

## Making Stories from Scratch in Foundation Stage and KS1

Our education system understandably places huge value on the reading of stories from books, in fact on reading and on books in general. But sometimes this can happen at the expense of verbal and active story-making, and the value of children creating their own stories can be overlooked. Over the last few years I have spent much of my time in worlds created by young children, and it has involved me in all kinds of fun and adventures. But it has also convinced me that this is really valuable stuff. So, why take the sometimes complicated, or even scary step of making up stories from scratch, when there are so many great stories already out there? Here are a few of my reasons:

**It develops speaking and listening.** This is general the official justification for story-making, but it is nonetheless effortlessly true. Any good child-led storymaking process encourages all kinds of desirable group activity, speaking, listening, sharing, collaboration, creativity and self-expression can all be helped, and regular use of story-making activities will help in many ways in the building of the skills of a group.

**It makes everything seem possible.** The area in which it can probably make the biggest impact of all is in boosting the confidence of the children [and even of the adults!] The visible sense of pride that is felt by a child who has created for themselves a brilliant story is regular demonstration of this value.

**There are no right answers.** Unlike so many other activities within schools, there is really no right answer in making up a story, and this frees you to respond positively to absolutely any contribution. It can be very liberating, particularly for children who are frightened of getting things wrong, and it is a nice relief for teachers too. A good story-making session should be able to stay entirely positive throughout.

**It is fun.** The sessions can be done sitting around, or very often they can develop into acting out together, and there is great fun to be had in getting on the floor with the children and going together on a monkey's picnic, or escaping from the dragon on a magic cloud.

**The stories are better.** The younger the children, the less they have been encouraged to think that stories have to be one thing or another, and the more wild and wacky they can be. I honestly believe that generally the process of getting older involves for most people a general seizing up of our imagination, and that three and four year olds have the best imaginations. They will slip without trouble between their everyday experience, the copying of stories they have seen and heard, and the completely surreal. This can give their stories sometimes amazing mixtures, and often takes them into realms which adult logic would have blocked from us.

An exchange in the creative world of the child...

I am with a group of very young children, playing and pretending. We are crawling around, trying to work out how we can escape from a tiger that is chasing us...

**'We have to go to Pizza Hut'**

**'Pizza Hut?'**

**'Tigers aren't allowed in the toilets in Pizza Hut'**

**'Why not?'**

**'There's a boys toilet, and a girls toilet. No tiger toilet'**

Of course.. there is no tiger toilet! It's obvious, when you are really in the young child's world - and what a wonderful world it is to be allowed to visit.

So, how to set about making up stories from scratch. As with the stories themselves, there is no right answer to this, and different approaches will suit different people. But some suggestions I would have would be:

Starting with objects. A box or bag with random objects can easily be enough to create a whole story. Objects that are open to interpretation can be best, so that when first introducing the object, it lends itself to open questions... 'What is this?' 'Who might this belong to?' 'Where could it live?' 'Who are her friends' etc. As a rule of thumb if you have an answer in mind, then the question is not the right one. Children can tell very easily if they are really in charge or not. The 'no right answers' rule, leaves you free to respond positively to every suggestion, and often it is the unexpected suggestions that lead to the most interesting stories.

Stories evolve, and the idea that a story should be planned at the beginning is one that can afford to wait until much later in the education system. Bring out the objects one by one, getting a new one when there is a need for a new episode in the story. Getting out a number at a time can be useful, if it is a group that will find it easy to make connections, but it is not often the best place to start.

Build the story through open questions. Welcome any suggestions, whether verbal or physical. Move between just saying the story and acting it out – for example if a child suggests something suitable, you can say, 'show me'... or involve a group in trying it out. 'How do frogs move?'

Tell the story back. It is surprisingly easy to make a satisfying story from children's ideas if you trust them, and you will quickly build up your skill at which questions will get you towards an ending, how to structure, and ways of telling back their story.

Resources like story cubes [dice with symbols on] or commercially available story boxes or bags, can be used in the same way.

It is no coincidence that so many of the great stories involve repetition, and when children have made up a story themselves and it is theirs, they will enjoy returning to it again and again.

There are many different ways to approach the process – eg starting with costumes, or settings, or characters, and many ways to develop it too - into books, performances, puppet shows or videos. I would just encourage you to jump in there and have fun. But watch out for those tigers!

**Peter Wynne-Willson**

**[pwynne@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:pwynne@blueyonder.co.uk)**