important considerations:

- ✎ A “match of meaning” – in other words, whatever is happening to your character must match the children's experience in some way; they must be able to relate to it. That way, they will listen with real absorption.
- ✎ Make it memorable, so you (or a child) can tell it again – repetition is helpful here. For example, your character(s) could go on a walk and find or do numerous things, or meet various people; or there could be a series of ways of solving a problem (*First, Next, In the end*).

When planning your story, you may find this list of universal themes useful:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Getting lost or losing something | Getting into trouble |
| Finding an interesting item | Feeling jealous |
| Helping someone | Being bullied/picked on |
| Feeling afraid | Winning and losing |
| Split loyalties | Mistaken identity |
| Disappointment | Accidents |
| Making choices/facing moral conflict | Not thinking ahead |
| Disregarding or breaking rules | Dishonesty |
| Acting bravely; self-sacrifice | Taking revenge |
| Being surprised | Getting locked in/trapped |
| Endeavor | Journeys and quests |

Children telling stories

Magic box

For this activity, you will need the co-operation of students' families to ensure that something is placed in the box sent home.

Explain to the children that they will all have an opportunity to take the magic box home and place it somewhere in their bedrooms. When they wake up in the morning there will be something for them in the magic box – it need be only a small token. The following morning the child brings the box back to school and tells everyone about what was found in the box.

The journey

You will need some play people, animal figures, pictures from magazines depicting settings, vehicles and activities, and a box of miscellaneous artifacts.

Sit the children in a circle with the resources in containers in the middle: characters, settings, vehicles, activities and objects. Explain that you are going to make up a story about some friends who go on a journey. Pass an object around the circle, explaining that whoever has the object when you give the signal (perhaps a bell or handclap), gets to choose a character. Encourage the child who selects the character to set the scene, for example: *“Once upon a time, there was a ...”*

Continue to pass the object around until the children have chosen and added to the spoken story; another character; a place where they went; a vehicle for them to travel in and an activity that they took part in. Finally, on the way home, they can find something (child chooses from the box of mixed artifacts). Model how the story might end, and once they have seen you do this a few times they will soon begin to do it for themselves.





Story bag

You will need an attractive bag and some interesting and unusual artifacts, such as an old key, magnifying glass, map, binoculars, a crystal or precious stone.

Tell the children that you are going to make up a story about the day they went on a very unusual school trip. Ask for suggestions for where the story may be set and how it might start. Invite children to take turns drawing an object out of the bag, and weaving a story about what happened when each item was found. If there are several suggestions, have them consider which would be most appropriate, and if they become stuck, offer a few suggestions of your own.

Our special character

One of the best ways to generate stories is to create your own character, arising from the children's interests. You could use a toy (a lonely teddy?) or even make a full-size model (one class made Mr. Togs the Tailor and he lived in a tailor's shop in their classroom for half a year!). The children can be involved in deciding the character's name, home (perhaps a role-play area), personality, and favorite activities. Once their characters have become established, you can go on to create situations to which the children can make a response, and in so doing, you may find the universal themes on page 43 helpful. Some useful starting points for children's stories are these:

-  showing your character covered in bandages or bandaged up – *“What happened?”*
-  having your character be upset because a favorite toy has been broken
-  maybe your character is frightened due to a dental visit
-  having the character “disappear,” leaving behind a note or sending a postcard

The children could also have turns to take the character home for the weekend and then tell the story of what happened during that time.

Great books for reading aloud

The most important factor in selecting a book to read aloud is that you enjoy reading it yourself. The following list is composed of tried and tested children's favorites:

- Andrew's Loose Tooth* Robert Munsch
Alfie Gets In First Shirley Hughes
Amazing Grace Mary Hoffman
Arroz Con Leche Lulu Delacre
Billy's Sunflower Nicola Moon
Bring on the Beat Rachael Isadora
Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?
Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle
Danny's Duck June Crebbin
Dear Daddy Philippe Dupasquier
Dear Zoo Rod Campbell
Drumheller Dinosaur Dance Robert Heidbreder
Each Peach Pear Plum Janet and Allan Ahlberg
Elmer David McKee
Farmer Duck Martin Waddell
Funnybones Janet and Allan Ahlberg
Going to the Fair Sheryl McFarlane
Gossie and Gertie Olivier Dunrea
Hairy Maclary from Donaldson's Dairy Lynley
Dodd
Here Comes Mother Goose Iona Opie, ed.
How Many Stars in the Sky? Lenny Hort
It Was Jake Anita Jeram
Jamaica and Brianna Juanita Havill
Koala Lou Mem Fox
Knick-Knack Paddywhack! Paul Zelinsky
Little Rabbit Foo Foo Michael Rosen and
Arthur Robbins
Mabel Murple Sheree Fitch
Mr. Gumpy's Outing John Burningham
Mr. Magnolia Quentin Blake
My Cat Likes to Hide in Boxes Eve Sutton and
Lynley Dodd
My Friend Rabbit Eric Rohmann
Oh, A-Hunting We Will Go John Langstaff
One Snowy Night Nick Butterworth
Owl Babies Martin Waddell
Peace at Last Jill Murphy
Rain Manya Stojic
Rosie's Walk Pat Hutchinson
Sometimes I'm Bombaloo Rachel Vail
So Much Trish Cooke
Tall Inside Jean Richardson
Ten, Nine, Eight Molly Bang
The Bear under the Stairs Helen Cooper
The Gingerbread Boy Ian Beck
The House That Jack Built Elizabeth Falconer
The Ice Cream Store Dennis Lee
The Time It Took Tom Nick Sharratt
The Train Ride June Crebbin and Stephen
Lambert
The Very Hungry Caterpillar Eric Carle
*The Wildlife ABC & 123: A Nature Alphabet and
Counting Book* Jan Thornhill
There Were Monkeys in My Kitchen Sheree Fitch
This Is the Bear Sarah Hayes and Helen Craig
Thomas's Snowsuit Robert Munsch
Through My Window Tony Bradman and Eileen
Browne
Toes in My Nose Sheree Fitch
We're Going on a Bear Hunt Michael Rosen
and Helen Oxenbury
Where the Wild Things Are Maurice Sendak
Where's My Teddy? Jez Alborough
Where's Spot? Eric Hill
Zigzag: Zoems for Zindergarten Loris Lesynski