



Practitioners know that listening to and creating stories is a good preparation for learning to read and write. Stories stir the imagination. They engage both heart and mind. Storytelling encourages thinking skills and active listening as children are transported to another world, another time. On this page John Paine tells us about two local projects and overleaf we offer two different approaches to storytelling.

Stories in the City

In Plymouth in 2008 Primary National Strategy Consultants and other helpers set up a range of story activities at 27 different venues throughout the City. **Stories in the City** involved a large number of volunteers, including the Lord Mayor, librarians, museum curators and players from Plymouth Argyle Football Club.

Schools were offered 27 venues where an appropriate story to suit the setting would be read to the children. Reception children listened to **Teddy Tales** at The Bear Factory and Year 5 heard **The Water Babies** in the swimming pool at the pavilion. At the National Marine Aquarium, children from St Edward's Church of England Primary and Plympton St. Maurice Primary Schools listened separately to **The Great Piratical Rumbustification** by Margaret Mahy, illustrated by Quentin Blake. This took

place right next to the shark tank, with special effects provided by a re-enactment group called **The Pirates of St. Piran**, authentically dressed in Captain Jack Sparrow mode.

Some children were taken on a tour of the Plymouth Evening Herald building; at the BBC they were filmed and saw themselves on television; they had tea in the Lord Mayor's parlour (after they had listened to Dick Whittington) and at the Theatre Royal they had a chance to look behind the scenes.

Stories in the City was a great way to involve lots of children. The many experiences children had in different locations made story reading new and exciting by setting the stories in unusual venues around the city.

Story Spinners

Birmingham Schools involved in this project were given *The Story Spinner* set of DVDs (2007), a collection of stories from around the world told by Phil McDermott. These invaluable resources can be used with children across the primary age and provide a model for practitioners and children alike of how to tell stories in ways that can evoke emotions and captivate imaginations.

Each teacher involved in the storytelling project collected evidence of children's writing before and after the project.

The emphasis on storytelling helped the children see the importance of taking account of the audience: telling a story in a coherent sequence, engaging and keeping their attention, and enchanting and thrilling them.

The impact of storytelling on children's writing included:

Improved sequencing of events

– the children showed greater confidence in planning, clearly knowing what they wanted to write after having the experience of telling stories.

Greater attention to characterisation

– many of the children were able to include characters' thoughts as they told stories, and create more multifaceted characterisation.

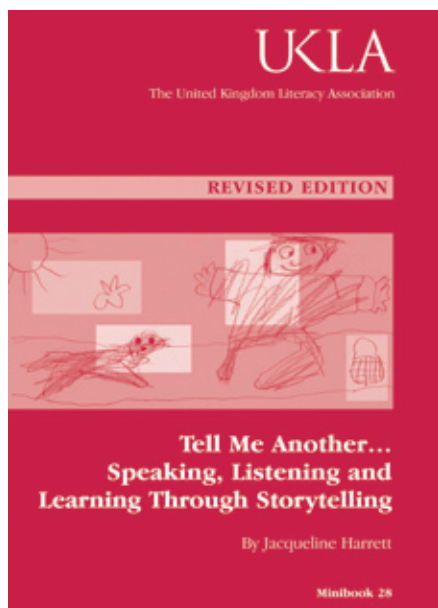
A more assured story voice – this was revealed in increased or more adventurous vocabulary and imagery; a more complex sentence structure and the use of rhetorical techniques such as repetition for emphasis or for creating narrative tension.

Improved use of punctuation

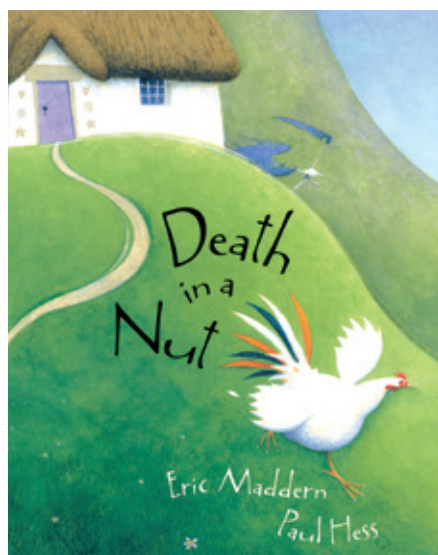
– the explicit discussion of, for example, the cadences of storytelling, including pauses for effect, helped the children become more aware of the function and importance of punctuation.

The full report of these projects may be found in English 4–11 Number 36 Summer 2009.

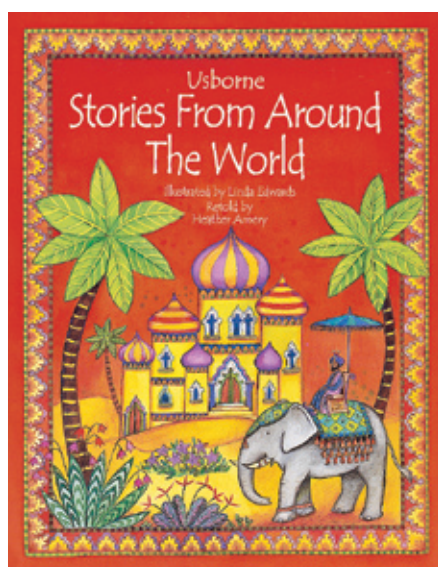
Following the story



Available from the UKLA - see p4 for contact details



Death in a Nut by Eric Maddern and Paul Hess
© Frances Lincoln 2005



Reproduced from *Stories from Around the World* by Heather Amey, by permission of Usborne Publishing, 83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT © Usborne Publishing Ltd

Jacqueline Harrett, author of *Tell Me Another... Speaking, Listening and Learning Through Storytelling*, shares her approach to storytelling.

The best stories for telling are based on traditional tales. These are the bastion of oral storytelling as they have withstood the test of time, have strong plots and often larger-than-life characters. Themes address the difficult issues in life such as illness, death, abandonment and cruelty as well as hope, endurance and resilience. Issues such as these have depth and meaning and are key to stimulating talk and reflection.

Oral stories may differ from those that the children have read. Telling a story and then reading a version of it encourages children to listen actively to spot similarities and differences. Encouraging children to re-tell the story to a partner or in a group helps them to understand the structure of narratives and how, in retellings, things may be twisted, removed or added to develop both plot and characters. In retellings children are given opportunities to create, re-create and improvise.

Many teachers use oral storytelling as a normal part of their teaching repertoire. For others this may be a new experience. Stories that stem from the oral tradition, such as Heather Amey's *Stories from around the World*, may encourage a teacher to try telling instead of reading.

Preparing to tell a story

- ▶ Choose a story with a strong plot.
- ▶ Familiarise yourself with it.
- ▶ Create a storyboard or key words to remember the skeleton of the tale.
- ▶ Remember that voice, facial expression and gesture are important.
- ▶ Seat children in a circle so that they can see and hear you clearly.

When the storytelling is finished allow children time to reflect as they may have questions to ask, as seen in the following examples.

Following the story

After a recent storytelling event I asked a group of Reception children if there was anything they wanted to ask about the story and encouraged them to take turns at responding to each other's questions. After the *Two Giants*, the children asked:

'Is that really real?'

'Why did the giant's wife meet the other giant?'

This led to talk about the nature of friendship and how people acted towards one another. They had more questions than answers about the story but it was obvious that it stimulated thinking.

Death in a Nut, with Year Two, provoked interesting discussion on the nature of Death as a character, with one child talking about Halloween. Others thought of Death as someone who lived in another country or another time.

'Death lived in olden times.'

The story also raised more probing questions such as, 'Would we see death in real life?' Some comments demonstrated that the story had encouraged the children to think more deeply to enable them to respond to this difficult concept. The notion of death was a challenge.

'Death is just a fairytale.'

said one and another child thought the story was designed to scare people. Nearly every member of the class contributed, indicating active listening and thinking. One final comment was an interesting observation for a seven-year-old:

'You need Death.'

A good story often has that effect. Every storytelling is a unique experience for teller and listeners, as well as a springboard for dialogue.

So don't just read to your class, give them something special – tell them a story!

The tale of the *Two Giants* is in *Tales for the Telling* by Edna O'Brien, published by Pavillion Books (out of print)

Tell Me Another... Speaking, Listening and Learning Through Storytelling by Jacqueline Harrett

The revised edition of this popular UKLA Minibook explains how teachers may use storytelling throughout the curriculum to help children to become effective, powerful learners. ISBN 978 1 897638 49 1

Storyboxes



Creating shoe-boxes containing objects referred to in favourite stories has been an inexpensive and involving project taken up by many schools for the fun and support it brings to literacy and learning progress. Here, Simon Wrigley describes how schools seeking creative solutions to literacy have taken to storyboxes with enthusiasm.

Teachers have been impressed by how previously disaffected pupils have enjoyed speaking, reading and writing as a result of using storyboxes. The exercise draws on the success of Neil Griffiths' 'Storysacks', but puts the emphasis on the children making boxes as their own re-telling of a favourite story.

To start a storybox project for any primary class, it is useful to have made a box yourself before asking pupils to make their own. One such shoe-box, for the re-telling of *The Three Little Pigs*, was decorated with key phrases and sub-divided into six sections. It contained: coins tied up in a spotted handkerchief; straw; a bundle of sticks tied up with string; broken pieces of brick, drill bits and Rawlplugs®, an apple; and a box of matches. Children helped the teacher retell the story, prompted by the objects in order and, as they did so, they included other objects, which they thought of, thus making the story their own.

Such boxes make cheap and valuable resources, which all children can easily make and use for their own writing, telling and reflecting. They can make them for a whole story, a character, a section of a story they already know, a topic or a poem (for example *The Highwayman* in Year 5). They enjoy working in this way and they deepen their learning by discussing their choices with others.

Schools have found that the advantages include for children:

- ▶ support for memory by creating associations
- ▶ confidence to talk at length and in detail
- ▶ providing access for and responsibility to different kinds of learners; particular progress was seen in boys' engagement and the confidence of younger and less articulate talkers. Those who liked making things but disliked literacy, and didn't see themselves as readers, were enthused by the project –

'If you'd seen the story in the storybox, you'd want to read the book.'

(Adam, Year 4)

- ▶ comprehension and interpretation skills when revisiting favourite books
- ▶ enjoyment and understanding of narrative voice and story structure. Leon, aged 5, sustained his retelling of Mick Inkpen's *Kipper's Birthday* for a good five minutes!

for parents:

- ▶ greater involvement in reading support by offering quick, practical ways of talking and supporting children's home learning, for example a Pinocchio storybox:

'Me and my nan made the big long nose.'

(Adam, Year 4)

- ▶ clearer understanding of conceptualisation and interpretation – involved in revisiting texts.



for teachers:

- ▶ cheap, easy and enjoyable ways of integrating oracy and literacy in sustained units of work
- ▶ creative solutions to cross-curricular problems
- ▶ devolvement of responsibility to the learner.

The Rose review makes it clear that the development of early reading depends on creating a language environment rich in purpose and possibility. Developing children's excitement about print, their oral confidence and their conceptual understanding is vital for their purposeful application of language.

For a more detailed exploration of the ideas and practical approaches using storyboxes, see the articles by Simon Wrigley in issues of NATE Classroom, Spring 2008 and Summer 2009.



The English Association

The English Association aims to further knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of the English language and its literatures and to foster good practice in its teaching and learning at all levels. The Association's journal for primary teachers – **English 4–11** (co-published with UKLA) – is dedicated to the teacher in the primary classroom.

Free resources from the English Association

The English Association's Primary Bookmarks series is intended to supplement the enthusiasm of the teacher in the primary classroom and to provide additional independent resources for readers wanting to broaden their engagement with literature.

There are four Bookmarks in the series so far:

- ▶ **Skellig** by David Almond:
Text and Context, by Ian Brinton
- ▶ **Mondays are Red** by Nicola Morgan: the author, the text, the characters and the use of language, by Louise Ellis-Barrett
- ▶ **Think of an Eel** by Karen Wallace and Mike Bostock: the Lyrical Voice in Non-Fiction, by Margaret Mallett
- ▶ **Coraline** by Neil Gaiman, by Louise Ellis-Barrett

Primary Bookmarks can be downloaded free of charge from the EA website and hard copies (£1 each plus .25 p&p) can be ordered from the EA office.



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NATE (National Association for the Teaching of English)

Special offer for readers of Primary Subjects

NATE will provide free copies of two high quality publications: **Sharing Poems** and **Off by Heart** to every teacher taking out a primary subscription until 30 April 2010, whilst stocks last. **Sharing Poems** is an invaluable collection of ringbound, photocopiable resources, including poems by writers such as John Agard, Roger McGough, Spike Milligan and Michael Rosen. For more information, contact the NATE office.



NATE Classroom

'Cross curricular thinking' is the main theme in the Spring (Feb) issue of NATE's magazine for all English teachers. Look out too, for 'Assessment' in the June issue and contact the editor (classroom@nate.org.uk) if you are interested in contributing an article.



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UKLA

UKLA promotes good practice in English teaching. It has a strong membership in the Primary sector of professionals committed to developing literacy education. As well as professional support, members receive *Literacy News* with accounts of UKLA activities and projects, **English 4–11**, published jointly with the English Association, and **Literacy**, which reports research with clear classroom implications.

Conference 2010

Developing pleasure and independence in reading and writing

Tuesday 30 March at the British Library. This practical one-day conference for teachers will offer workshops, keynotes and ideas for developing children's reading and writing for pleasure, fostering their independence as literate learners. Visit www.ukla.org.uk

Publications

Reading Magazines with a Critical Eye in the Primary School

by Carolyn Swain
This new UKLA minibook explores how teachers can bridge the gap between home and school literacy by including magazines in the reading repertoire.

ISBN 978 1 897638 51 4
– £7.00 (members) £8.00 (non-members)



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