

Telling Stories in Early Years

A resource to help practitioners and educators support
early years children to tell stories



Introduction

Stories are the lens through which children explore and understand their world. When we encourage creative storytelling, we empower them to weave narratives inspired by their interests, experiences and boundless imagination. By fostering this skill in early years settings, we not only nurture language and communication but also spark curiosity and confidence. Ready to help your children become storytellers? Use these top tips to bring their ideas to life and make storytelling a joyful part of your classroom.

Model storytelling yourself

Show children that you don't need a book to tell a story. Gather them round and tell a story from your head. You could use props, fancy dress and put on voices for the different characters. Demonstrate that in a made-up story, the possibilities are endless, and anything can happen. Your enthusiasm will inspire the children to try it out for themselves.



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Do some group storytelling

To build children's confidence, it can be helpful to create a story as a group. Go round and ask each child to carry on the story or add an idea. Emphasise that it doesn't have to be on a topic and it's ok to take the story off in any direction. It can be as silly and imaginative as they would like. Storytelling in a group can be useful to reassure children that your setting is a safe space to share their ideas.

Set up a storytelling space

Create an exciting space to encourage children to become storytellers. It might include a storytelling chair and baskets with props. You might want to include some seats for an audience. This space can be inside or in your outside area.

Have a storytelling starter

Support children by providing an inspiration for their story. This could be in the form of a prompt, a question or a mystery. It could be a mysterious object that has appeared in the setting or some interesting footprints that have been uncovered outside. Use phrases such as “I wonder how that got here...” and “I wonder what will happen...” to spark children’s imagination.

Use storytelling resources

It can be useful to scaffold stories by having some storytelling resources available, such as storytelling dice, character and setting cards. These help to give children ideas to include in their stories.



Use puppets

Puppets allow children to pretend to be somebody else and try out ideas they might not have the confidence to try themselves. Provide a range of different puppets, including hand puppets, finger puppets, stick puppets and resources for children to make their own.

Provide rich and diverse role-play resources

Ensure that the resources you provide reflect the experiences of the children in the setting and allow them to explore unfamiliar cultures. This can be achieved by having a variety of food and cooking equipment in the home corner, a range of dressing up clothes and diverse small world people. These resources will allow children to tell stories about their culture and experiences. Alistair Bryce-Clegg describes the use of mini-me's, which involve creating miniature versions of the children by sticking photos of them onto bottles. This provides an opportunity for each child to become part of an imaginative story, starting with characters that are familiar to them; themselves and their peers.

Have a bank of known stories

Knowing and being familiar with a range of books helps children make up their own stories. Learning key phrases and repeated refrains gives children ideas and phrases they can then insert into their play. Talking about familiar stories will also help children to identify key features of a story that they will need to include, for example, setting, problem/key event, resolution/ending.

Scribe the story

Take away any transcription concerns your children may have by offering to write the story for them. This allows the children to focus on their creativity. When scribing, write down what the child says as closely as possible. For older children, it may be appropriate to model and identify key features as you write. Once a few stories have been scribed, these can be collated into book and shared with the other children. Children can become illustrators and draw pictures to go along with the stories too.



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Use technology to record stories

Another way of allowing children to record their stories without needing to write them down is through using technology, such as recordable cubes or whiteboards. This has the bonus of children being able to use them independently without an adult. If a child does not speak English, then this technology can be used to encourage them to tell and record a story in their home language.

Use the outside area

Outside space can provide an exciting backdrop for stories as more space is available and children can be more physical in their storytelling. Setting up imaginative play situations outside can work well as a hook or starter for a story. Having a richly resourced outside

area will enable children to select their own resources and take the story to their preferred space. Examples include setting up a pirate ship from wooden crates or a spaceship from cardboard boxes. Modelling use of the outside space can inspire children to create their own stories. For example, you could try going on a bear hunt and use lines from a familiar story to support the narrative.

Provide exciting resources for book-making

Although stories do not have to be written down, some children will enjoy making a representation of their ideas. Support them to do so by providing exciting and inviting resources such as zig-zag books, coloured paper and a variety of mark making tools. Having mark making equipment available will also allow children with less developed language skills to create their own stories through pictures.

Have fun!

Encourage children to have fun with their stories. Storytelling can be a great way to get to know the children in your setting and for children to share their sense of humour and interesting ideas.



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