



A Storytelling Toolkit

Imaginative Spaces



Simple ideas for creating a Storytelling framework for early year's children and families.

Things you need

- A storytelling Character Prop- this could be a hat, scarf or coat.
- A Puppet, small toy or soft friend!
- A range of storybooks to give you inspiration (to be used as a starting point for creating your stories)
- A range of simple items to bring characters or moments in your stories alive, e.g. floaty scarves, fabrics, feathers, pebbles, shells or fir cones.
- A Story box or bag to contain it altogether and bring it all out of during the storytelling.
- A storytelling chair (armless)
- Cushions, mats, or big blanket for the children to sit on.

Getting started

Take inspiration from your favourite stories, or if you are looking at a theme already choose some story books that broadly connect with that theme or topic.

Once you have some books have a look through, what words, moments, characters, themes or scenes jump out? Jot down what you notice or like and make a note of anything you can take from the books.

Example: We were exploring colour over a term so I took inspiration from the books: *Wow Said the Owl* by Tim Hopgood, *If You're Happy and You Know It* by Anna McQuinn and Sophie Factus and *The Jolly Postman* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg. You will see from the stories I developed I took different things from each book. I took part of a phrase and the idea of an owl discovering colours from *Wow Said the Owl*, I took the idea of greetings in different languages from *If You're Happy and You Know It*, finally I took the inspiration for my storytelling character from *The Jolly Postman*.

Creating your Storytelling character

Think about what character you could be.

You might like to consider some of these things:

- What sort of person are you? Eg: Jolly/Brave/Lonely you can be all three!
- What job or role do you have?
- What do you like or dislike?

Choose someone you think the children will be able to identify with or might have encountered in their everyday lives. Choose someone you will be comfortable being.

The creation of this character will add a sense of occasion to your storytelling and provide new opportunities for embedding language and experiences. The children will love seeing you become a character in front of them. They will totally suspend their disbelief and believe in who you are just by you putting on a simple character indicator(s) such as a hat, scarf or coat.

Choosing a puppet or friend for your character

Now you can select a puppet, toy or small soft item that will be your character's friend or pet in the stories. You will bring this little character out each week and he/she will enable you to tell the children his/her adventures. Consider choosing a puppet that you think will fit with your character. You might want to think about how they know each other. Your puppet/toy doesn't need to be sophisticated as long as you are happy with it.

Building your Story framework

Children are reassured by repetition, it also helps the children to develop confidence and will enable them to join in or learn aspects of the story that are repeated each week. So your Story can start the same way each week. Start by getting into your role and introducing the children to who are, what it is you do, and give the children a bit of an insight into your characters life. This can be very simple and you also could consider adding a few lines of song with simple actions to reinforce what you do.

Example: Polly the Post lady sings;

"I push the letters through the doors (Mimes pushing letters through doors)

Sometimes I feel like there's more and more!"

Once you have introduced your character you can now introduce your friend and how they fit into your life. The children will be very excited to see the puppet each time and bringing him/her out provides a great opportunity for a call and response moment with the children.

Example:

"Wow, wow

Please come out little owl

Wow, wow

Please come out little owl"

(Softly first then a little louder, getting the children to join in and little owl slowly emerges)

Now you can use your puppet to recount an adventure or encounter they have had. This part of the story will be different each week. It could tie in with the theme that you are looking at.

Example:

Each week Little Owl meet a new creature who was a different colour, Red Butterfly, Orange Tiger, Yellow Duck, Green Frog, Blue Bird, Purple Jellyfish, Pink Flamingo etc...

You might want to consider thinking of where your little friend might go and simple experiences they could have. It really doesn't have to be long or involved. Short and sweet works best. If it helps to bring alive this part of the story you could use some of the simple items you have collected to illustrate a character they meet, a setting or moment the puppet is experiencing in the story. Then you can conclude the adventure and bring the little friend back home you have set up with your character.

Then you can finish the story same way each week. Think of a way to put away and say goodbye to your little friend. This provides another opportunity for a call and response.

Example:

Shall we help him settle down to sleep?

Night Night

Sleep Tight

Little owl

Go to sleep.

(He goes back into his hole)

Once the Little friend has been tucked away you can return the children to your characters world and give them one more insight into something you might have to do.

Example:

"I do like his stories though I really do.

Any way look at me chatting away I really must go I've still got all these letters left to deliver."

The final end to the story could incorporate an interactive element or the same repeated action that the children always have to do.

Example:

"Don't forget to post your letters!

(Hands out letters for the children to post in a post box)

See you another day I hope!"



Telling the Stories

Once you have created your framework you are now ready to tell the stories. In order for the children to get the most out of the experience you need to create the right space, rituals and moment for stories to take place in each session.

Most of the ideas that follow come from mistakes we made and we realised we needed to modify how we set up the Storytime to enable everyone to get the most out of it!

You might want to consider the following:

- Make it comfy and cosy- Set up the space with cushion or mats for the children to sit on and lay out a special storytelling rug or blanket.
- Have a simple storytelling chair (a chair with no arms works best so you can move more)
- Maximise sightlines - In the layout make sure all the children will be able to see the storyteller(s)
- Minimise distractions- make sure all the other activities are finished and covered over or use another space or room for storytelling if you have one.
- Try to ensure that children are not thirsty or hungry before you start by offering snack and drinks first, but try to clear them away before you commence.

- Work as a team and support each other. Model how to engage and encourage children to sit and watch or if with parent to sit on their parent's knee, from the start and throughout the Storytime.
- Stimulate their senses- You could use a musical cue to indicate for the start of the story time or light a scented candle.
- Colleagues can also support the storytelling by helping bring out the props when needed and supporting the children in joining in with key words or actions during the stories.
- Be brave and jump in! The children will love it, everybody feels self-conscious to start with but hold on to seeing how excited and captivated the children are and it will give you the courage to carry on a tell amazing stories.

Link to the Stories

The series of Polly and Little Owl stories developed by Manya Benenson, Artist in Residence at St Barnabas Library as part of the Spark Arts for Children Imaginative Spaces project are available as a free resource to download here:

www.thesparkarts.co.uk/storytellingtoolkit

See more fun, free and simple toolkit sessions that anyone can deliver within their library at www.thesparkarts.co.uk

Find out more

If you would like to know more about The Spark Arts for Children or our work in libraries please get in touch

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