

A week of story time outdoors

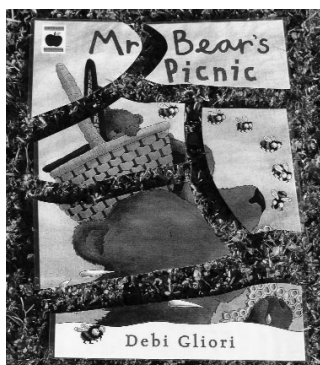
Storytelling is an art that begins in babyhood, perhaps as the baby gurgles away trying to keep its audience interested as they tell a story of sorts. Young children need time to explore ideas and create their own stories, have them listened to and receive appropriate help to stage their story and see how it acts out. Practitioners who can spend a little time each day annotating children's stories and observing the child's choice of who could act out which part, can then sympathetically direct and narrate these small, priceless insights into their children's worlds. Story time outdoors can be a positive and useful opportunity for young children and adults alike to develop storytelling. But for story time to be effective, making time to explore ideas is crucial.

This Curriculum Support shows how one published story can source many others from children. These stories will help us appreciate what children are able to think and do.

Day 1 – Hunt for picture clues

Choose a suitable story for your age group. See the EYO Advice Sheet *Books For Children* if you need ideas.

Photocopy the book's front cover. Laminate it and cut it into pieces: toddlers can start with just 2 pieces; older children can go up to about 6 pieces.



Discreetly place the laminated pieces around your outdoor area where children can search for and find them.

Explain to the children that today you are going to be looking for a story picture outdoors and that it will have X number of

pieces. Ask the children how they will look for the picture pieces, taking care of the living things, such as plants, where the pieces may be hiding.

The children may well become excited, especially when they have done this before, but remind them that it isn't a race. Taking photographs of this activity can source a story for another day e.g. *At first Nazra thought the picture card would be hidden under the log, she pushed hard to roll it over but underneath she found woodlice. "It's not here she thought" etc.*

Once found, the pieces can be brought to your outdoor story mat or circle.

Use the next 5–10 minutes to look at the cover together as a group. Talk about how it was found. What kind of story does each child think it could be? Does the picture give clues? Is it happy; exciting; fun; scary; etc? Individual children may want to recount the story if they are already familiar with it. Make an opportunity to talk about what they remember and what they like about it. Keep notes of the children's names and the little stories they tell. They can be referred back to positively. Don't correct children who tell the 'wrong' story. This is a time to respect the children's views and letting them share their ideas is crucial to developing and nurturing their imaginations, it just needs a skilled adult to facilitate it.

Day 2 – Hunt for props

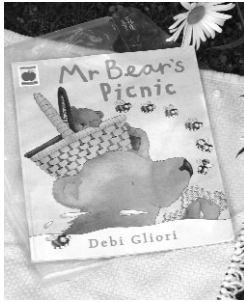
A similar start to Day 1, but this time props instead of picture clues will be sought and found. Try to pick out key points in the story that can be illustrated by a prop which can be hidden in a story sack or bag in the garden. The children will delight in finding and then guessing what's in the bag; pass them around the story circle to be felt by each child rather like a game of pass the parcel. This time ask questions about the use of each item not just in the story but in the children's own lives as well. Take photographs as these will be useful for yet more stories. The art of storytelling involves a practitioner who can allow children to share positively, it



may only need a word or two checked for your (and everyone else's) interpretation or it may need you to fill out the missing dialogue to sustain and enjoy this time together.

Day 3 – Tell the story

Take a few minutes to meander around the garden with the children reminding them of what has gone on so far during story time this week. Pause in places where items were found and ask the children if they can remember what they found here. Mistakes by adults sharpen children's listening skills and give them confidence to feel knowledgeable. Next gather the children to your story mat and give a chosen child a clue for where to find the book. This may even be under the mat you are sitting on, or wherever else you like.



The book should be in a plastic bag to show it is taken care of outdoors. Look again at the front cover and let the children match up the jigsaw pieces to check this really is the story you had been looking for. Again, take photographs of this stage to create the *Story of Story Week*.

Take your time to tell the story, judging whether pauses to

discuss ideas from earlier in the week or to recall props will enrich or take from this experience for the children. The same applies to discussion afterwards; sometimes reflections are evident in actions such as a child's gait when leaving or how they talk to their parents or toys about it later.

Day 4 – Act out the story

Decide how you can bring the story to life with the help of the children. Young children 'think' using the medium of an imagined drama. There is so much skill involved. Act as narrator and cast children for the roles in the story, act it out as a group or have several children playing each role. This is a skill for staff and children which can grow if given chance. Start simply and ask the children to gather the things they will need for the story, the props and the book. Practitioners new to this will enjoy asking individual children to play key roles. Remember a key role may be the pig as in *Mrs Wishy Washy* or other roles which assist in bringing the story to life e.g. trees. Photographs and notes of children's observations and comments are once again useful.

Day 5 – Our own stories

Everyday play and storytelling are woven inextricably. Liberate yourself and be pleased when your children can perform the feat of translation from play time to story time. Give yourself a space outside where children can come to you with their stories. You act as scribe. You may ask questions to build up your knowledge of their story. Check out its beginning, middle and end. They can tell you who they would choose to play the different characters they have created. Children also act out quick storylines in their everyday play. You don't need to separate this play from the stories they tell. Both activities are necessary for literacy. So much can be learnt from them. Use everyday play time to feed story time. Then at story time act as narrator and the children can act out their stories for each other. Share, enjoy, observe and photograph. Help keep the flow enjoyable so your



setting has the feeling that the world has slowed down enough for you to watch it turn.

Extension activity

Use a staff meeting to re-enact storylines that have taken place and try to imagine multiple ways of responding. Which of your comments support the children's ideas and extend them? Which of your interventions dampen the spirit and spoil the drama?



What can you learn about fantasy play that had been unknown to you before?

Resource

For further information on this type of good practice see *A Child's Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play* by Vivian Gussin Paley. New edition June 2005. ISBN-10: 0-226-64489-8

© This resource was originally created as part of the Early Years Outdoors membership scheme from the national school grounds charity

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