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Cambridgeshire County Council

CREDS
Cambridgeshire Race Equality & Diversity Service

"Something BAD has to happen..."

Storytelling Skills & Creativity in the Classroom for Enhancing Educational Development

prepared by Chip Colquhoun of Epic Tales

as part of a **European Union Comenius Regio Project** between the **Cambridgeshire Race Equality and Diversity Service, Cambridgeshire County Council** and **Kırşehir Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü**

PARTNERS

Partners in the Comenius Regio project are:

CREDS, Cambridgeshire County Council, UK
The Grove Primary School
Peckover Primary Academy
Epic Tales

Kırşehir İl Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü, Turkey
Öğretmen Bedıa Köksal Güler İlkokulu
Kırşehir Yusuf Demir Bilim Ve Sanat Merkezi
Vali Mithat Saylam İlköğretimokulu
Kırşehir Rehberlik Ve Araştırma Merkezi

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DISCLAIMER

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CREDS, Cambridgeshire County Council, Kırşehir Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü, the EU Commission, or the British Council. Examples of analysis performed within this guidance are only examples. Any assumptions made within the analysis are not reflective of the position of any of the organisations mentioned above.

FOREWORD

from CREDS

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this guidance on **Storytelling Skills and Creativity in the Classroom for Enhancing Educational Development** that has been developed as part of a Comenius Regio project between Cambridgeshire County Council and the Kırşehir Education Authority (Turkey) in partnership with schools and other partners. Epic Tales storytellers enthuse learners with their skills of storytelling in an inclusive, powerful and entertaining way as I saw when attending the opening workshop.

This guidance gives step-by-step support with the aim of bringing children and teachers together in a creative environment to enhance learning and understanding. It helps teachers to develop their classroom skills by giving a wide range of helpful examples along with inspiring videos of storytelling sessions.

The document is underpinned by a commitment to working in partnership with schools and school leaders to provide clear practical advice to raise the skills of teachers and other education professionals. In addition to this, the Learning Directorate will take a key role in providing expertise, guidance and training to achieve this and will work in partnership with schools to ensure success for every learner.

I hope that teachers and practitioners will find this guide useful in helping them to develop children's imaginative and creative writing skills as a foundation to obtaining a high level of achievement in their ongoing journey of learning.

Satwant Kaur
Interim Manager of Cambridgeshire Race Equality and Diversity Service

FOREWORD

from Kırsehir MEB

We live in a world that changes from day to day. Borderlines are gradually losing their significance, and the mass of information that we receive on a daily basis is booming. So it is our duty to provide our children with all the necessary skills, which will enable them to live and develop their personality in a world without boundaries. Nevertheless, education which aims to combine creatively different cultural elements should always be founded on the ground of humanitarian values, our historical tradition, and our national identity.

It is our responsibility to teach children the way in which to collect and survey new pieces of information and also to take advantage of them through the use of modern and technologically advanced tools. Pupils should become accustomed to group work and develop their creative skills through participation in various activities, specially designed to provide both knowledge and development in the ability to reason.

This Storytelling Skills and Creativity Project, which took place between 2013 and 2015, was coordinated by CREDS, Cambridgeshire County Council and Kırsehır MEB. We are grateful to CREDS, Cambridgeshire County Council, The Grove Primary School, Peckover Primary School and Epic Tales for their personal encouragement that we take risks in our work and generate something new. We are especially grateful to Mahbubur Rahman and Chip Colquhoun for their help and support throughout this project, and for providing such a generative space in which to work creatively.

We thank them all for their valuable input, enthusiasm and wisdom, which has helped shape this project into its present form.

In addition, we are grateful to all the contributors who gave freely of their time and energy in providing input, and preparing the programme descriptions of their exciting classroom projects.

We were incredibly fortunate to work with an amazing team of teachers, university faculties, teaching artists and students throughout the 2013-2015 period.

We also want to thank our core partner schools.

We believe that all children, throughout their education, can benefit from developing their storytelling skills through this project.

Osman Elmali
Manager for the Kırşehir National Educational Directorate

How to Use This Guidance

Welcome! You have before you one of the most comprehensive guides to using oral storytelling in the classroom. With it, you and your children should *soon* see vast, strong improvements right across your curriculum – in speaking and listening, maths, history, science, social studies, and more.

As we lay out in **Part One**, research has shown this to be possible. However, despite the frequency of schools discovering that children improve fast when taught through storytelling, there hasn't yet been a singular ***multi-district*** gathering of data with which to conclusively prove that this method excels above rote learning and testing.

You can help to change that. Over the next page, you will see how you can get involved in the largest study of storytelling in education ever achieved – no matter where you are, the language you speak, or the stage you consider your teaching/storytelling ability to be at. It's very simple, costs you nothing, can take as little as thirty minutes of class time, and could halve the budget you need for a storyteller to visit your school. So please join us in potentially improving the future of education worldwide – make **page 6** of this guidance compulsory reading!

Even if you've never tried oral storytelling with your children before, the data-gathering activities mentioned above should convince you of the potential impact you can achieve with storytelling in your classroom. If you then decide you want to achieve that impact, this guidance is for you.

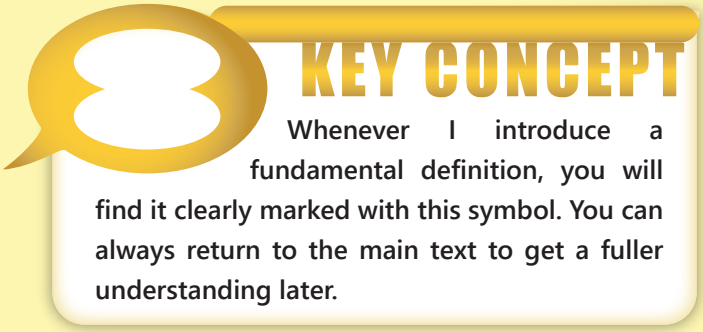
What to read and when

When implemented correctly, storytelling can help your children see major leaps in their ***wider cognitive skills*** and ***self-confidence*** as well as improved use of memory and language. So a proper understanding of how it works is just as important as doing it.

As a result, this guidance necessarily contains a lot of theory! With the aim of making it a leisurely read, and therefore also a swift one, I have chosen to write in the engaging style I use during my teacher workshops – which also makes every chapter itself an example of storytelling in action.

I hope this will help you to grasp the ***heart*** of the art. If you do, you will find it easier to design all your lesson plans with at least some influence from oral storytelling – even if you never tell a single story.

However, so you can start using the guidance without delay, there are symbols to help you quickly locate **activities** (see the next page) and **key concepts**. Each chapter also ends with a **summary** identifying the most important points.



Whenever I introduce a fundamental definition, you will find it clearly marked with this symbol. You can always return to the main text to get a fuller understanding later.

Part One explores how and why storytelling works to engage, enthral, and enhance learning, along with activities to prove its power.

Part Two sets out techniques you can use to improve your ***own*** storytelling, regardless of your current level.

Part Three provides guidance on implementing storytelling in your lesson planning.

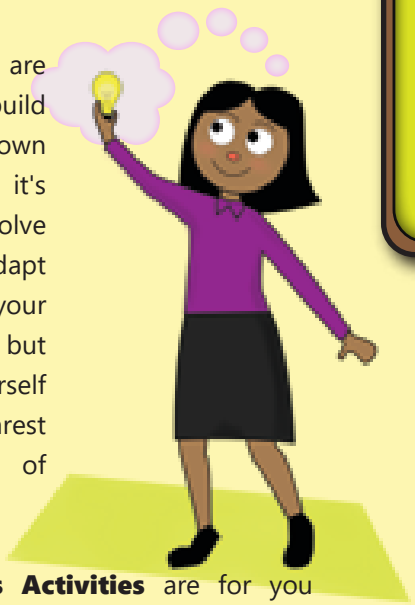
Part Four gives you a full approach to improving the creativity of your children, and using it to stimulate their interest in absolutely any area of your curriculum.

Part Five brings all these aspects together to help you motivate your children to share their development and learning, ***including encouraging them to write***. It also details some fun, effective and confidence-boosting activities.

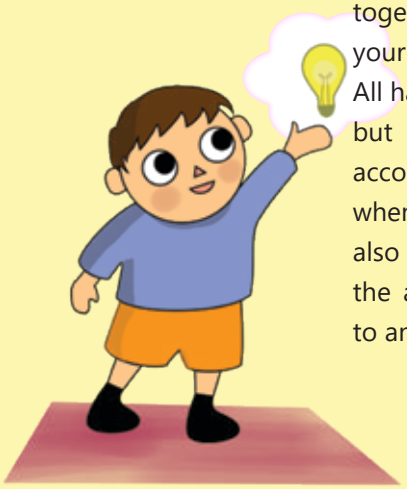
Using the Activities

The activities in this guidance are primarily intended to help you experience what storytelling can offer, and strengthen your ability to use it.

Teacher Activities are designed for ***you*** to build your ***own*** skills, in your own time. Where noted, it's possible for some to involve colleagues. You may adapt them to use with your children if you wish, but please attempt them yourself first so you have the clearest possible understanding of what's involved.



Class Activities are for you and your class to enjoy together – either to build your skills, their skills, or both. All have immediate benefits – but please read the accompanying chapters when you can, as you may also see how the principles of the activities can be applied to any lesson.



Illustrations: Lianna Weidle

Using the Video Clips

We are greatly indebted to The Grove Primary School in Cambridge for permitting us to film several examples to accompany this guidance. The full collection of clips can be found here: www.RegioStorytelling.com/videos

Please note, though, that these clips are ***not*** intended for your children to watch. They are to demonstrate techniques and activities only. Because the clips show me performing to an audience, there is no eye contact with the camera – which means your children will find it difficult to engage with the clip, however much the children within the clip itself are engaged.

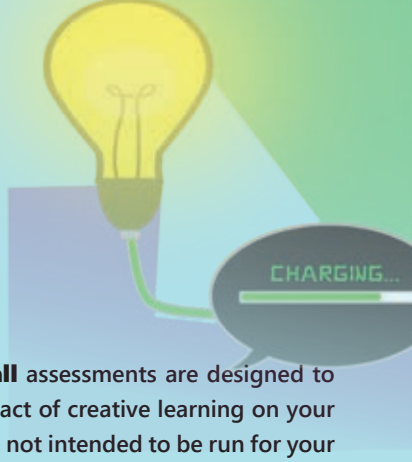
When a video clip accompanies the text in this guidance, it will be mentioned by title. So visit the URL above, then select the appropriate clip.

For videos of storytelling that you *can* show in your classroom, where the storytellers make eye contact with your children through the camera, visit www.epictales.co.uk

Turkish and British teachers together – photograph courtesy of Peckover Primary School

In the 8 years that Epic Tales has provided performances and workshops for schools, the regularity with which we are invited back by the same teachers is testimony to the ability of storytelling to engage and enthral successive generations of children while enhancing their learning. I hope this guidance helps you to harness these attributes of storytelling yourself.

Help Us Prove the Power of *Storytelling*



If you have yet to see the power of oral storytelling to improve the development of your children, then the activities detailed in Chapter Three should provide you with the evidence you seek. Once they have, or if you're *already* aware of the benefits of storytelling for education, you have the option to help us put together a convincing argument that storytelling should be at the heart of the curriculum of every country.

For this, all you need to do is complete one, some or all of the activities in **Chapter Three** and send your results to us using the simple forms at www.RegioStorytelling.com/research. Since one of these activities, the **Narrative Test**, can be completed within thirty minutes in class (and a minimum of thirty minutes of preparation), you should easily find time to help us gather some useful and important data.

In return, you can choose to supply your contact details for updates on the progress of our research (you will be able to opt out at any time). And, if you do so, you may also receive a special offer on storytelling from Epic Tales, the organisation who compiled all the theory and activities for this project and this guidance.[1]

Submitting this data is not a requirement. You are welcome to make use of this guidance solely for the benefit of the children in your class and school. But I hope that, when you see the extent of that benefit, you will be as keen as we are to spread the word as far as we can!

How to collect your data

When running these activities to submit data for us, though, ***please ensure you keep as close as possible to the instructions detailed in this guidance***. This is vital to ensure the research remains completely scientific – essential for the accuracy and credibility of this research.

To help you collect your data, and also to ensure conformity across all of our results, you can download some simple forms from www.RegioStorytelling.com/research to complete.

The **Narrative Test** aims to confirm the strength of narrative learning against rote learning. You can run this test at any time, regardless of your progress through this guidance.

List your children's test results in the Excel spreadsheet available from www.RegioStorytelling.com/research (the sheet will calculate the averages for you).

Minimum recommended prep time: 30min.
Minimum recommended class time: 30min.

[1]Please note that Epic Tales is affiliated with the author, and neither Epic Tales nor this offer is in any way affiliated with or endorsed by CREDS, Cambridgeshire County Council, Kırşehir Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü, the EU Commission, or the British Council. Offer is subject to terms and conditions that can be found at www.RegioStorytelling.com

The **Free Debate** and **Story Ball** assessments are designed to help you measure the wider impact of creative learning on your children's development. They are not intended to be run for your entire class. Instead, choose a focus group of between six and ten children – containing a mix of the abilities, ages and genders within your class – and plan to run these activities with this group both ***before and after*** you implement any of the **class activities** detailed in this guidance from **Chapter Four** onwards (NB: you can still make use of the **teacher activities**).

You can use the assessment foci on **page 22** to gauge the level of your children yourself, and submit your findings using the form found at www.RegioStorytelling.com/research. If you prefer, ***and if you have all relevant parental permissions***, you can send your videos for us to assess following the instructions on the website.

How soon should I send my data?

We aim to collate all the submitted data by September 2017, and so the Epic Tales offer mentioned above will expire after then. However, any data that arrives after this date will continue to help us adjust the strength of our argument for countries to adopt storytelling-based curricula. If (as we thoroughly expect) the results are predominantly positive across Europe, future generations may gain from an increased use of narrative and creative learning in education.

Edit 2019

Sadly the research mentioned on this page was interrupted by changes to the political situation in Turkey, and RegioStorytelling.com is no longer a valid URL.

...but there is good news! The research mentioned here was picked up by the University of Cambridge for a pilot study in 2016, and is now being undertaken in full by a collaboration between UCL's Institute of Education and Durham University's School of Education.

So you can still take part! To do so, instead of running the tests included here, please email your interest to victoria.menzies@durham.ac.uk

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Illustration: Ruth Haddock

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INTRODUCTION:

Why We Tell Stories

At first, there were no stories in the world. All the stories, that would ever be, were kept away from the land of men and animals by the Sky God, Nyambe.

In that time lived a spider called Anansi. Anansi really wanted to tell stories – ***especially*** stories about... Anansi the spider.

So Anansi climbed to the top of the tallest tree and cried, "Oh, great Nyambe! You're so wonderful, and we all love you down here! And we love you especially because you're the kind of god who gives us great gifts, like all the stories in the world..."

But the Sky God was not easily fooled...

"Are you trying to trick me, little spider? Pah! I will not share the stories with you unless you can prove yourself worthy. And to do that, you would have to bring me... the ***wasps with stings like fire***... the ***snake that swallows men whole***... and the ***leopard with teeth like spears***!"

Anansi gulped – but replied, "Right... I'll see what I can do!"

Now, you would probably feel a little nervous approaching a swarm of wasps with stings like fire. So imagine how a little spider would feel! But Anansi desperately wanted the ability to tell stories. So he took his gourd, opened it up... and tipped the water all over himself! Then he raised his umbrella over his head and, still holding the empty gourd, set off through the jungle.

He followed the sound of buzzing until he found them. When they saw him, the wasps were excited, thinking they had finally found a restaurant that delivered. But Anansi quickly halted them in their flight paths by saying, "Friends! There's a great storm coming! Look how wet it's made me... and I'm holding an umbrella! I know you guys hate rain, so hey – why don't you hide in my gourd?"

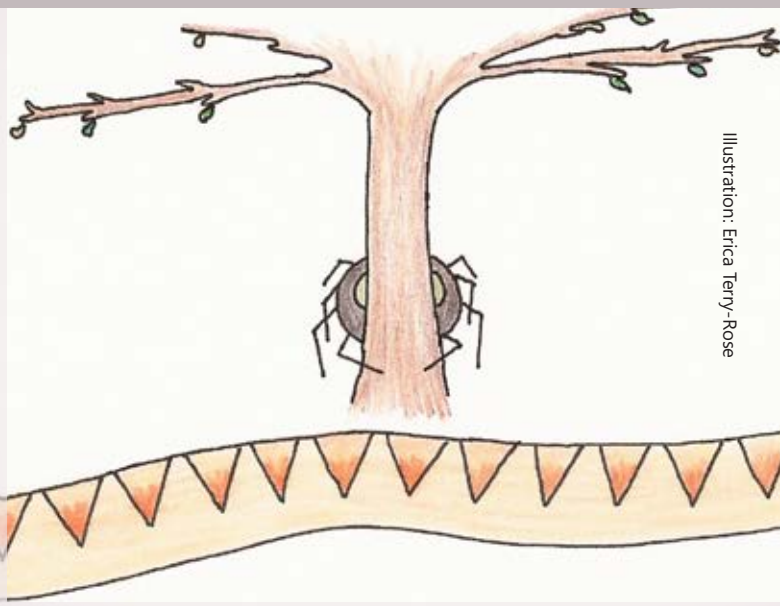


Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

All the wasps gratefully zipped into Anansi's gourd. Once they were all inside, he screwed the lid tight... then carried the gourd up the tallest tree and declared, "Here you are, Nyambe! The wasps with stings like fire!"

Nyambe took the gourd.

"Very clever, little spider. But you have yet to bring me the ***snake that swallows men whole***, and the ***leopard with teeth like spears***..."

Anansi gulped – but replied, "Right... On it!"

Now, you would probably feel quite nervous approaching a snake that could swallow you whole. So imagine how a little spider would feel! But Anansi craved the ability to tell stories. So he grabbed a long stick, then set off through the jungle.

Photograph courtesy of The Grove Primary School

He followed the sound of hissing until he came across the snake. Immediately, Anansi held up the stick and declared, "No, no, I'm definitely right..."

The snake faced Anansi, and raised an eyebrow. "Anansi... Why are you arguing with yourself?"

"Oh, great snake who swallows men whole! My wife and I were having an argument this morning, you see. She thinks you're not as long as this stick here, but I think you're longer!"

The snake proudly replied, "Well, let's measure it! If I'm longer, you can go back and tell your wife. If the stick's longer, I'll eat you so you can't tell anyone. How does that sound?"

Anansi blinked. "Um... Sure!"

So Anansi laid the stick on the ground, and the snake lay beside it – but, being a snake, he could not lay still.

Anansi scratched his head. "It's no use. Every time you move, the stick moves as well. I can't keep you next to each other."

"Well, why don't you tie my body to the stick?"

Anansi thought this was a great idea, and tied the snake's body down with some web... then carried the snake-on-a-stick all the way up the tallest tree and declared, "Here you are, Nyambe! The snake that swallows men whole!"

Nyambe took the snake-on-a-stick.

"Very impressive, little spider. But you have yet to bring me the ***leopard with teeth like spears***..."

Anansi gulped – but replied, "Right... Be right back!"

Now, you would probably feel very nervous approaching a leopard with teeth like spears. So imagine how a little spider would feel! But Anansi was resolved to one day tell stories. So he went home for a shovel, and began to dig a big pit next to a rubber tree. He covered the hole with leaves and twigs, and left the leopard's favourite food carefully balanced in the middle.

Then he went to sleep.

The following day, Anansi went back to find all the twigs and leaves had fallen in, and moans rising up from the bottom of the pit. He peered down the hole and called, "Is that you, leopard with teeth like spears?"

"Oh yes, Anansi! Please help me out!"

"Hold on! I'm going to pass a stick down for you to grab onto..."

Using his incredibly sticky hands and feet, Anansi bent the rubber tree so that the tip poked down into the hole.

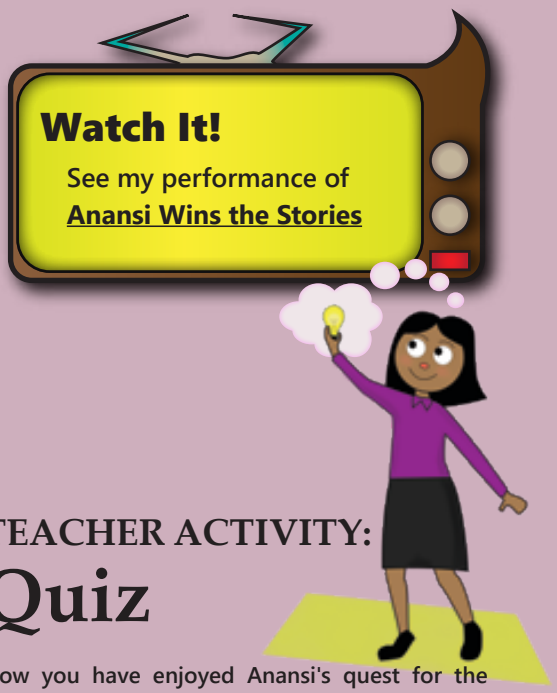
"See it? Good. Got it? Good. Now hold tight..."

Anansi let go of the rubber tree, and it flipped straight again, whipping the leopard out from the pit and up into the sky... straight into the arms of the Sky God.

Now Nyambe looked down at Anansi and said, "Very accomplished, little spider! You have completed all the challenges I set. So I will keep my word, and share all the stories with you – and every mortal creature on Earth."

So if you enjoyed that story – or, indeed, ***any*** story – you know who to thank...

Based on a traditional West African tale
Adapted by Chip Colquhoun



TEACHER ACTIVITY:
Quiz

Now you have enjoyed Anansi's quest for the stories, answer the following questions. Be sure to heed these two important rules...

- Do ***NOT*** refer to the written story or the recorded performance while you are tackling the quiz.
- Answer ***ALL*** the questions, even if you don't think you know the answer. Note – this means providing actual answers. "Not sure", "Don't know", "Can't remember", "Don't think we were told that" etc are not acceptable answers.

NB: There is no need to be concerned about your spellings or using complete sentences.

Remember: this is an activity for ***you***. You should ***not*** run this activity for your class.

The Questions

1. What was the name of the Sky God?
2. How many wasps were there?
3. What was so dangerous about the wasps?
4. How long was the snake compared to the stick?
5. Who did Anansi claim to have been arguing with about the length of the snake?
6. What was the leopard's favourite food?
7. What type of tree did Anansi use to "rescue" the leopard?
8. How did the Sky God feel about giving all the stories to Anansi?

Now – keep your answers beside you as you read **Chapter One**...!

PART ONE:
THE HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF STORYTELLING IN EDUCATION

Chapter One:
The Importance of Storytelling in Educa-

Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

Just over 30,000 years ago, something amazing happened. Until then, species like the Neanderthals and Homo Sapiens were similar beasts: hunting, gathering, using simple tools, even wearing jewellery and decorating with hand prints... and also being hunted, starving when food supplies were scarce, and freezing to death.

But then, the species that we would come to know more fondly as "human beings" began doing something no other creature has done before or since – they began ***telling stories***.

These stories, found painted on the walls of caves dotted around Asia and Europe, seem designed to share knowledge about food supplies, hunting methods, escaping danger, etc. Effectively, our species extended the primitive "flight or fight" principle by reflecting on the past and planning for the future. And it only did this by developing ***imagination***.

As a result, Homo Sapiens managed to beat extinction when other species – even remarkably similar ones such as the Neanderthals – perished. So there can be no disputing that the imagination is the greatest tool mankind ever invented – it was essential to our survival and spread.

Ever since then, the imagination has been at the heart of pretty much every attribute that marks human beings as unique among animals. Take **empathy**, for example – you ***imagine*** being in someone else's shoes.

Or how about **hypothesising** – you ***imagine*** how an experiment will turn out, and set out to prove or disprove yourself.

Even **mental arithmetic** uses the imagination to hold conceptual numbers. **Problem-solving** of any kind is best achieved by imagining potential solutions. When you are **ambitious**, you imagine your future self. And how would complex inventions be made without the ability to imagine them first?

Little wonder, then, that the Institute of Education published a study in 2013 revealing that children who enjoy reading for pleasure tend to perform better in subjects across the curriculum, including science and maths.[2]

Put simply: improve your imagination, and you become a better human.[3] So how can we develop this skill?

[2] Dr A Sullivan & M Brown, ***Social inequalities in cognitive scores at age 16: The role of reading***

[3] Since we began this project, Prof Yuval Harari published a book exploring these concepts and the evidence for them, that quickly became an international bestseller. If you are interested in what we can learn from the development of human nature, it is recommended reading: ***Sapiens*** (ISBN 978-0099590088).

The Magic of Storytelling

The history of human development above suggests that imagination is an intrinsic human quality. Have a read of this sentence:

> ***Sam went to the end of her garden, and ran her hand through the flowers that grew there.***

You would be a rare human being indeed if you hadn't just imagined a female called Sam running her hand through some flowers at the end of a garden. It may only have been for a fleeting moment – you may have pictured it, anything from the whole scene to just the head of a single flower... Any which way, though, you imagined ***something***.

This is because it's almost impossible for a literate human being to look at a word entirely objectively and not consider its meaning. The same happens for less literate, or even non-literate, individuals who can understand some ***spoken*** language and/or tone – which is part of what makes oral storytelling so universal.

This automatic engagement of the imagination in both reading and oral storytelling is therefore easy to initiate – and, as with any other muscle or skill, the more it is exercised, the stronger the imagination becomes. But what gives it such incredible power to engage audiences, especially children?

Relevant Fun

Have you taken the quiz at the end of the introduction yet? If so, get your answers ready... you'll need them in a moment! If not, don't spoil it for yourself – go back to page 9, read the story and take the quiz now before continuing!

Ownership, and Imaginative Investment

When you imagined Sam in the example above, how old was she? What colour was her hair? What colour flowers did she run her hand through?

All of these details were missing from the text – and yet your imagination most likely filled in the gaps for you. You might even be able to describe her house and garden too.

Automatically, your imagination created the story. Since I wrote fewer than 20 words, that actually made you more of a creator than me. Similarly, when you tell tales to your children, they are the ones who take the creative reins.

Of course, your version of Sam is likely to be very different to mine, or any other reader's. You own a completely unique version of the story. And because your imagination knows how you think, your version will be especially adapted to your preferred way of sensing the world.

Visual individuals, for example, may vividly see the colours of those flowers... Tactile individuals may readily imagine the petals brushing their fingers... Fans of romance may see the picture through a subtle haze, while horror fans may see dark clouds on the horizon... And so on. This is one reason why any child is easily enthralled by storytelling – his or her imagination provides a totally bespoke representation of the story. And it is this representation for which I have coined the phrase ***imaginative investment***.

KEY CONCEPT

Imaginative Investment

A child's **imaginative investment** is however much of their own creativity they have had to use. Higher levels of **imaginative investment** bring about increased levels of engagement. Oral storytelling intrinsically inspires a high level, because the child must create their own mental image of the action taking place.

Why use the word "investment"? The more you invest in something – money in a house, time in a relationship, effort in a job, etc – the more you care for it, right? This is equally true for products of one's imagination. When a child has expended energy creating a mental image of a happy Red Riding Hood, he or she will care about Red's journey through the forest, and is more likely to hope Red arrives at the end of the story unscathed. Consequently, the higher the **imaginative investment**, the higher the child's engagement in the story, lesson, and/or topic.

Now take your answers to the quiz at the end of the introduction. Check all your ***even numbered*** answers. Your answers to these questions could not have come from the text, nor the video clip – but they are all correct answers, as supplied by your imagination!

Narrative: the "Window of Experience"

You see? You're a hero.

You're not just a hero for getting those answers right, though – you're the hero of an entire story.

Consider your life for a moment. Thinking back, you may remember times that felt like you turned over a new leaf, began a new chapter, or maybe even started a sequel. Perhaps there's an individual who seems to be your arch nemesis. If you're lucky, maybe the story of your life has a love interest.

The point here is that we live our life through the famous narrative structure of **beginning**, **middle** and **end**. The beginning of new careers... The ending of relationships... New Year's Day... The World Cup final... The structure isn't just part of our everyday life, it ***is*** our everyday life!

Experiencing life through this narrative frame makes us inherently aware of it. So when we hear a story begin, we automatically expect a middle – and, eventually, an ending. This expectation can hook us into a tale, even if we weren't interested to start with. But there's more to narrative than just another engagement tool...

Now check your ***odd numbered*** answers from the quiz. Do they match, or come very close to, the following?

1. Nyambe?
3. They had stings like fire
5. His wife
7. A rubber tree

What's your score? Four out of four?

The narrative window of experience is also a magnet for our memory. Since we experience life through narrative, we intrinsically recognise it as an easy way to learn. When combined with **imaginative investment**, it provides greater recall than rote learning. In **Chapter Three** you'll find a test you can run with your class to see this in action.

So these two elements – **narrative**, and the automatic differentiation afforded by each child's unique **imaginative investment** – put oral storytelling among the top tools, and perhaps make it ***the*** top tool, for strengthening the most crucial aspects of a child's development: language, concentration, and imagination.

Of course, anyone can whack a hammer at an object. It takes training to know exactly when, how, and how hard. Likewise, storytelling method has developed through time as practitioners of the art found ways to enhance audience engagement and enjoyment. Nevertheless, all these techniques rely on the foundational principles of ownership and narrative to be effective.

This guidance focuses upon what I believe to be the most fundamental of these techniques. But first, the next two chapters will further support and prove that oral storytelling will be of benefit to ***you*** and ***your children***.

Storytelling and EAL/SEND Pupils

Teachers often draw me aside before a storytelling session to point out particular pupils with limited English and/or learning difficulties, apologising in advance that these children probably won't engage. They are then pleasantly surprised when these children don't just engage, but also remember details from the story afterwards – and can present their own understanding.

Again, this is largely due to ownership. Even the most basic grasp of language – including tone and gesture – can generate enough of a framework for the listener's imagination to start filling in the gaps, thereby stimulating engagement, recall ability and comprehension.

Photographs courtesy of Peckover Primary School

Chapter Summary

- The imagination is at the heart of unique human qualities, including social skills like empathy and higher cognitive skills like mental arithmetic.
- Storytelling automatically stimulates listeners' ***imaginative investment*** (see **Key Concept**), which helps them to engage.
- The appeal of an oral story can be automatically differentiated between each child in a class, giving each a bespoke learning experience.
- Narrative learning is learning in its most natural form – and so also one of the most powerful.

Chapter Two:
The Landscape of Storytelling in Education

Photograph courtesy of Bedia Koksal Guler Primary School

In December 2014, the UK Department for Education updated its National Curriculum guidelines to state, **"Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject. English is both a subject in its own right and the medium for teaching; for pupils, understanding the language provides access to the whole curriculum. Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for success in all subjects."**[4]

Any country in the world need only replace the word "English" with their native language to agree that the final two sentences are universal. It is apt that "spoken language" is listed first, as it requires the most present involvement of abstract understanding – thereby granting greater gains to the imagination, the bedrock of all other aspects of language and literacy. Later in this guidance, we will see how storytelling assists reading and writing (**Chapter Eleven**) and vocabulary (**Chapter Six**).

In the National Curriculum for the UK, giving children "opportunities to listen frequently to stories"[5] is recommended for children as old as 9 – as is "reading aloud"[6] to those as old as 11. The National Strategies' archives include several case studies recounting the positive impact of storytelling methods on learning, in particular using their own Talk For Writing programme (see the end of this chapter). From 2002 to 2011 the UK government supported Creative Partnerships, which linked schools with artists to assess creative approaches to learning. In 2011, case studies revealing the success of this scheme led to an award from the Qatar-based World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) Foundation. Epic Tales took part in one of these successful projects.

This reveals some recognition of the fact that storytelling benefits the aims of state education. And yet, oral storytelling has not yet formed part of any ***statutory*** framework. "Spoken language" is primarily intended to "develop [children's] understanding through speculating, hypothesising and exploring ideas [so to] enable them to clarify their thinking as well as organise their ideas for writing"[7]. In other words, the spoken word is seen as the means to an end – despite being just as recordable and assessable.

Perhaps this is why most teacher training courses still give little space to oral storytelling. In a newspaper article, language trainer David Heathfield suggested it may also be because "trainers lack experience"[8].

So in the UK, we see there is a gap between what is recognised as beneficial, and what is enforced as necessary. This guidance proposes that the influence of those beneficial activities greatly enhances attainment in all that's necessary, and seeks to redress the balance with teachers' own skill in this area.

[4]Section 6.1 of the ***National Curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4***

[5]"Notes and guidance (non-statutory)" from the "Years 3 and 4 programme of study" of the ***National curriculum in England: English programmes of study***

[6]"Notes and guidance (non-statutory)" from the "Years 5 and 6 programme of study" of the above

[7]Section 6.2 of the ***National Curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4***

[8]"Are you sitting comfortably?", ***The Guardian***, Tuesday 10 April 2012

Talk For Writing

One method that has gained popularity in the UK since 2008 is the National Strategies' Talk For Writing programme, developed by Pie Corbett and former National Literacy Trust deputy director Julia Strong.

Talk For Writing first encourages children to imitate speech patterns supported by simple movements. This imitation phase involves the ownership principle – regularly imitating actions and phrases allows children to possess them in much the same way that we first grasp our native language. But also... it's great fun! It's little wonder that Talk For Writing is a huge hit with children and teachers – the active element appeals to children's playfulness, motivating them to engage with the learning objectives.

But the focus on *direct* imitation can result in fairly basic tellings. Most Talk For Writing tales are far from the definition of "a good story" found here in Chapter Eleven, and few involve the elements you'll meet in Chapter Eight (stories people *want* to hear). Perhaps this is why some teachers find the programme's subsequent phases, innovation and invention, are "the least easy to implement".[9]

This guidance suggests "leading by example", rather than asking children to simply copy your tellings word-by-word or action-by-action. In later chapters, you'll see how this can still dramatically improve vocabulary and performance. But the key area where this guidance differs from Talk For Writing is in how to help your children become independent, innovative imaginers – which encourages them in turn to become highly motivated creators, sharers, and writers.

Now you have the context for the use of storytelling in education, it's time to prove that it will benefit ***you*** and ***your children***...

Chapter Summary

- Stories and storytelling are often advised routes for teachers to achieve curriculum goals, but are not mandatory or pushed above other methods.
- Conversely, there is relatively little training for teachers on aspects of narrative learning.
- Studies have shown that children who regularly indulge their imagination perform better in all subjects, including maths and science.
- In the UK, "Spoken word" is taught as a means to a measurable end, i.e. writing.
- Various UK National Strategies, such as Talk For Writing and Creative Partnerships, have provided case studies attesting to the educational benefits of storytelling and/or narrative learning.

[9] Cathryn Wicks, ***Raising standards in writing through storytelling***, originally published in the National Strategies' archives on 16 December 2010.

Chapter Three:
The Science of Storytelling in Education

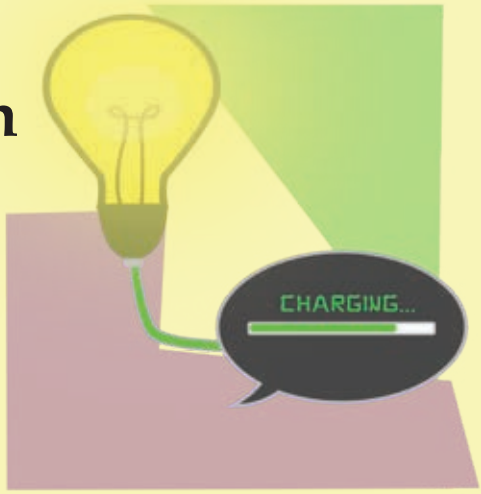


Illustration: Lianna Weidle

As we explored in the previous chapter, case studies revealing the (often huge) positive impact of storytelling in education are common. This is probably unsurprising to most since, as discussed in Chapter One, narrative learning is so intrinsic.

But to date, such studies have always been qualitative – that is, focused on a single school (or a small cluster of schools) and its aims, collecting data mainly through child and teacher comments (known as 'anecdotal evidence'). When curricula are written, these successes are hard to integrate because they often don't involve ***quantifiable assessments*** of the participants' progress (e.g. differences in test results between participants and non-participants), and/or no single study is large enough to risk extrapolating the data across a country. Consequently, storytelling is relegated to advisory, non-statutory chapters.

Narrative v Rote Learning

At the outset of this project, a very simple quantifiable test was designed for teachers to pit narrative against rote learning – the ***Narrative Test***. A class was split into two groups, each containing a similar range of ages and abilities as the other. Without informing the children they were to take a test, one group were told they "had to learn" a set of facts by memorising them (rote learning). The other group were told a story containing the same facts, without being instructed to memorise it.

After ten minutes, both groups went outside for a break. Upon their return, they were given a test of nine questions to check their recall of the facts.

It never shocks teachers to know that the narrative learners outperformed the rote learners. The difference between their results, though, was ***25%***.

Expressed as a percentage, this improvement doesn't seem all that huge. However, the average score for the rote learners was 5.8 out of 9. For the narrative learners it was ***8 out of 9***.

So that 25% improvement was the difference between just under two-thirds recall and ***near perfect*** recall. The children who heard the facts through storytelling remembered, on average, nearly everything – ***despite not being told they would need to***.

Even so, we need to assess this test in a far greater number of schools before it will gain scientific credibility – it needs to be shown that the results were not unusual. So please turn the page to try the Narrative Test with ***your*** children... and submit your results via www.regiostorytelling.com/research!

Assessment Criteria

As outlined in Chapter One, storytelling doesn't just hold the potential to improve children's recall ability, but also their language, imagination, and confidence. The pan-European distribution of this guidance gives you the opportunity to help us go far beyond the qualitative approach in proving these benefits too.

To do this, pick a focus group of between six and ten children from amongst your class, trying to include as broad a range of ages and abilities as you can. Run the Free Debate and Story Ball activities with them (from pages 20 and 21) *before* you make use of any of the class activities found in this guidance from Chapter Four onwards (NB: you can still make use of the teacher activities). Then, after at least a term of those activities, run these two activities again to track the improvement of your focus group.

You may send your group's activity videos for us to assess by following the instructions you can find at www.regiostorytelling.com/research, *provided you have all relevant parental permissions*. If you don't have all these permissions, or if you would prefer, you can make the assessments yourself using the foci on page 22. These foci are based on the 2010 criteria set by the UK Department for Education for assessing development in speaking and listening, and required only a few modifications to monitor the full benefits of storytelling (my modifications to the foci are underlined). Once you've made your assessments, before and after, please submit them to us via the simple online form at www.regiostorytelling.com/research. You may find it useful to take a look at this form before your group begins the activities.

Photo courtesy of The Grove Primary School

CLASS ACTIVITY:
The Narrative Test

To perform this test, you should first split your class as evenly as possible into two groups of similar ability. These groups must receive the facts in separate rooms, out of earshot from each other. ***Do not tell either group that they are learning information for a test*** – it is important for both groups to be relaxed whilst learning.

Group A should be presented with the following facts on a board/sheet and asked to memorise them within a short time:

- **The Chichi Festival is held in China around September**
- **Chichi is sometimes called the Magpie Festival**
- **Chichi celebrates the love of Princess Zinu and a farmer called Nulang**
- **Zinu and Nulang are constellations – pictures made by joining up patterns of stars in the night sky**
- **Between Zinu and Nulang is a long streak of stars, which some astronomers call "the Milky Way"**
- **You can sometimes see another star between Zinu and Nulang, which the Chinese call "the Bridge"**
- **At Chinese weddings, the new husband and wife make special prayers to Zinu and Nulang to have a happy marriage**

For Group B, ***tell*** the story found on the next page (also demonstrated in a video clip). Feel free to use as many or as little of the techniques from **Part Two** of this guidance as you can, but ***do make sure you employ good eye contact throughout***.

Remember, you don't need to memorise the text exactly – in fact, you ***shouldn't*** memorise the text exactly! You are welcome to keep Group A's list of facts near you as a prompt sheet, but try to recreate the narrative for your children with a style your own and a language they can easily understand.

After both groups have completed their method of learning, send them out for breaks of equal length. You could time the rote learning of Group A by how long it takes for the story to be told to Group B. A break time of 15min was used in the trial of this exercise.

Immediately after the break, give the children no longer than 10min to answer on paper the following questions under exam conditions:

1. **Which country celebrates the Chichi Festival?**
   A: China
2. **When is the Chichi Festival?**
   A: September
3. **What type of bird is important at Chichi?**
   A: Magpie
4. **Who was Zinu?**
   A: A princess/Queen's daughter
5. **What was the job of Nulang?**
   A: Farmer
6. **Where can you see Nulang and Zinu today?**
   A: In the sky
7. **Name something that you can <u>always</u> see between Nulang and Zinu.**
   A: The Milky Way
8. **Name something that you can <u>sometimes</u> see between Nulang and the Zinu.**
   A: A star called "the Bridge"
9. **Who likes to pray to Nulang and the Zinu?**
   A: Husbands and wives

When you collect their answers, be sure to keep separate piles for each group. After marking, place the scores directly into the spreadsheet, which can be found at www.regiostorytelling.com/research. The spreadsheet will calculate each group's average score for you.

Repeat this test between seven and ten days later, then again between four and six weeks later. Add these results to your spreadsheet.

Which group has the higher average score each time? Which group is better at retaining their knowledge over an extended period of time? This test will hopefully confirm for you which learning method is best for your children...

Zinu and Nulang

Illustration: Lianna Weidle

Once upon a time, the Queen of Heaven had a daughter called Zinu. Like all of the other children in Heaven, Zinu had to live right there – in Heaven. Her job was making clothes for all the other citizens of Heaven, so every single day Zinu would sit at her spinning wheel and weave.

But Zinu got bored with her job, and so one day decided to sneak out from Heaven and go down to Earth. She landed in the country of China, and began searching the towns and villages for fun. She came to the field of a farmer called Nulang. Nulang was looking after his cows when he saw the beautiful girl. He went and introduced himself. Zinu didn't tell him she was the princess of Heaven – instead she just said she was lost. Nulang invited her into his house for some food.

Zinu told Nulang that she was new to China, but she had heard it was a fun place. Nulang agreed to show her some of the amazing sights of China, such as the Great Wall, the New Year dragon festival, and of course some shadow puppet shows. As they went around together, Nulang and Zinu fell in love – and when it came to September, they got married.

But remember the Queen of Heaven? She had been searching everywhere for her lost daughter. When she heard that Zinu was getting married down in China, she was ***furious***! She flew down to China and snatched Zinu back up to Heaven. To make sure Zinu could never climb down to Earth again, she scratched a big river across the sky – a river that some people now call "the Milky Way".

Watch it!

Watch me performing **Zinu and Nulang**

But **use this video for inspiring your own telling only. It is not recommended to let your children watch this video as part of this test, as they will not benefit from the eye contact essential to the power of storytelling.**

Nulang tried to follow, but he could not cross the Milky Way. He asked everyone he could think of for help: but no-one, not even the Emperor of China, cared about his sadness. They didn't want to make the Queen of Heaven angry, in case she wouldn't let them into Heaven when they died!

So Nulang sat in the middle of his farm and cried. A group of magpies watched him from the trees, and felt very sorry for him. So they chose to offer their help. The magpies told Nulang that they would fly up to create a bridge for him to cross the Milky Way – but he could only have one day with Zinu, just in case the Queen of Heaven found out and did something even worse to him or Zinu.

And that's what has happened every single year since then. Today, you can see Nulang and Zinu in the sky. If you look up at night, you can sometimes see a pattern of stars in the shape of Nulang, and another pattern in the shape of Zinu. Between them is the purple streak of the Milky Way, keeping them apart. But once every year, usually around September time, the magpies fly up to create a bridge across the Milky Way, which looks just like a very bright star.

The people in China remember this story every September in the Chichi Festival, which is also known as the Magpie Festival. At this time, husbands and wives who recently married will offer a special prayer to Nulang the farmer and Zinu the Princess of Heaven, believing that Nulang and Zinu will bless them with a very happy marriage.

Based on a traditional Chinese tale

CLASS ACTIVITY:

Free Debate

Before beginning this activity, make sure you've read the guidance under the heading "Assessment Criteria" on page 17, along with all the rules in the box to the bottom right.

This activity assesses AF1, 2 and 4. The procedure is simple: tell the group they should talk to each other about one of the following questions for between 5 and 10 minutes...

What different ways do people talk to each other?

How do you make sure people understand you?

After five minutes (but no more than ten), try to find an appropriate break to bring the discussion to an end.

NB: when you later repeat this activity to assess development, use whichever question you *didn't* ask.

Photograph courtesy of The Grove Primary School

CLASS ACTIVITY:

Story Ball

Before beginning this activity, make sure you've read the guidance under the heading "Assessment Criteria" on page 17, along with all the rules in the box to the bottom left.

This activity assesses AF1 and 3. First, find a tennis ball to use as a "Story Ball". This should be the standard yellow colour, to rule out any possibility of colour psychology skewing the results of your assessment.

Sit with the children in a circle. Explain...

- **You will each take it in turns, clockwise, to create a story. Whoever is holding the Story Ball can add anything they like to the story. Do not say that it must follow on or make sense (but say nothing to the contrary either).**
- **When a child thinks they have finished their bit, *or if they don't wish to add anything*, they may pass the Story Ball to their left.**
- **No-one is allowed to end the story until you say so.**

When you are ready to begin, hold the Story Ball and – without recourse to notes – spend around two minutes telling the opening to a story. You can make this up, or – if you prefer – tell the beginning of an existing story (e.g. the story from the introduction to this guidance). If you opt for an existing tale, however, ensure *prior to the activity* that none of your focus group have heard the story before (to prevent them attempting to follow the original narrative).

Then pass the Story Ball to your left. You should only force the ball along if the current holder has held it for more than two minutes. When the ball returns to you the first time, add more to the story and then pass it again to your left. When it returns to you a second time, add an ending to finish the activity.

NB: When repeating this activity to assess progress, use a different story opener so your group won't try to recall their original tale.

The following rules should be kept in mind throughout *both* the activities on these pages:

- **Use a video camera to record the session for assessing later. Position it so you can easily identify each child. But do not draw attention to it – switch off any recording light if possible, and keep it at a distance, using a zoom function if available so you can still observe the children's gestures.**
- **Conduct these activities in a room without any audience or potential interruptions (passing traffic, etc). You may wish to place a sign outside to ensure no-one enters during the activities.**
- **If talk ceases, mentally count to at least 10 before providing a prompt to continue.**
- **Prompts should not provide new ideas, but should rather be open suggestions following on from the most recent comment (e.g. "What do you think about what she just said?", etc).**

Adapted Speaking and Listening Assessment Foci

"Narrative conventions" includes recognisable story structures, participation techniques, refrains, etc. "Originality" should be assessed in relation to the child's awareness of the topic (i.e. it need not be objectively brand new).

LEVEL	***AF1 – Talking to others*** Talk in purposeful and imaginative ways to select and explore ideas and feelings, adapting and varying structure and vocabulary according to purpose, listeners and content.	***AF2 – Talking with others*** Listen and respond to others, including in pairs and in groups, shaping meanings through decisions, suggestions, comments and questions.	***AF3 – Talking within narration, role-play and drama*** Create and sustain different roles and scenarios, adapting techniques in a range of dramatic activities to explore texts, ideas and issues.	***AF4 – Talking about talk*** Understand the range and uses of spoken language – commenting upon meaning and impact – and draw on this when talking to others.
5	**Across a RANGE of contexts:** • select relevant and original ideas to present • confidently express and explain ideas and feelings with some elaboration to make meaning explicit • shape talk in deliberate ways for clarity and effect to engage the listener(s) • adapt vocabulary, grammar, and non-verbal features in ways well-matched to audience, purpose and context	**Across a RANGE of contexts:** • quickly recognise significant details and implicit meanings, developing the speaker's ideas in original or different ways • sustain roles and responsibilities with independence in pairs or groups, sometimes confidently shaping overall direction of talk with effective contributions	**Across a RANGE of contexts:** • show insight into narrative conventions, texts and issues through deliberate choices of speech, gesture, and movement, beginning to sustain and adapt different roles and scenarios	**Across a RANGE of contexts:** • explain features of own and others' language use, showing understanding of effect of varying language for different purposes and situations
4	**Across a RANGE of contexts:** • select relevant and original ideas to present • speak in extended turns to express straightforward ideas and feelings, with some relevant detail • structure talk in ways which support meaning and show attention to the listener(s) • vary vocabulary, grammar, and non-verbal features to suit audience,	**Across a RANGE of contexts:** • show generally clear understanding of content and how it is presented, sometimes introducing new material or ideas • take on straightforward roles and responsibilities in pairs and groups	**Across a RANGE of contexts:** • convey straightforward ideas about narrative conventions, characters and situations, making deliberate choices of speech, gesture, and movement in different roles and scenarios	**Across a RANGE of contexts:** • show understanding of how and why language choices vary in their own and others' talk in different situations
3	**In MOST contexts:** • select relevant ideas to present • develop ideas and feelings over sustained speaking turns	**In MOST contexts:** • respond to the speaker's main ideas, developing them through generally relevant comments and suggestions	**In MOST contexts:** • show understanding of narrative conventions, characters and/or situations by adapting speech,	**In MOST contexts:** • recognise and comment on different ways that meaning can be expressed in own and others' talk

	• organise talk to help the listener(s), with overall structure evident • adapt language and non-verbal features to suit content and audience	• attempt different roles and responsibilities in pairs or groups	gesture, and movement, helping to create roles and scenarios	
2	**In SOME contexts:** • recount experiences and imagine possibilities, often connecting ideas • vary talk in simple ways to gain and hold the attention of at least one listener • make specific vocabulary and non-verbal feature choices that show awareness of different purposes and listeners	**In SOME contexts:** • listen and respond to the speaker, making simple comments and suggestions • make helpful contributions when speaking in turn, in pairs, and in small groups	**In SOME contexts:** • extend experience and ideas, adapting speech, gesture, or movement to simple roles and different scenarios	**In SOME contexts:** • show awareness of ways in which speakers vary talk, and why, through exploring different ways of speaking
1	**In SOME contexts:** • express feelings and ideas when speaking about matters of immediate interest • talk in ways that are audible and intelligible to at least one familiar other • show some awareness of at least one listener by making changes to language and non-verbal features	**In SOME contexts:** • understand and engage with the speaker, demonstrating attentive listening • engage with others through taking turns in pairs and small groups	**In SOME contexts:** • engage in imaginative play, enacting simple characters and situations using everyday speech, gesture, or movement	**In SOME contexts:** • notice simple differences in speakers' use of language, and try out new words and ways of expressing meaning

Chapter Summary

- Preliminary tests show that narrative learning outperforms rote learning.
- It is possible to assess the impact of storytelling upon children's cognitive abilities, such as reasoning and problem-solving.
- A wide sample is required to confirm and strengthen the benefits of storytelling in education. You have the option to participate using the activities in this chapter. Can you help?

The Story So Far...

Part One of this guidance has hopefully left you convinced – if you weren't already – that oral storytelling can greatly benefit your children's development. So now it's time to explore some techniques to enhance *your* storytelling...

PART TWO:
All the better to HEAR you with...

Chapter Four:
The Keyring to Great Storytelling

Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

What's the difference between recounting the story of your day at the pub, and telling a story for an assembly?

Yes, your language will probably vary between these scenarios. But observe those telling anecdotes or jokes in the pub, and you'll likely notice them looking away from their listeners, as if reporting some action being played out on an imaginary screen projected by their memory.

Assuming they are with friends, the anecdote tellers can be sure their audiences are listening carefully, watching their facial expressions for how they should react to the story's drama.

But when storytelling in an assembly, you watch your audience. You watch them partly to check that they are watching you, of course – but also because you are not trying to ***demonstrate*** a reaction to them as much as ***draw reactions from them***.

As mentioned in **Chapter One**, each child will be busy creating the story with their **imaginative investment**. So his or her reactions won't be an imitation of yours – they will be in response to the drama of the story unfolding in their mind's eye.

Their imaginative investment is activated through the fact that you are seeking to engage them with the foundation of almost all good storytelling: ***eye contact***.

"Almost all"...?

The principle here should not be taken to suggest that the blind cannot be good storytellers. In fact, there are several fantastic and popular tellers in the UK who suffer from visual impairment. Such tellers develop methods for engaging their audiences that compensate for the lack of actual eye contact, methods which are largely outside the scope of this guidance – but exciting curiosity at the outset often plays a key part.

The Importance of Eye Contact

It may seem ironic for a largely auditory medium, but it is a fact worth emphasising: ***eye contact supports good storytelling, and is the principle from which all other techniques arise***.

There is something unusually captivating about eyes, even in the animal kingdom. Any animal instinctively knows how to look you in the eye. At times, a pet will even wander into a room having only seen your feet, behaving as if you're not there – and then, as soon as you speak and betray your presence, snap its head around to seek out your eyes with theirs.

The reason for this is largely a mystery. But, with oral storytelling at least, the reason can again be related to the principle of **ownership**.

When you look at your audience, you give them your attention. To a certain extent, they own you. For this to work, though, they have to give you some attention back – meaning they have, again, provided some investment. Both these levels of ownership – their attention ***from*** you and ***to*** you – instinctively inspire a feeling of care towards what you are about to say. And this allows their **imaginative investment** to get a foothold.

Storytelling, Not Showing...

Why Storytellers Are Less Self-Conscious Than Actors

Here is a good place to note one of the fundamental differences between storytelling and "the dramatic arts". An actor in a play pretends to be someone else: a character. In most traditional forms of theatre, that character follows a script and a pattern of behaviour that assumes the audience does not exist. This is the case even when delivering a monologue, which is largely interpreted as a character's conversation with his or herself. So, during a performance, actors will usually seek eye contact only with other actors on the stage.

Theatre practitioners are always trying to break conventions, of course, and there are some very famous forms of theatre where actors consistently address the audience directly ("Oh no they don't!"). Even in these cases, though, they are almost always trying to present a character other than themselves – or else, a "stage version" of themselves.

When you are storytelling, however, you don't need to pretend to be someone else. No-one will judge your ability to swap your personality for another's. You needn't be self-conscious about your own personality being in the limelight either – because each member of your audience will in fact be focused on what his or her mind's eye is revealing to them, far more than their physical sight.

CLASS ACTIVITY:
"Once Upon a Time..."

Photography courtesy of The Grove Primary School

This activity works best with groups of 30 children or fewer.

With the children seated in front of you, tell them they are about to play a game called "Once Upon a Time" – but, as soon as you begin those four words, start steadily (but not ***too*** slowly) looking around the group to make eye contact with every single child whose eyes can be seen. Your tone at this point shouldn't be anything special – at this stage, you are only trying to demonstrate the eye contact.

Follow this immediately by saying you are ***not*** going to be playing a game called "Once Upon a Time" – use exactly the same tone at this point, but deliver the entire four words making eye contact with just one individual.

Begin asking your children if they can spot the difference between your two styles of delivery. If they pick up on a fluctuation in tone or expression, congratulate them for being able to hear a difference you weren't trying to make – but then explain that there was a bigger difference you made ***on purpose*** that they didn't need their ears to notice. Repeat your examples if you deem it necessary.

The difference, of course, is the eye contact. Once your children have worked this out (or have at least spotted that you moved on one occasion, and kept still for the other), explain to them that this is all they need to do to score points in this game: come to the front and say no more than those four words – "Once Upon a Time" – whilst making eye contact with as many people in the audience as they can. Doing this gets them one point.

Go on to say, however, that they can also score ***bonus points*** for making it sound as if they are about to tell a really exciting story! Demonstrate what you mean by saying those four words, making eye contact, and using two or more extra aspects from the chart on the next page.

Make it clear that bonus points can only be received in ***addition*** to the point for eye contact. No eye contact means no points at all.

Finish by giving the group a joint target of points to accumulate within a time limit. If you are playing this for the first time, a good target to pick is the equivalent of one point per child (so 30 for a group of 30). A good time limit to ***give*** is 5 minutes, though note that this will mean 10–15 minutes playing time because of scoring and switching storytellers.

I highly recommend offering a prize if the group hit or exceed their target on time, as this helps motivate those in the audience to keep their eyes "available" for the storyteller to see. The prize could be anything from a story to being allowed out for break time!

Proceed to invite one child up at a time to have a go. During their turns, you should position yourself at one end of the front row, effectively becoming a member of the audience. At the end of each attempt, ask the child to stay while you score them:

First, ask the audience to raise their hand if s/he "looked at you". It's OK to be forgiving of possible porkies in early plays of the game, as this will breed familiarity with the objectives. But as time goes on, watch carefully, and don't give out that point for eye contact unless you're confident it's been earned!

Second, tally up any bonus points you can award the child from the chart below. If a bonus point is being awarded for an aspect performed by a previous contestant, that previous contestant should be thanked (e.g. "Just like Casey, you had a clear voice...").

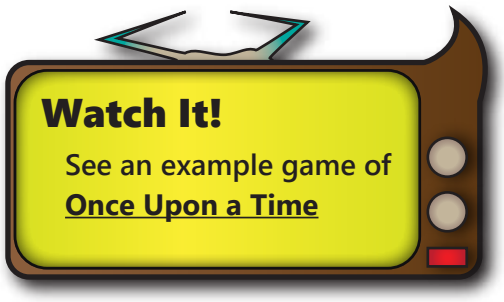
After each turn, applaud the contestant, then remind the group of how many points remain.

Bonus Points

...may be awarded for:

- Going first (only award once!)
- Confident body language
- Clear voice
- "Funny" voice
- Use of gesture
- Standing up (if sat to start)
- Sitting down (if stood to start)
- Smooth head movement
- Sudden start
- Use of suspense
- Making people jump
- Making people laugh
- Taking their time before beginning
- Beginning before you say "Go"!
- Anything else you deem worth a point!
- Looking at you

The last award in that chart is an important one. Most children fail to look at their teacher in this exercise, because the teacher is facilitating the game. But the moment a child includes you in the audience, they have truly crossed the boundary between ***imitating*** a storyteller and ***becoming*** a storyteller. Once you've rewarded this, though, everyone will do it! So I often reward this aspect with two points to the first child who adopts it, and one point to each child thereafter.



Watch It!

See an example game of
Once Upon a Time

Won't they just copy each other?

Yes... and that's what you want! Copying each other means they really are engaging with each other's storytelling. But you will see original ideas pop up too – the group target inspires teamwork to win, but some will still try to outdo their peers on points earned...

Chapter Summary

- Eye contact is the fundamental principle behind almost all engaging storytelling (see box: **"Almost all"...?**).
- Good eye contact throughout will invite continuous **imaginative investment** throughout, ensuring continuous engagement.
- Storytelling is not the same as acting – you can tell a story as yourself, and still achieve the benefits of imaginative investment and narrative learning from the listener(s).

Chapter Five:
The Three Keys of Great Storytelling

Now you are aware of the importance of eye contact, you sit in front of your children to tell them a story, determined to look at them throughout. From the moment you utter those timeless words, "Once upon a time...", they are hooked.

For about two minutes.

Then the fidgeting starts. A few gazes stray to the window. One boy realises he hasn't told his best friend about his weekend yet. And the girl immediately in front of you has developed a haunting fascination with your right shoe.

Despite your annoyance, you can understand why. After all, you as well have begun to feel uncomfortable. Having sat in the same position for the last hundred seconds or so, your neck and eyes are beginning to tire from the strain of trying to ensure every child sees you seeing them...

While eye contact is essential, it's important to remember that it's only the key***ring***. And what's more, you can keep eye contact without even looking at your children...

Key 1: Story Space

I imagine the look on your face right now says something along the lines of, "Wait... What?"

The answer lies in using what I label **eye contact anchors**. Such anchors abound in ***story space***.

KEY CONCEPT

Eye Contact Anchors

An imagined object, character or item of scenery that you treat as if it is there with you in actuality – and, in so doing, encourage your listeners to do the same. Eye contact anchors can be created by the eyes (looking at something as if it is there), the hands (shaping or pointing to the object), or both. To be effective, they must follow the "**Golden Rule of Story Space**" (see over the page).

Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

The power of story space is easy to prove with this simple exercise...

TEACHER ACTIVITY:
Pin the Cow on the Tale

This activity assumes you are familiar with the story of ***Jack and the Beanstalk***. If you are unsure, have a search for it on the Internet.

Either in assembly or with your class, you will tell the story from memory and in your own words – ***but*** be sure you follow this plan...

1. ***Introduce Jack in a field with the cow***
2. ***Jack goes indoors for lunch, Mum tells him they need to sell the cow***
3. ***Jack goes back to give the cow the bad news***
4. ***[Continue however you like]***

For point 1, start by standing to one side of your performance space. Make good eye contact with your audience as you set the scene. When you come to introduce the cow, take some time to describe her, tracing her shape with your hands and looking at her ***as if she is actually in the space beside you***.

As you continue to point 2, move to the other side of your performance space, maintaining good eye contact with your audience as you do so.

At the ***very beginning*** of point 3, look around as if you are puzzled, then address the children directly and say something along the following lines:

"Now, um... Where did I leave the cow?"

Note how the children respond, then continue the story however you wish.

After your telling, consider: How many children pointed to the cow? How many looked back at you with a pleased expression as you went on? Did anyone interrupt to say the cow wasn't really there?

Interruptions of the latter kind are rare, even from children on the autistic spectrum. This is because their mind's eye fills the gap you create ***with your eyes and hands*** so that the existence of the object or character is a literal truth – albeit an imagined one. The creator's mind is inherently aware of being responsible for the imagery, and so willingly suspends disbelief about its invisible nature.

The Golden Rule

Being fictional, objects in story space can achieve impossible activity. Pumpkins transform into carriages. Witches fly away on broomsticks. Genies burst out of tiny lamps. But effective story space always observes one simple rule: **all eye contact anchors must have *mass***.

A common example of ***incorrect*** story space is holding a sword. When wielding imaginary blades, people are often tempted to clench their fist. But **eye contact anchors** have ***potential reality***, which means you would need to wrap your fingers around an imaginary hilt – leaving your fist partially open.

Another important aspect of mass, however, is ***position***. If you go through a door in story space by grabbing the handle on the left and pulling it towards you, then to go back through the door later you will need to grab the handle on the right and push it away from you. Failing to do this will cause the **anchor** to waver, resulting in the eye contact weakening.

This doesn't mean to say you can't transition between scenes. Using story space, you can at last enjoy the world revolving around you – if you want to change the location, simply 'cast' a new one. However, all the while you're in one location, or if you return to one, make sure you look for objects where you left them.

"Sounding" familiar?

If you are practiced in BSL and/or some other forms of sign language, the Golden Rule of story space may be recognisable. Signers often ascribe a spot in the air to the subject of a sentence or paragraph, and indicate that spot when making a later reference to that subject.

Watch It!

All my tellings use story space to one extent or another, but for some very strong examples of "The Golden Rule" watch <u>The Beautiful Girl (Part 1)</u>

Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

Why It Works

When you look at something in your story space as if it's actually there, then your audience have a choice: look at you, or look at the object.

Either way, they are maintaining eye contact. Objects in story space are created as much by your eyes as they are by the shape of your hands, meaning there is always a link to you via the world you are casting – your audience know they need to look back to you to see how the objects will be animated.

However, there is now a lot more movement involved, and no-one is having to stare at just the one spot for the entire duration of a story. It's as if you are at the helm of a magic carpet touring the world of the tale, pointing out what your companions can witness.

Multi-Sensory Learning

As well as making your stories more engaging and memorable for your audiences, story space is a great rehearsal aid – since casting **eye contact anchors** involves your muscles in memorising the tale.

Key 2: Joining In!

Oral storytelling is automatically a participatory art – your audience provide the imaginative power that brings your telling to life. Eye contact is the principle vehicle for this, acting as an open invitation for your audience to engage. Further forms of participation provide more opportunities for your audience to take ownership of the experience, but there is a greater reason to suggest it is an essential technique: it makes it clear *you* are engaged with *them*.

When you pause a story briefly to seek audience comment, suggestion or help, you are acknowledging their role as creators. Little does more to highlight their **imaginative investment**.

There are four main types of participation, for which you can use the acronym **RASP**: Repetition, Atmosphere, Suggestion, Props.

Repetition

This is the simplest form of participation, and should be familiar to anyone who has participated in any formal storytelling course, including the UK National Strategies' Talk For Writing. A refrain is built into the story, often making use of rhyme and/or action, which the audience are encouraged to duplicate.

If you have ever told such a story to your children, you may have already discovered that they rarely need prompting to start joining in with refrains – just a slight pause will usually trigger their participation. But if you want to draw particular attention to the refrain (e.g. to discuss a character's traits afterward), then it can be worth taking a moment to teach the phrase or action. In Nenillo & Nenella, you see both: the children are taught the refrain that transitions between the endings, but soon pick up on others (such as the "huge hug").

Repetition works by reinforcing ownership. When the audience first hear the refrain, it activates their imaginative investment. The second time provides a clue to the trigger for the refrain. Some may join in at that point, but the third repetition is when all will be certain they have made the story "theirs".

Atmosphere

You yourself can easily create an atmosphere – such as with costume, mood lighting, etc. But if you ask your audience to help you create it, then their ownership and engagement in the story will be there before it's even begun.

Watch It!

As with story space, all my tellings involve some form of participation. But for a demonstration of a wide variety of RASP techniques, watch **Nenillo & Nenella**...

Try encouraging your children to think of ways to decorate your classroom just before story time, to transform it into the kind of space for sharing secrets from other worlds. Even students from secondary education (ages 12–16) can throw themselves into such activities, then display a real keenness to hear the first story that will be told to them in "their" space.

You can also invite atmospheric assistance mid-story. For instance, you can ask your audience to show you an expression related to a character's mood or appearance. Another technique is "Voice Jazz" – asking your audience to create a backdrop of sound. Examples of both are in ***Nenillo & Nenella***. Why not try Voice Jazz by placing your 'favourite' class helper or colleague in the middle of a dark forest created by your children? Go on – you know you want to...

Suggestion

It seems obvious that one way you can allow your audience to take ownership over the story is to ask them for suggestions. But beware: ***let them choose the paint, but don't give them the paintbrush!***

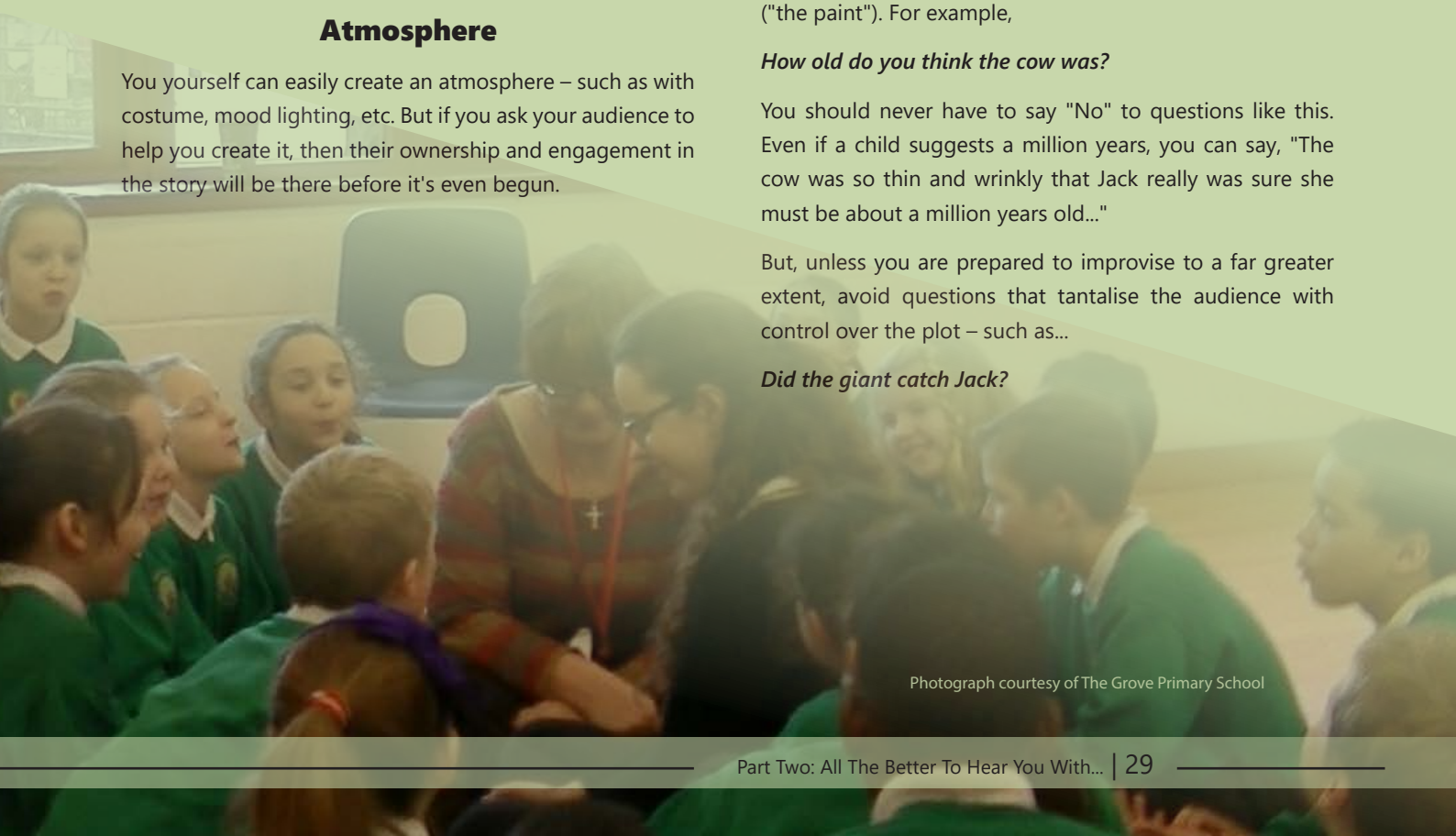
By all means, ask for questions that will colour the story ("the paint"). For example,

How old do you think the cow was?

You should never have to say "No" to questions like this. Even if a child suggests a million years, you can say, "The cow was so thin and wrinkly that Jack really was sure she must be about a million years old..."

But, unless you are prepared to improvise to a far greater extent, avoid questions that tantalise the audience with control over the plot – such as...

Did the giant catch Jack?



Photograph courtesy of The Grove Primary School

Note that such "paintbrush" questions need only be avoided ***during*** the story. It's fine to ask them afterwards to test your children's listening – but if they're hearing the story for the first time, how will they know? Even if a child has heard the tale before, what's to stop them giving you a cheeky answer? Saying "No" to a child's suggestion is a blunt interruption to their ownership of the story.

Certain ***paint*** questions can sound a lot like the ***paintbrush***. In ***Nenillo & Nenella***, for example, the children are invited to suggest potential punishments for the wicked stepmother. Their ideas colour the ***action*** that follows, not just a description. But this is fine: the plot merely requires that she be punished – ***how*** she's punished needn't be set in stone.

Of course, if your goal is to make up a story on the spot using your children's suggestions, then asking paintbrush questions is necessary. And if you feel confident with improvisation (which you will after **Chapter Ten** of this guidance...), you can even sometimes get away with improvising in a known tale. For example, ask...

What could Jack use to chop down the beanstalk?

This question could be taken as either paintbrush or paint. If you consider that the plot only calls for Jack to chop down the beanstalk, then it may not matter how he does so.

Jack remembered that the ice cream in their freezer had got so hard and sharp, it once nearly cut his tongue, so he rushed into the kitchen...

Watch It!

For a detailed study of "paint" suggestions, watch
The House Beside the Graveyard

Props

This final method of participation is linked very closely to story space. By asking children to take on the role of characters – or even objects – you effectively turn them into **eye contact anchors**. They don't need to look the part – your audience will 'dress' them using their **imaginative investment**. But they can be helpful in several situations...

- When you have a character whose presence you want kept in mind
- When you want to combine a character's journey with atmospheric participation
- To highlight a particular struggle with an activity
- To embarrass another member of staff...

...and many more.

Watch It!

All the above reasons for using props can be found in **The Tadpole Prince**

You don't need to ask for volunteers to be props, either. Try auditioning, like in Nenillo & Nenella, or even summoning, as I do in **The Beautiful Girl (Part 2)**...

Animating your props should require little more than simple directions. However, a word of caution about giving out lines. Asking a prop to repeat your phrases can become tedious for the audience, who have to hear everything twice – more so if the prop struggles to hear you the first time. Single lines, like that given to the prince in Nenillo & Nenella, are usually enough. All other times, however, relate dialogue and/or speak for your props.

Keeping Active

If you can encourage your children to use these forms of participation too, you will help them and their audiences get far greater enjoyment – and, thus, engagement – from their tellings. Class activities to help your children develop *their* RASP techniques can be found in Chapter Fifteen.

Photograph courtesy of Shirley Primary School

Key 3: Voice

Quite often, people think of "a good storyteller" as someone who "does all the voices". By now I hope you will agree that this is far from the first principle of good storytelling – rather, strong eye contact, consistent story space and fun participation make for much more engaging oral storytelling than simply changing one's voice for different characters.

But of course, changes in voice are still a big and important aspect of storytelling – largely as an aid to eye contact or story space.

Clarity

The most important aspect of voice, therefore, is clarity. An audible, roundly toned voice with a steady pace (not too fast, not too slow) makes it easier for your audience to make eye contact and engage with your telling – rather than watching your lips as they strain to make out what you're saying.

Illustration: Lianna Weidle

TEACHER ACTIVITY: Throwing the Laugh

This activity is best practiced with colleagues, though can be practiced alone with a mirror.

Step One

Stand facing your colleague or mirror. If trying this with several colleagues, either split into separate pairs or stand together in a circle.

Then begin taking turns to throw each other a laugh. By this, I don't mean a little giggle. I mean a proper, resounding ***belly laugh*** – the kind that makes your body shake.

To help you, try to recall the last time you couldn't help but laugh. A TV comedy show, a child's expression, a noise from a colleague... Whatever it was, think of it – and, as the laugh pushes up from your diaphragm, make the physical action of throwing it to your partner.

Keep going until you are satisfied you're all doing it right. You'll know when that point arrives – you should all be in hysterics!

Step Two

Now repeat step one, but with ***silent belly laughs*** – disengage the throat so you no longer hear any "Ha ha!", "Hee hee!", etc. The only sound you should hear will be the rush of air forced out from your mouth with the strength of your diaphragm – if you're doing proper belly laughs, you won't be able to avoid that.

Step Three

Finally, repeat step two – but this time, attach a word to your belly laugh. Think of it as throwing a laugh carrying your word.

You can make this into an improvisation warm-up too, by ruling that the word you throw cannot be a word that either you or your partner(s) have already said – so you create a string of new words between you.

What's Going On?

When you return to having conversations with each other after this exercise, can you see how volumes have raised around the room? Laughing is a natural warm-up for the voice, because your body is designed to adapt to it: your diaphragm delivers extra 'oomph' to the voicebox... your airway widens to allow that air a smoother passage... and the back of your throat moves back and relaxes to avoid potential damage.

But these effects don't immediately disappear following a belly laugh – they hang around for long enough to affect regular speech, giving it both extra volume and a rounded tone – both *safely*.

This principle is easy to prove. The next time you are sick with cold or 'flu and lose your voice, notice how you still make a sound when needing to belly laugh – the laugh counteracts the effects of the virus.

So think of a laugh as the best warm-up for safely sustaining a strong, clear voice for long periods of storytelling, singing... or even regular teaching. A slight adaptation of Peter Pan's advice to Wendy can help you keep it in mind:

Think happy thoughts, and your voice can fly!

The sound of your voice can be an aid to story space, helping your audience build their picture of a scene or character. Your sound at any one time relies on three aspects: your vocal position, register and quality.[10]

Vocal Position

Scene-setting is usually best done in a voice that sounds detached from the world you're describing. Epic Tales' term for this is the epic position, achieved by giving your voice the fullest possible support from your diaphragm. One way to do this is by imagining that your voice is leaving your body through your navel. Practice on your own, beginning with a word that is itself enthused with an epic nature, e.g. "Gandalf" – hard consonants and long vowels.

Of course, this voice is less suited to narration requiring gentler description, such as moments of quiet, sorrow, romance, sneakiness, etc. For this, you want a softer, warmer voice – though not necessarily quieter. Our term for this is the lyrical position. For this, imagine your voice leaving your body from your heart. Choose a practice word with poetic, lilting consonants, e.g. "Legolas". Take your time with this word – enjoy it.

Finally, when telling in the first-person (e.g. moments of dialogue), you want it to sound as if the character is right there in the room with your audience. We call this the witness position.

So for this one, you want to imagine that your voice is leaving from... your mouth! But when practicing, really concentrate on emphasising the sound of your mouth – perhaps rasp long consonants like "s" and "f" against your lips and teeth, and add a little pop or smack to hard consonants like "p" or "b". An appropriate practice word might be "Bilbo Baggins".

Though we discuss vocal positions here from the viewpoint of narration, note that they can vary between character too. Charismatic nobles like kings will benefit from an epic voice... Advice-sharing wise women might sound lyrical... Cheeky children will almost invariably sound present... And so on.

[10]For the principle of vocal positioning I am greatly indebted to Ashley Ramsden, founder of the UK School of Storytelling – and for the principles of vocal registers and qualities, I must thank Liz VonSeggen, a teacher and minister who uses ventriloquism to great effect in her work in Colorado, USA.

On Air

Ever noticed how voices on the radio often sound more 'present' than in the cinema? This is because sound production in films often tries to round tones to make them more attractive, resulting in voices closer to epic – whereas radio, having a more 'tinny' quality, tends to accentuate the odd "p" or "s".

Vocal Register

Simply put, this means the pitch of your voice. Higher pitches are often associated with smaller, weaker, cheeky or vicious characters; lower pitches suggest large, cumbersome, slow, menacing or unintelligent characters.

Note, though: you should never push your voice beyond its comfort zone. Simply raising the pitch above your standard level will sound high enough for your audience to pick up on the difference. Try humming at your most natural pitch, then raise it slowly one notch at a time whilst counting to five. Talk at the pitch you land upon – that can easily be your high register. Repeat the process in the other direction to find your low register.

Vocal Qualities

This final aspect of the voice includes all other "special effects", such as accents.

Two of the easiest vocal qualities to pick up are the nasal and the breathy. To sound nasal, let your nose vibrate as you speak. Use a 'launch phrase' to help you, such as the word "sing" – hold the "-ng" for as long as you need to get a feel for the quality, then continue to apply it to other words.

The breathy quality is similar to whispering, but not as quiet – you should be adding extra breath over the sound, rather than taking the sound away. As a result, expect to get out of breath very quickly when using this quality!

The nasal quality is useful for annoying, cheeky and/or unintelligent characters (e.g. Janice from Friends). A breathy voice lends itself well to older, wiser, or pained characters.

TEACHER ACTIVITY:

The 27 Voices You Can Already Do

If you've been practicing the above positions, registers and qualities as we've been going along, then congratulations – you're now adept with at least 27 character voices![11]

These are achieved, of course, by mixing up the different aspects. 3 positions x 3 registers x 3 qualities = 27 combinations.

[11] NB: your normal pitch is the third register, and your usual quality is the third quality..

Now try constructing a voice for the following characters. There are no right answers, per se – but test your voice on a colleague and see if they can guess the kind of character you were attempting to assume. A suggestion is given for the first.

- **A wise turtle – epic, low, normal**
- **A witch's cat**
- **An old owl**
- **The king of the donkey**
- **Another of your choice**

Illustration: Lianna Weidle

Chapter Summary

- Eye contact can be maintained without looking at your audience, by making use of ***eye contact anchors*** (see **Key Concept**).
- The ***Golden Rule of Story Space*** (see box) is that eye contact anchors must have mass. This supports the listeners' **imaginative investment**.
- There are 4 main types of audience participation, under the acronym RASP: Repetition, Atmosphere, Suggestion, and Props. The goal of each is to strengthen **imaginative investment** and audience ownership.
- The only voice a storyteller ***must*** be able to achieve is a safe and clear one!

Chapter Six:
Words About Language

Chapter Five gave you a set of key techniques for potent, engaging storytelling. You may now want to use them for immediate developments in your children's vocabulary and/or performance. The good news is you can – and it's easy.

Time after time, teachers come to me after my storytelling sessions – even after a single day – and express surprise at how 'quiet' children were inspired to stand before their peers and give a truly entertaining performance, and/or start using more elaborate vocabulary in their oral and/or written work (my favourite has to be a year 3 class starting to use the word "vociferate"). This has been achieved without my insistence that the children copy my tellings word-for-word. Instead, it has relied upon the concept of **bigging it up**.

KEY CONCEPT

Bigging It Up

Retelling a story known to the listener, but using increasing levels of vocabulary and/or presentation techniques – that the listener can then assimilate due to the principles of natural language development being supported by their **imaginative investment**.

How does it work?

When most people first enter this world, they are presented with an endless series of blobs. These blobs come and go, but one of them usually sticks around more frequently than others. The baby will notice that certain sounds herald the presence of this blob, and begin fancying that replicating those sounds might produce the blob or draw it nearer – which, often, it does. And so they usually learn to call this blob "Mum".

Bigging it up works on the same principle – i.e. the principle by which we naturally learn our native language. It takes a vision already familiar to your children, such as a familiar fairy tale, which enables their **imaginative investment** from the first word of your telling. But, as you retell that tale, you add new levels of vocab, phrases, etc.

As you do this, your children won't need to interrupt you to ask what words mean. Since they already have knowledge of the story, they will see the definitions played out in their minds' eyes.

It's not just vocabulary and phraseology that your children assimilate through bigging it up, though. They will also absorb your performance techniques. Their desire to replicate the joy your performances bring to the entire class will encourage them to build elements of your storytelling into theirs. And, when this is successful, you will notice their confidence with public speaking begin to soar.

Watch It!

For **The Beautiful Girl (Part 2)**, the children were asked to try finding the real ending to the story using four objects. First, they share their ending with me and the class. Then I retell it "to see whether it makes sense". Notice how my telling seamlessly fills in holes in the plot (e.g. why does the prince eat the poisoned walnut?), but also uses a higher level of vocabulary (e.g. "rasping", "shimmering", "charmed") and phraseology (e.g. "even though...", "however...", "the moment she gave him that kiss...").

Another example of **bigging it up** is in **36 Years (An Improvised Tale)**. Here I create the story using very basic language, but then go on to tell it using a wider scope.

But you may spot other examples of **bigging it up** in other clips too. The repetitive structure of **Nenillo & Nenella**, for instance, means that the first instance of a scene is told with a basic level of vocabulary (e.g. "went on and on and on..."), but the second instance uses an advanced level (e.g. "persisted").

Photograph courtesy of Peckover Primary School

CLASS ACTIVITY:
Bigging It Up

This activity aims to show the speed with which your children pick up new vocabulary, phraseology and/or performance techniques after witnessing your storytelling. For your first tale, I suggest one of the following sources:

1. A fairy tale with which the majority of your class are already familiar.
2. A new story that you tell first by restricting yourself to phraseology aimed at the lowest ability level within your class.
3. A new story improvised with your class.
4. A story shared first through an interview of one/a group of your children.

Your children will already have a good deal of **ownership** over a tale from any of these sources – each child should be aware of the plot, and have a reasonably clear vision of the setting and characters in their mind's eye.

Now it's time to stick more advanced vocab and phrases on top of that image. Retell the story using a higher level of expression and/or language. If doing this exercise immediately after hearing a story for the first time (often the case with sources 3 or 4), you may be restricted by your powers of improvisation – but, if you have preparation time, feel free to plan a telling specifically including a word or phrase you want to teach.

After the story, if you used a word that the children are unlikely to have heard before, ask what they think that word means. Repeat at least one of the word's appearances in the story as you ask your question.

Shortly after your telling, give your children a follow-up task, such as performing/writing the tale back to you, performing/writing the same story in a different setting, performing/writing a sequel. Encourage them to use any new vocab or phrases they have picked up.

I expect you'll be pleasantly surprised by how many do – including those of lower ability.

As you progress at using storytelling within your classroom, you may feel confident to give your children the task of **bigging it up** – where "it" can be...

- a story you've told
- a chapter from a book
- story they've created
- a true story (e.g. what happened this morning, what happened last night, etc)
- a story heard elsewhere

Let them know they can tell the story in their own words, but challenge them to make their voices and actions as 'big' as possible. As with the **Once Upon a Time** activity from **Chapter Four**, your children will be eager to copy you and/or their peers' words and phrases in order to get similar good reactions.

However, you may begin to find children fall into a "connective rut" – repeatedly using the same phrases. The most common culprits are "And then...", "But then...", and "So..."

If this becomes a problem for you, try the following activity...

Acknowledgement

The Cut It Out activity was developed in response to a question posed by The Grove Primary teachers Laura-Jayne Hare and Helen Harwood as part of this project – so a big thanks to them!

Photograph courtesy of Peckover Primary School

CLASS ACTIVITY:
Cut It Out

Allow one or a group of your children to tell a story, ideally bigging it up so they and their audience are sure to enjoy it. Pause them after about a minute and say...

"Now, I'd like you to continue the story without using the word 'cat'."

...where "cat" should be a relevant and common word in their story.

Start pointing out when you hear a forbidden word, and operate a "three strikes and you're out" policy to move the game along. If the child manages to keep in the game, pause them after each successive minute to give a harder challenge. The second challenge can be to remove a connective. The third can be a right stinker, just for fun – if they complete the story after that, they can be really proud! Here are some examples using famous fairy tales...

Cinderella
1st – "ugly"
2nd – "then"
3rd – "foot"

Little Red Riding Hood
1st – "house"
2nd – "so"
3rd – "wolf"

Goldilocks
1st – "just"
2nd – "but"
3rd – "my"

Chapter Summary

- Our natural language development involves discovering vocabulary to label our experience.
- Children can assimilate new vocabulary very quickly if stories known to them are retold with a higher vocab level – the process of ***bigging it up*** (see **Key Concept**).

The Story So Far...

Having finished Part Two, you should feel more confident in your storytelling ability. You may have begun using storytelling to develop the language and/or performance skills of your children. But storytelling's educational benefits aren't limited to literacy...

PART THREE:

Using LIES in the Classroom

Chapter Seven:

FINDING STORIES

To get the most out of using storytelling in your classroom, you will need to find stories that meet your learning intentions. The exact terminology varies between schools (e.g. learning objectives, learning targets, etc), so I hope you can forgive me for picking the one that offered the best acronym: LIES – Learning Intentions Enhanced by Storytelling.

The first thing you will need, of course, is a choice of stories. Without a doubt, the best way to find stories is to attend storytelling events. By witnessing a story orally for the first time, you will benefit from your own **ownership** and **narrative learning** to assist your recall of the story. You will also be better able to adapt the story for your own performance and/or lesson planning.

Despite its low profile, oral storytelling is a very vibrant practice throughout Europe. If living or travelling in the UK, visit www.sfs.org.uk/events to search **The Society for Storytelling**'s website for events nearby. You can also follow the link to their **Storytelling Clubs** page to see if there's a regular group local to you. Don't be nervous about attending – these groups welcome listeners just as much as they welcome tellers!

If you are anywhere else in Europe, ask the Federation of European Storytelling for your country's representative storytelling organisation – just email festeurope@gmail.com.

Online Resources

Your preferred search engine will undoubtedly help you find stories if you have a rough idea of what you are searching for. Good keywords to use include **folk**, **tale**, **traditional** and **story**. For instance, you may search for "ancient roman folk tale".

However, beware: a story found in this way ***may*** be authored work within copyright – even if it is described as a "traditional" tale. Adapting the work for use within your classroom alone is fine within the law of most countries (including the UK). But you must not intend to make a profit from any aspect of your adaptation (e.g. as a school drama production).

Of the two most comprehensive websites for traditional tales we have found on the web, my personal first port of call is always www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html – Prof Ashliman's collection of international folktexts arranged by theme. The themes may seem arbitrary, ranging from moral (e.g. "Advice Well Taken") through location (e.g. "China") to famous character (e.g. "Cinderella"). However, the site is split across two pages – so the best way to explore it is to access your browser's search tool (usually by pressing **Ctrl-F**) and type a theme word (e.g. "roman"). Try this on page 1, then follow the link at the top to page 2 and repeat.

If you already know at least one traditional tale in your required theme, the second most useful site is actually **Wikipedia**. Search for your known story, and you will very likely find variations, adaptations, and links to similar tales involving the same characters, openings, endings, etc. ***Rapunzel***, for example, links to ***Rudāba***, ***St Barbara***, ***Petrosinella***, and more.

Referee Your References...

Wikipedia, though a great resource, may again innocently point you to authored works (especially when looking at adaptations).

Story Books

The printed page offers us many fantastic collections of traditional and fairy tales too, though here one must be even more careful not to tread on the fingers of an author publishing their own work. Most (though sadly not all) collections will contain references to their sources, and if the source is listed as traditional/oral then you can be satisfied that the story is available for you to adapt as you choose for your own performance and/or lesson planning. If such references are ***not*** provided, I recommend you search online to see if the tale has a history before the book's date of publication.

My personal favourite printed collections are ***Favourite Folktales from Around the World*** edited by Jane Yolen (ISBN 978-0394751887), which arranges its stories by theme, and ***Best Loved Folktales of the World*** edited by Joanna Cole (ISBN 978-0385189491), which arranges them by country of origin. In the UK, History Press also print the excellent ***Folk Tales*** series, collecting legends from each county compiled by a local storyteller. If you wish to get a fantastic 30% discount on any or all of these titles, you can do so by becoming a member of the **Society for Storytelling** – just visit www.sfs.org.uk/join.

Organising Your Stories

I thoroughly recommend you get into the habit of recording your stories in a simple table for ease of reference. Ideally using your favourite spreadsheet software (e.g. ***MS Excel***), create a table with the following 5 headings:

Title

Most traditional tales, especially those told orally, don't have a specific title. But you can usually attach one yourself quite easily using the name of the main character, or referring to a key event. For instance, if you'd just heard ***Little Red Riding Hood*** without knowing the title, you might name it ***The Wolf in Grandma's Clothing***.

Brief plot

Try to create a simple one-sentence summary of the story, either to jog your memory or to help you search for it later. Most oral tales are easily summarised, e.g. "Girl meets wolf on her travels and tells him she's going to Grandma's, where he goes to wait for her by gobbling Grandma and putting on her clothes."

A quick word...!

You may find it easier to summarise a plot in this way after playing the 2min/1min game with your children, found in Chapter Fifteen...

Theme, Setting and Activities

We'll look at what to put in these headings in **Chapter Nine**. But first we'll explore how to identify the usefulness within a tale...

Chapter Summary

- Stories can be found in a wide variety of places, but you must take care over whether a story is traditional (e.g. folk lore) or authored (and so within copyright).
- The best way to discover ***and remember*** new stories is probably to hear them.
- It is a good idea to keep a record of the stories you find, using a spreadsheet/database that allows you to note their title, plot, theme, setting, and activities.

Chapter Eight:

The Two Types of Want

Some stories come into being solely to entertain. Others are forged entirely from their originator's desire to teach a particular moral. But those which stand the test of time are those that do both.

What We Want to *Hear*

Although oral storytelling can engage an audience from the off thanks to **imaginative investment**, a storyteller is more likely to attract an audience in the first place if the story is one they want to hear. Similarly, if the audience likes the sound of a story, they are more likely to engage with it willingly.

Many folktales contain evidence of this. For instance, we find empathising with characters is easier if they are (or appear to be) from our peer group. Hence stories intended to appeal ***to*** children are most often ***about*** children.

Take ***Little Red Riding Hood***. Stories bridging the generational gap are popular because grandparents often dote on the younger members of their family and vice versa. The tale also boasts several other features we love to hear stories about: spooky forests... talking animals... last-minute rescues... and so on.

The first want, therefore, comes from the listener. It is arguably the most crucial want, as without it the storyteller may not have any listeners – and so can't share their story. But the storyteller also needs to have a reason for telling the story in the first place...

What They Want to *Say*

There are some myths surrounding the original version of ***Little Red***, most of which have no firm contextual evidence – but one thing you can be certain of is that it was a great deal more violent. Not always towards Little Red herself, though – in many early versions of the tale, it is the wolf who ends up discovering the inner workings of the digestive system.

Nevertheless, the basic plot always remains: Red encounters a wolf on her way to Grandma's house, and foolishly reveals her destination. He then runs off to dispose of Grandma and set an elaborate trap for Red.

The real absurdity of this tale isn't the wolf's choice of trap – it's the fact that he doesn't just consume Red on the spot at their first encounter. First, he has to convince Red to talk to a stranger... Later, he tries to trap her using deceit and identity theft, when again he could just clamp his jaws around her throat... It seems the originator of this tale may have wanted to make a point or two.

The most obvious moral is "stranger danger" – warning children not to talk too freely with those met on their travels. The evil of the deceiver is also evident, and would explain the very nasty punishments that the wolf usually suffers.

TEACHER ACTIVITY:

I Want It All

Although this activity is recommended for you to try yourself, it is also an activity that I have run very successfully with children from KS2 and above – so you can try it with them too.

On the next page is a table separating the wants in another famous fairy tale: *Cinderella*. Create your own blank table (I thought to give you one to photocopy, but it's honestly not that hard...), then separate the wants of another fairy tale from the spreadsheet you compiled in Chapter Seven.

What we want	What they want
Success of the underdog	Everybody has a value
Magic	The importance of family
Romance across social divide	Good things come to
Young heroine	

TEACHER ACTIVITY:

Reverse Engineering

Now prepare another blank table, but change the column headings to "What ***they*** want to hear" and "What ***we*** want to say". This time you won't apply it to a known fairy tale. Instead, start filling the "hear" column with subjects, themes and characters that you know to be popular. Here are a few to get you started...

- aliens
- animals
- romance
- search for treasure

Then begin filling the "say" column with some morals or mindsets you (and/or your class) would like to convey to listeners. For example, "Be tidy"... "Be polite"... "Online safety"...

Once you have finished with both columns, pick at least one from each side and draft a short synopsis for a story incorporating those wants. For example, if you took "search for treasure", "aliens" and "online safety"...

A group of children find a website containing a treasure map. They follow it to a field, where they get sucked up into a space ship – the website was a trap! They are placed in a cell together with other abducted creatures, including a peacock. By tickling the aliens with a peacock feather, they manage to escape.

Bringing it all together

You and your class may find this activity easier after playing the Unconnections games found in Chapter Ten...

Chapter Summary

- What the audience wants to hear is important for creating a lasting story.
- What the storyteller wants to say can also shape a story.
- Stories that have stood the test of time usually involve combining both these wants.

Chapter Nine:
LIES (Learning Intentions Enhanced by Storytelling)

Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

Once you know the wants in a tale, from both the listener and the storyteller, you are very nearly ready to use it in your lesson planning. Before we start, however, let's look at those last three columns in the spreadsheet you began in Chapter Seven...

Themes

Elements of what the story is about. These are the "say" wants you were picking out in **Chapter Eight**. In ***Cinderella***, for instance, themes include "the underdog", "personal value", "family" and "humility".

Settings

Elements of what the story ***contains***, as well as where it occurs. If it has multiple scenes, be sure to note all of them. Cinderella lives in a simple medieval cottage, but the prince hails from a medieval city.

Activities

Here you can start thinking about ***practical*** activities you might run with your class that make use of the story. For example, ***Cinderella*** might inspire activities such as designing invitations, making models of pumpkin carriages, trying to sort peas from lentils, etc.

Matching Learning Intentions to Stories

These three columns are the ones you will usually find most useful for choosing the story or stories best suited to a particular Learning Intention. For example, if your LI was...

> ***To understand the nature of cities, boroughs and suburbs.***

...you would scan your list (or use Ctrl-F) for words like "city" or "suburban".

Here, ***Cinderella*** might catch your eye. Perhaps you could tell the tale with an emphasis on describing in detail her journey from quaint suburb to glorious city centre.

Perhaps you have a LI in the same term like...

> ***To begin to understand how statistics might be used to either inform or mislead.***

Since you're already using ***Cinderella*** for one LI in this term, you might want to see if you can use it here. Generally, **settings** link well to narrative or worldly subjects such as history, RE, etc... **themes** can also provide such links, but aid the teaching of social studies too... and your **activities** will usually suggest practical or numerical subjects such as design and technology, science, maths, etc. So for instance, as Cinderella sorts out the peas and lentils, she could be introducing your children to statistical concepts such as percentages, sets, etc.

Now try matching some of ***your*** Learning Intentions to stories in your spreadsheet. If you haven't built too comprehensive a list yet, try using famous fairy tales for now (***Little Red***, ***Goldilocks***, etc). And if you don't have your LIs to hand, practice with these...

> ***To recognise the difference between industrial and agricultural land use***
>
> ***To use a map to gain information***
>
> ***Select from and use a wider range of tools and equipment to perform practical tasks***

Chapter Summary

- The themes, settings, and activities suggested by stories can help you meet and/or enhance your Learning Intentions.

The Story So Far...

Now that you hold an arsenal of storytelling techniques and LIES, vast improvements to your children's development in all subjects are close at hand.

But if you really want to see their imaginations grow – and thus also their aptitude in all uniquely human key skills – little beats helping them become accomplished story-makers and problem solvers...

PART FOUR:

Inspiring Creative Thinking

Chapter Ten:

How the Imagination Works

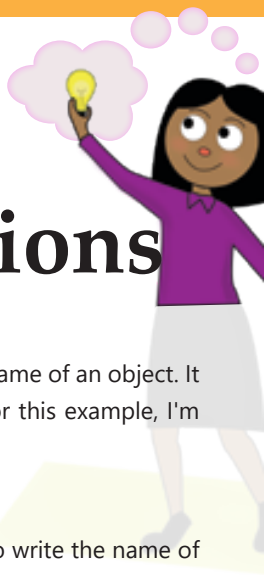
So far, we have looked at storytelling as a means of developing your children's imagination through the automatic interplay of language and context that we all experience by virtue of being human (see Part One), and have explored how this can also develop language (through bigging it up), engagement with any subject (through imaginative investment), recall ability (through narrative learning) and confidence in interacting (through eye contact). Several additional benefits spring out from these, such as concentration ability, public speaking, and the motivation to read more widely to find more stories.

You will probably find the majority of your classwork is significantly improved by these benefits. But encouraging your children to find the art of good story-making will strengthen their imaginations yet further, vastly improving the other human qualities we mentioned in **Chapter One** (ambition, mental arithmetic, empathy, problem-solving, etc).

I picked my words carefully in that last sentence. I used "encouraging" rather than "teaching", and "find" rather than "learn", because a narrative approach inspires more engagement from your children than simple rote methods such as worksheets... But I also used "***good*** story-making", because the discovery of how to make a story that others enjoy is what activates a child's desire to create, share and ***record*** their creations. And that will help you elicit a feeling that teachers often find eludes their children: the **motivation to write**.

Before we look at strengthening the imaginations of your children, however, it's important to strengthen your own. Don't despair – there is no such thing as a person who "lacks imagination" (we'll look again at children who ***appear*** to lack imagination in **Chapter Twelve**). The fact that you can read the phrase "purple elephant" and immediately conceptualise a purple elephant – despite such a creature being entirely fictional[12] – is proof that you have this innate human talent. But, like any other muscle, it will strengthen with exercise. For this, I am going to share with you an activity I invented which is widely acknowledged to be the best way to strengthen one's

[12]As opposed to pink elephants, which have in fact been seen. The BBC caught one on camera in March 2009. Scientists believe it is the elephantine equivalent of an albino.



TEACHER ACTIVITY:

Unconnections

Step One

At the top of a piece of paper, write the name of an object. It can be absolutely any object you like. For this example, I'm going to pick "Moon".

Step Two

Beneath your first object, you're going to write the name of another, following this simple rule: ***it has to be as unconnected as possible from the previous object***.

Note that we're referring to conceptual distance here, as opposed to physical. "The Sun" is very far away from its closest moon in the solar system (which just happens to be ours), but both are obviously heavenly bodies. So a less connected word might be "fridge" – the fridge in my kitchen might be closer to the Moon than the Sun, but you are less likely to associate these two items with each other.

Step Three

Repeat Step Two until you have created a list of five unconnected words. It doesn't matter if the third word has an association with the first (e.g. my next word could be "Sun"), but every word must be disassociated from the word immediately before it in the list.

My example list is as follows:

Moon | Fridge | Sun | Chair | Angel

Don't worry if you're finding this challenging. Already, you are starting to exercise your imagination. Our minds naturally remember objects by their association with other items and/or actions – e.g. we see the word "chair", we automatically think of tables, cushions, sitting, etc. So to go to a different area of your mind entirely in search of a disassociated object is something of a mental leap. But do push yourself to get a full list of five before continuing.

Step Four

Now you are going to take each pair of words in turn, and force yourself to make ***real-life*** connections between those objects.

By "real-life", I mean the connections should not be fictional or probable – they should be instantly verifiable. So "Neil Armstrong probably had a fridge on his spaceship when it landed on the Moon" is not a valid connection, as you would need to find some reference material to verify whether Apollo 11 did or didn't contain a fridge.

Instead, a valid connection might be: "the Moon often looks white in the sky, and fridges are in the category of white goods". Both of these are statements that your mind should instantly recognise as holding truth. In this way, you have found a ***real-life connection***.

Note that it doesn't matter how tenuous the link is between the objects, so long as they are verifiable. For instance: "the Moon was once fabled to be made of cheese, and fridges are the best place to store cheese". Or even: "the Moon usually appears at night, and nights are usually colder than days, and fridges keep things cold" – here, the link is temperature, and each statement remains true.

Try to make as many links for each pair as you can, but make sure you have at least ***two*** for each...

Fridge + Sun: People associate sunny days with ice cream, which is cold like a fridge. | The Sun is usually represented as yellow, orange juice can be yellow, orange juice is kept in the fridge.

Sun + Chair: Trees need the Sun to grow, trees provide wood which can be used to make chairs. | Sun lounging is often accomplished on a deck chair.

Chair + Angel: Angels carry messages, and chairs carry seated individuals. | Both words contain the letter "a".

Photograph courtesy of Peckover Primary School

How It Works

In this activity, you are exercising your imagination in its most basic form. The Random House Dictionary defines "imagination" as "***the forming of new ideas***" – and "to form" is to "***bring together parts to combine or create***". The Collins English Dictionary defines "imagination" as "the faculty or action of ***producing*** ideas", which might suggest you don't need any source material to be imaginative. But, as classic English author Jerome K Jerome observed in his book Dreams, "The human mind can no more produce an original thought than a tree can bear an original fruit."

I recommend you think of it like this: ***the fuel for the imagination is experience***. To form new ideas, we bring together old ones. Sometimes this is a conscious process: Spielberg, for instance, makes no shame in interviews of explaining that he came up with Indiana Jones by combining the ideas of James Bond and archaeology. But it's often also an unconscious one: an author may think they have come up with a completely original idea for their novel, only to find critics reviewing it as a cross between Novel A and Novel B. Even if the author hadn't read Novel A or Novel B, they may have subconsciously combined Novel C (a novel very similar to Novel A) with a personal experience reminiscent of Novel B...

So in this activity, you are reaching across the scope of your experience, and training your mind to forge bridges across some of its widest gaps. The more you do this, the more adept you will become at quickly forming new ideas. Try it before lesson planning as a creative warm-up, or practice a little every day to really boost the speed of your wit. I promise you it won't be long before you're struggling to find unconnected words to build your list – for as soon as you think of an unconnected word, your mind will throw up several real-life connections.

"Widely Acknowledged"?

I know this to be widely accepted as the best way to strengthen the imagination because, as I mentioned above, I invented it. I then went on to read several books which contained the same (or a very similar) activity, for a variety of purposes – training (Kirby), game designing (Bartle), scriptwriting (Costello), novel writing (innumerable!) – each by authors claiming to have invented it themselves!

What this shows is that the activity is the most redacted method for explaining how the imagination works: stripped down, this is how we form new ideas – by taking disparate ones, and linking them together.

CLASS ACTIVITY:
Unconnections (Team Version)

There is an easy adaptation of this activity that I have played with children as young as year 3 (ages 7 to 8). Doing so will help you strengthen their imaginations too, but also give you an insight into just how quickly the imagination can improve...

Step One
Split your children into teams of between 4 and 6. Perhaps let them choose their team names, then list the teams on a white or chalk board.

Step Two
Explain that the teams will take it in turns to list unconnected words, and give an example (e.g. "potato" and "shoe"). The other team(s) should buzz (i.e. raise their hand and make a sound to grab your attention) if they think they spot a connection. Give an example of a connection (e.g. "we eat potatoes for energy, and we need energy to walk, and we wear shoes to protect our feet while walking"). If you, as referee, judge it to be a valid connection, then that team scores a point. NB: it is up to you whether you wish to use the ***real-life*** rule, as used in the **teacher activity** above.

Step Three
Choose a team to be the first to list unconnected words. This should be done on the spot – i.e. point to the first child in the team and ask for a word, then point to the next child in the team and ask for a word "completely different" to the first word, and so on. Leave a few seconds between each one for other teams to buzz if they would like to. Depending on how many children in the team and/or how long you have for the activity, you may go round the team more than once.

Step Four
Repeat Step Three until all teams have had a go at creating the list.

Not only do I expect your children will pick this up incredibly fast, but they may also surprise you with some of their connections (the "potato-shoe" connection used as an example above is one that I was given by a year 5 pupil). In fact, with children all the way up to the age of 18, it usually doesn't take long before teams are putting up their hands even before the next word has been completely uttered!

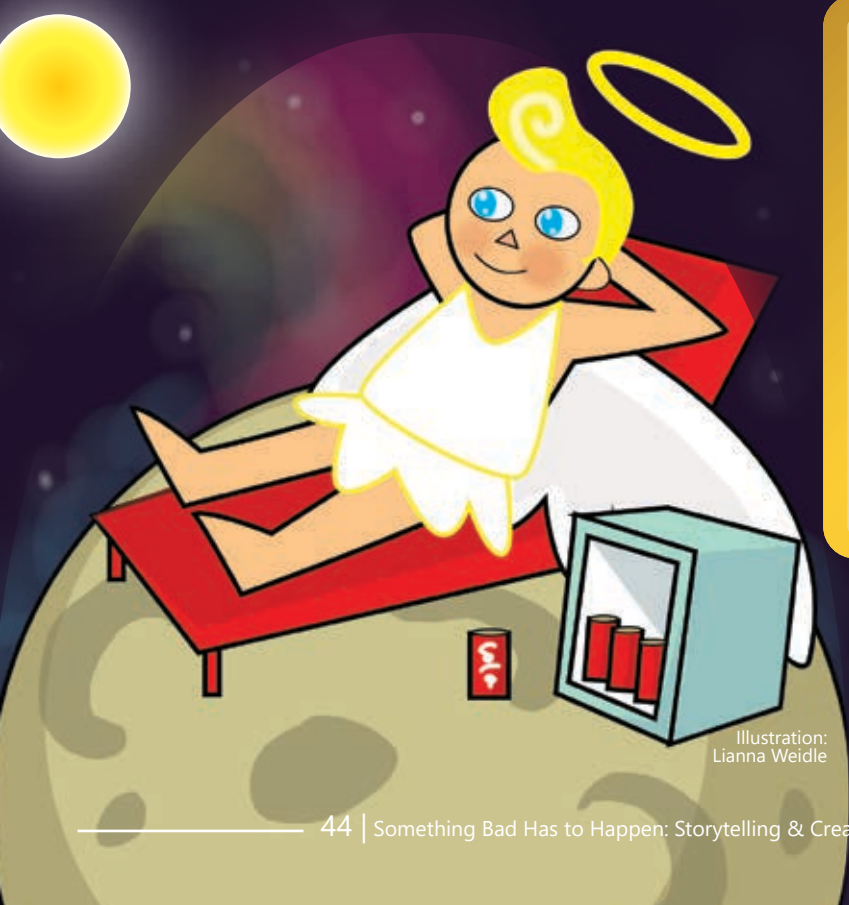


Illustration:
Lianna Weidle

Chapter Summary

- The imagination is like any other muscle – it will grow stronger with exercise.
- The best way to define "imagination" is as ***the forming of new ideas from old ones***.
- Imagination is fuelled by experience. You can strengthen your imagination by searching out unusual but verifiable links across your knowledge.
- Forming new ideas in this way can be conscious or subconscious – but making a conscious effort to strengthen it will improve your subconscious ability too.

Chapter Eleven:
The Secret of "Good" Stories

I mentioned in the previous chapter that children become motivated to create, share and record as soon as they know they are creating a good and/or interesting story. Teachers often tell me how they are amazed at a certain child's keenness to write down a tale they've created during one of my story-making workshops, when that child had previously expressed no interest in writing whatsoever. But what makes a story *good* or *interesting*?

Both of these words, of course, are subjective – and because of the principle of ownership, most children will look at a story they create in a favourable light. But their teachers often find that broader appeal is missing. Overwhelmingly, the most common examples we hear from teachers are the following:

- **An invincible superhero easily cuts through a hoard of attackers.**
- **A prince finds his true love from the common people and marries her.**

Immediately, it is clear that these examples are full of gender stereotypes, and a child who creates one such story is likely to be very happy with their own creation – but will probably be uninterested in the other's.

For the rest of Part Four of this guidance, we will look at how you can help your children overcome these clichés. To do this, we must search for a quality that elicits the interest of an audience beyond the creator – one that meets a wider standard of "good". This is the quality that allows boys to be easily captivated by the story of Cinderella, while girls can just as easily engage with tales of the legendary invincible demigod Hercules.

So what is it that gives a story an unselfish element of appeal?

Something Bad Has to Happen

Every story that has ever stood the test of time bears one remarkable quality: something ***bad*** has to happen.

Be it the kidnapping of a queen (Homer's ***Illiad***), the arrival of a wicked stepmother (***Hansel and Gretel***), an evil wizard's resurfacing to conquer the world (***Lord of the Rings***), a series of animals intending to eat the hero (***The Gruffalo***), a crowd of people laughing at the hero's attempt to do something impossible (***Nasreddin and the Lake of Yoghurt***), or even just a belly-ache (***The Very Hungry Caterpillar***), there is always something negative affecting the characters – regardless of the genre, moral, or intended audience. Even the Teletubbies are famous for regularly needing to say, "Uh-oh!"

Am I wrong? Can you think of a widely-popular tale where nothing bad happens? Please get in touch to let me know... You'll be the first out of hundreds over seven years of asking this question in my workshops!

Note, though, that this "something bad" must relate to a ***character***. In the examples above, the boy's story of attacking hoards wouldn't count, because the hero himself is invincible and needn't have any fear. Note too that the bad thing can be a threat that the hero then manages to avoid (as in ***The Gruffalo***), or even a misunderstanding of the hero by other characters in the tale (as in ***Nasreddin and the Lake of Yoghurt***).

Photograph courtesy of Peckover Primary School

Why It Works

The bad thing in a story is what provides the ***drama*** – a word often associated with narrative, be it in plays, news reports, or family affairs. Philosophers have long explored the reasons for our fascination with drama (e.g. Aristotle's explanation of ***catharsis***), but I propose that it's the link with narrative, the "window of experience" as outlined in **Chapter One**, that really captures our engagement.

Because we live life through narrative, we are intrinsically aware that matters take time to resolve. If something is certain, then it has already been resolved – the outcome of the boy's story is already known, because the invincible hero is certain to succeed. But bad things introduce an element of uncertainty – we can no longer be sure whether our characters will be OK at the end. So we know we are at a beginning, with an end to look forward to.

This is the case even in genres famous for their happy endings, such as romances. We may be sure that Hugh Grant will end up in a solid relationship with Julia Andrews, but we begin with uncertainty over who will have to make the largest sacrifice for their relationship to work.

The Turning Point

Take another look at ***Nenillo & Nenella***. In this clip, I present the children with one beginning to three possible endings. Because it's a fairy tale, you can feel reasonably sure that the children will come out OK. But the bad thing, being left in the forest at the instigation of their wicked stepmother, provides uncertainty over how they will manage it – as evidenced by the very different progressions of the first and second endings. And the third ending reveals that we can only ever be ***reasonably*** sure of a fairy tale having a happy ending...!

Discovering the Secret

The easiest way for children to grasp this concept is to give them the chance to enjoy a broad selection of folk tales. If you've been following this guidance so far, you will already be well on your way to achieving this.

But to begin the discussion with your children over what makes a good story, there is one particular genre of tale that makes the "secret" keenly clear...

CLASS ACTIVITY:

The Quest

You could find a quest to simply tell your children at the start of your discussion, but – as you know from **Chapter One** – your children are more likely to be inspired if you first invite their **imaginative investment**.

Step One

In your planning, come up with a few items of treasure your quest could be for (e.g. flying shoes, never-ending money purse), somewhere exotic it could be hidden (e.g. volcano, swamp), and a creature that could be guarding it (e.g. troll, dragon).

Also plan a series of three or four bad things. My list usually goes...

Long hilly walk | Stuck on a cliff | Stuck in quicksand under an avalanche | Man-eating squirrels

The first one or two obstacles should be relatively simple and without time constraints – this will allow your children to get used to suggesting solutions. However, work towards obstacles where an urgent solution needs to be found. Being stuck in quicksand alone would give you plenty of time to wait for a rescuer to pass by – but if an avalanche is on its way, you need to escape fast!

Step Two

Begin by telling your children you are going on a quest. Let them help you decide what it is for, where it is and what is guarding it – your examples may give them inspiration.

Step Three

Leave your initial position to make it clear that your quest has begun, and explain your first obstacle. Whatever it is – be it the "long hilly walk" mentioned above (which is further than all the food you can carry) or another of your choosing, be sure to mention that you are ***leaving your medieval village***.

Step Four

Ask the children for suggestions for overcoming your obstacle. ***Never just refuse an idea outright***, even if the idea sounds silly. Keep the narrative alive by either (a) acting out an attempt to try the idea and to show how and why it fails, or (b) explaining the reason why it can't work.

Watch It!

See my demonstration of an improvised journey in The Quest

For (b), stating at the outset that you are leaving a medieval village will help you deflect any suggestions that would overcome the obstacle with little effort, and/or bring the quest to an instant end – such as jetpacks. Since you are trying to make these obstacles as hard for yourself as possible, you should also remind your children at various points that you are not a superhero, nor a magician, and you're not carrying a kit bag of useful tools like saws.

Step Five

Allow the children to find a solution that works. Sometimes they will manage this quickly. Other times you may have to use your own imagination to help a suggestion work. Often you can help them along by revealing additional information about your setting in your responses to their non-workable suggestions. Use your discretion, but never let it be too easy – at least not after your second obstacle.

Once you've found that solution, act it out – then move on to the next obstacle. Keep doing this throughout your list, and finish in the location they choose facing the guardian of their choice. All the time, try to keep the story world alive – behave as if you are actually stuck in that quicksand, looking at the teeth of those squirrels, standing at the edge of a stinky swamp, etc.

Step Six

Having completed your quest, ask your children if they thought it was a good story. When they inevitably chorus "Yes!", ask why.

Step Seven

If a child answers that they enjoyed the fact that bad things were happening to you, you can launch straight into the discussion about the secret to good storytelling. With every other answer, remind them that the story wasn't good for you (as a character). If the correct answer isn't forthcoming, tell them that they are obviously too polite to say the truth: that they were enjoying the story because lots of bad things were happening to you.

CLASS ACTIVITY:

Quest Race

Once you have demonstrated a quest, you can give your children the chance to practice "making bad things happen". Children have a tendency to make life easy for their heroes – especially when telling a story where they play the leading roles – which is normal when you consider that their **imaginative investment** results in care for their characters. But this activity will help them to counter this tendency – and the fun of watching your quest will be their motivation for replicating it.

First split your children into teams, then explain the following rules:

1. They must act out bad things as they happen, act out their solutions, then move on to the next bad thing – they're not allowed to just stand still and talk.
2. They have to be themselves – no-one has any superpowers like being strong enough to fight a lion, and no-one can pull a tool (e.g. a chainsaw) out from nowhere.
3. The winner is the team who completes their quest closest to a "secret time" (I usually make this two minutes) – so they shouldn't let their quest go on for too long, nor should they let it be too short. Around four or five bad things will be about right.
4. When they finish, they should let you know by sitting on the floor as a team, with their hands on their heads (so you know they're not just trapped in a dungeon somewhere...).

Occasionally, children try to argue against 2, such as by claiming that they would be able to wrestle a lion. If so, remind your children that these bad things need to be so bad that their lives are in danger – and that couldn't be the case if they were super-strong, able to summon weapons, etc.

Send your children on their quests. I usually allow an extra minute over my secret time for the activity as a whole (though I still announce the winner to be the team that completed their quest closest to two minutes). Afterwards, discuss their bad things and their solutions. Praise them especially for clever solutions (as opposed to lucky ones).

Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

Watch It!

See my demonstration of this activity in
The Quest Race

Photograph courtesy of Hawthorn Primary School

Chapter Summary

- A "good" or "interesting" story is best described as a story containing an unselfish element of appeal.
- A common element to all good stories is that "something bad has to happen" – which puts the certainty of the conclusion in doubt.
- Once you have helped your children to grasp this concept, they will have a strong structure for ensuring their own stories are interesting for other people as well as themselves.

Chapter Twelve:
Drawing Creativity from Your Children

I have worked with tens of thousands of children worldwide in my eight years of storytelling, and not once have I met a child suffering from a lack of imagination. However, I have lost count of the amount of teachers who have *claimed* that their children lack this intrinsic human quality. Their evidence is their experience: they ask these 'unimaginative' children to create a good/interesting story, and the child fails to produce anything worthy, if at all.

The reason for this is not lack of imagination, but actually the exact opposite: too much imagination! If asked to create an interesting story, a child's mind will instantly conjure up a bewildering assortment of options – but modern education's 'test culture' convinces them that they need to find a 'right answer'. How can they pick just one from an overwhelming array of ideas?

One way you can draw out the creativity of your children is with a method I developed and dubbed **restrictive questioning**. To explain the concept, let's take a look at the different questioning methods you may have come across...

Photograph courtesy of St Philip's Primary School

Open Questions

These are questions which invite an infinitely broad answer, such as, "What happens next?" – the possibilities are endless.

As a result, these are the questions that can cause children to freeze with indecision. Subjectivity can also open out a question – e.g. "How could you make this character interesting?" Every individual has a different idea of what is interesting, and the child may be confused by whether they are looking for traits that will interest ***you***, ***them*** or ***their peers***. So open questions are unlikely to be useful for drawing creativity from your children.

Closed Questions

These are questions which carry with them an extremely limited number of options, sometimes even as few as two. For example, True or false? Yes or no? Left, right, or straight ahead?

Their format makes these questions very reminiscent of multiple choice tests, evoking an even stronger sense that the answer will be right or wrong. Even if you would be happy with any answer a child gives, the majority of the creative work has actually been done by you, the questioner. Let's say you ask, "Could the princess be in love with a prince? Or is she going to want to be a knight like her brother instead?" Regardless of which scenario the child opts for, it will be a scenario of your invention. So closed questions

Leading Questions

These are questions that prompt a desired answer. Let's say a child has told you their story is about a girl who lives in a forest. If you wanted to encourage a rags-to-riches story, you might ask, "If the girl was really poor and hungry, what would she need?"

In the context of story-making, leading questions are similar to closed questions. The creative work is yours – the child may not have intended their girl to be poor or hungry, but your question immediately suggests some obvious plot devices: money, food, her family, etc.

Some children can respond to leading questions with 'curved balls' – they may think their poor hungry girl really needs to find a box of matches, a magic carpet, a talking slug, etc. But since such responses are rare, leading questions are also of limited use for drawing creativity from your children.

Restrictive Questions

The most effective questions, therefore, are those that fall between closed and open. I call these **restrictive** because they set boundaries for the child's imagination – but, in reality, the choices are still theoretically endless.

Here's a typical restrictive question using the 'secret' we uncovered in **Chapter Eleven**:

> ***What bad thing could happen to your character?***

This is different to "What happens next?" because it specifies what is required for the child to create a good story. But it is far from a leading or closed question, because the possible answers are still limitless.

Nevertheless, it generates a feeling of security for a child knowing that the boundless scope of their imagination is somewhat constrained.

There is a second element to **restrictive questioning**, however, which is that **you must treat every answer as a *right* answer**. This increases the child's confidence in their ability to produce ideas.

Here are some further examples of **restrictive questions**:

- ***Who is the good character in your story?***
- ***How can you make sure it's not too easy for your character?***
- ***What clever thing can your character do to solve this problem?***

Once you know more details about the child's story, your **restrictive questions** can become more specific. For example, a child may tell you that a giant has a magic sword that turns anyone it touches into statues. One day his golden goose is stolen by two ogres, and the giant gives chase. By the time he catches up with them, however, an army of a hundred ogres has arrived to help their friends. The giant is now outnumbered – and the child can't think how to help him. At this point, you could ask...

> ***Is there any way his magic sword can help him when fighting won't work?***

In the real-life instance behind this example, the child – from Year 3 – felt his bad thing had become too bad! My question suggested he leave behind the idea that his story had to end with a battle. Although the possible magical solutions were endless, providing this sense of focus was all I needed to do to help him find a satisfying and happy end to his tale. The child's solution is in the footnote on this page; but, before you read it, consider – what answer do you think he gave? And what answer would you give?[13]

[13] The child chose to stick with the sword's original power: the giant cut his own thumb and became a statue himself. However, because it was only a small cut, the magic wore off later that day, so the giant could sneak his goose away while the ogres were having a party to celebrate their triumph...

KEY CONCEPT

Restrictive Questioning

A **restrictive question** is one that sets the scope for an answer, but to which the possible answers are still infinite. In other words, it is not the number of answers that is restricted, but the theme or direction.

Watch It!

We managed to capture two clear examples of my use of **restrictive questioning** with children from the Grove Primary School in Cambridge as they created their stories. Watch them in the clip, **Restrictive Questioning**. Notice how I often refer to their story cards to build my **restrictive questions** too (see **Chapter Thirteen** for more about story cards).

CLASS ACTIVITY:
The Flutter-Bye Effect

This activity will help you practice creating **restrictive questions**. Find a story that you are confident your children won't already know (so they're far less likely to respond with the original plot). Pick a point close to the beginning of this story, and try to create a **restrictive question** that could result in the original ending, but could just as easily be interpreted an infinite number of other ways.

Here's an example using a well-known fairy tale, to give you a sense of the task:

Cinderella

Who could arrive to help Cinderella get to the ball?

Although this question points to the intended path of the story, it is still sufficiently open to interpretation. In fact, various cultures have answered this question in different ways. Nowadays Cinderella's rescuer is her fairy godmother, but in the past it's been her dead mother, the prince's sister, and even the Egyptian god Horus.

Now tell the beginning of the story to your children. As you approach the point of your **restrictive question**, pause the story and split your children up into teams. Then give them their challenge: to find the real ending of the story. Say that the real ending holds the answer to a question – and then ask your **restrictive question**.

You can modify this activity in a number of ways, such as by giving each team a 'story bag' containing identical sets of objects relevant to the remainder of the story. Once they've had enough time to create their endings (ten minutes is usually ample), you could even combine this activity with an example of bigging it up – in fact, for the bigging it up demonstration (***The Beautiful Girl (Part 2)***), the children had just completed a similar activity.

Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

Chapter Summary

- There is no such thing as a child (in fact, there's no such thing as a human being) who lacks imagination.
- Children can fail to respond to creative challenges due to indecision at the bewildering array of options suggested by their imagination.
- ***Restrictive questioning*** (see **Key Concept**) is one method I have developed for helping your children discern the best options presented by their imaginations.

Chapter Thirteen:

One Story Structure to Rule Them All

Once you have shown your children that the key to good story-making is that something bad has to happen, you will be amazed by the breadth of stories they create. Since 2009, Epic Tales has been taking some of the stories created by children in our workshops and turning them into successful family productions touring theatres and festivals nationwide. Here are some examples of stories we've told in these shows – all of them from children aged between 6 and 12, and of varying ability. For instance, the first example came from a 7-year-old boy with Asperger syndrome.

A city of dragons is terrified by a spider. When they blow fire on it, the spider gets bigger. But they bravely decide to keep blowing fire on it, until it's so huge it gets sucked up into the vacuum of space.

A girl finds a genie in a teapot, and wishes to be a princess in a palace. But he's an evil genie who twists people's wishes, so she goes to the palace as a maid. However, this gives her the chance to cook up some hot porridge to pour into the teapot, stopping the genie from harming the prince. He marries her – so she gets her wish after all!

A boy is turned into an oven by a mean wizard. He manages to attract his mother's attention by burning the word "Help" into a pie. She gives the pie to the wizard, and after he's eaten it she pretends it was poisoned so she can blackmail him: the antidote in return for reversing the spell.

None of these stories made use of characters, settings or plots provided by us or teachers. The content was entirely devised by the children themselves, relying solely on the principle that **something bad has to happen**.

Capture Your Children's Interest in Any Subject

Although they were all very different, you could probably envision all of the above tales fitting neatly into a single family show. We achieved this by encouraging children to remain within the fairy tale genre – not by specifying elements that they had to use, but by using ***story cards***.

There are commercial story cards available, but I highly recommend you follow the steps in the **class activity** on the next page in which your children create a deck of story cards themselves. This will allow you to make use of every engagement-enhancing benefit of storytelling to the upmost – be it for history, geography, maths, social education, or indeed absolutely any topic you need to teach.

It works like this: You choose the topic and set three or four categories for the cards, but they research and create them – thoroughly placing their **imaginative investment** in the topic, which secures their engagement. By redistributing the cards and challenging your children to use them to create a new story, you reap additional **imaginative investment**. But they may also now need to research the subjects on the cards they've received – research that will then be solidified in their memory through the **narrative learning** involved in story-making.

Here are some example categories for various topics:

Geology:
type of rock | type of plant | type of fuel | type of natural disaster

Maths:
2D shape | 3D shape | type of number

Ancient Greece:
item of clothing | tool | something used for fun | building

Social science:
an emotion | an expression | a tone of voice

Physics:
a force | a piece of measuring equipment | something seen in space

Provide reference books and/or show a few documentaries in class that your children can use for inspiration. Afterwards, shuffle their cards and give each child (or group of children) three or four cards at random with which to create a story in which **something bad has to happen**. Because they will already be immersed in the subject, you can be confident the stories will make use of the research they've already made. But if they receive cards for objects or concepts with which they're not familiar, they may need to conduct additional research.

So by the end of this exercise, your children will have self-taught themselves between four and eight elements of your topic – motivated by their **imaginative investment** and cemented through **narrative learning**.

CLASS ACTIVITY: Story Cards

Photograph courtesy of The Grove Primary

This is the basic structure of the activity, which makes use of fairy tales – a great way to introduce your children to the concept of story cards. After completing this activity, though, see the previous page for suggestions on incorporating other topics.

Preparation

Step One

Create presentation slides for some fairy tales that are well-known to your class, each revealing an object from each of the following four categories:

1. ***Character object – something that is worn or carried by a particular person (at least within the story)***
2. ***Standard object – something that anyone could pick up and/or use***
3. ***Fixed object – something that can't be moved, e.g. a castle***
4. ***Something magical – an element that doesn't exist in the real world***

Here are some examples, that you're welcome to use if familiar to your children...

Little Red Riding Hood
red cape | bed | forest | talking wolf

Sleeping Beauty
crown | spinning wheel | castle | wicked fairy godmother

Snow White
pick axe | apple | cottage | magic mirror

Shared Speaking & Listening

Step Two

For each example fairy tale, challenge your children to guess the story by looking at the appropriate set of objects. Extra fun can be had by showing the objects one at a time, taking guesses after each new revelation and trying to save the most obvious (e.g. the red cape, the spinning wheel, the magic mirror) until last. Open the discussion to consider whether some of the cards could be shared between the stories (e.g. the bed, the crown, the cottage).

Step Three

Start discussing the four categories. Invite your children to suggest other objects from those fairy tales (e.g. grandma's nightcap), and then decide together which category they would fall into. Some may fit into more than one.

Independent Work

Step Four

Hand out four blank cards to each child, and explain that they should now create one card for each category. They can use any of the examples already discussed, or think of objects from fairy tales they know that haven't yet been mentioned. They don't need to restrict themselves to one story either: if they want to take their character object from ***Rapunzel***, their standard object from ***Hansel & Gretel***, their fixed object from ***Three Billy Goats Gruff*** and their magical object from ***The Princess and the Frog***, that's fine too.

Their cards should have pictures, and ideally also be labelled (you may need to help some children to write clear labels). But note: **make sure the children *do not* put their name anywhere on any card**.

Step Five

Afterwards, collect all the story cards into a single deck. Shuffle them up, and choose four to create an improvised tale. If you feel able, you can pick the cards at random in front of your children and go straight into improvising and performing a tale – but feel free to pause the activity here and return with a fully developed story later in the week.

Step Six

Deal four cards at random to each child and/or children working in groups, and challenge them to create a story (orally at first – they can always act it out/write it down later). There are only two rules:

1. **Something bad has to happen**
2. **They must use all the objects on their cards – but they can use other objects if they wish**

Chapter Summary

- The "something bad" principle is a useful aid to **restrictive questioning**.
- Story cards can also aid restrictive questioning – and can be themed around any subject in your curriculum.
- Using story cards is also a major aid to gaining your children's **imaginative investment** in a topic.

PART FIVE:
THE STORYTELLING BAZAAR

Chapter Fourteen:
Motivating Your Children to Write and Share

Illustration: Lianna Weidle

If, by now, you have followed the programme in Part Four for inspiring your children's creative thinking (strengthening your imagination, strengthening their imagination, discovering the secret of good stories, and helping them craft great stories using a combination of restrictive questioning and story cards), your children should each be proud owners of at least one brand new story. Stories full of their imaginative investment.

It's because of this investment that you may have already had some children ask you if they can record their stories in some way – be it on video, as artwork, or in writing. They care about their stories, and are excited by how good they are. This means they have some desire to share them with the world.

A Grimm Example

Even if some or all of your children haven't yet approached you with some such request, the desire will be there – you just need to solicit it. By far the best way I have encountered for doing so is by expressing your enthusiasm for sharing their stories, and reminding them of the impact they could have in the world.

In 1812, Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm published their collection of ***Children's and Household Tales***, bringing together folklore from across Germany. The book was sold around the world, and families started telling their favourite Grimm fairy tales to each other and to their friends. Eventually they even went to America, where Disney made some of them into cartoons. Nowadays, there is hardly a person in the world who doesn't know at least one Grimm fairy tale, such as ***Little Red Riding Hood***, ***Cinderella*** or ***Snow White***.

Tell the above story to your children, and finish by going one step further: if it happened for the Grimm brothers, it could happen for the children in your class. It's easy to do this, too. Contact another school – maybe a school nearby, maybe elsewhere in your country, maybe elsewhere in the world – and offer to send them a collection of your children's stories, perhaps in exchange for some stories in return.

If you do this, who knows? Maybe one day it will be stories created by ***your children*** that are world-famous, being made into movies by Disney...!

Why We Write

It's important to tie the above story in with the reason we write. We don't write to pass tests – we write to ***record things for the future***, either for us or for others to look at. Keep the focus on this, and you will have little trouble encouraging your children to put their oral stories into written form.

Once they develop this desire, though, you will find it comes with a desire to make sure others understand their writing. In this way, you will inspire them to ***consciously seek out*** ways to improve their writing. Again, this means they'll be engaged with their learning – which should have a noticeable positive effect when the time comes to test their writing.

It can be useful to break up the writing process into stages. First, encourage your children to put their story down onto paper ***however they like*** – but don't give them long. Don't give them the opportunity to try and construct proper sentences, or draw amazing pictures! You don't want them to worry about extraneous details just yet – the first and most important thing is to ensure that they have a record of their story that ***they*** can turn to, and ***they*** will understand. So state explicitly that you won't be marking these papers, and they needn't care about their handwriting, spellings, or hastily drawn pictures. If you're familiar with Talk For Writing, you could recommend your children sketch out a story map at this stage.

Then ***hear*** their tales, and **big them up** if required (either yourself or between children working in groups). This allows them to solidify their understanding of their stories, develop the language they'll use to tell them, and increase their enthusiasm for setting the stories down in a format they can share beyond the classroom.

Of course, nothing will do more to increase your children's desire to write and spread their story than letting them witness, first-hand, audiences enjoying their stories. This is where the storytelling bazaar comes in...

Chapter Summary

- Children naturally desire to share the results of their creativity when they are sure others will enjoy it. This desire can be harnessed to improve their writing.
- The stories your children create stand as much chance of one day being world famous as the Grimms' collection of folk tales.
- We don't write to pass tests – we write to record things for the future.
- If children create a story they care about, they are motivated to record their creation in writing – and this inspires them to pick up the skills that will help them pass tests.

Photograph courtesy of Vali Mithat Saylam Secondary School

Chapter Fifteen: Planning Your

What is a Storytelling Bazaar?

Up until very recently, the markets of Marrakech in Morocco were places you could go to buy clothes, food, local crafts... and stories. Oral storytellers would gather shoppers on carpets under tents and tell them a tale, right there amidst the hustle and bustle of haggling. The tale would end, the audience would continue their day of shopping... and a new audience would join the teller.

Sadly this tradition is dying out, but it did inspire us to replicate it in several of the schools we visited. Doing so, we discovered it provided children with two major benefits that were missing from conventional staged presentations...

Confidence

If children are asked to perform their stories on a stage, standing up in front of even just ten adults plus a fair amount of their peers, there's a high chance they will suffer from performance anxiety – regardless of how keen they are to share their created work.

In a **storytelling bazaar**, though, the audience is divided into several smaller groups, who travel from child to child. The first benefit of this is that the experience is far more intimate, and so less nerve-wracking. The second benefit is that this confidence continues to grow, as each child performs their story anew to each successive audience.

A third benefit can also be gained if the audience are seated on the floor, on mats and cushions, while the child (or group of children) stand or sit on chairs before them. This puts the children in a position of power reminiscent of your storytelling to them, and this sensation of control also goes some way to improving their confidence.

Developing Interaction

Repeatedly performing their story means your children are constantly rehearsing it, but also adapting in response to how their audiences interact with the story. The audience may surprise them the first time round, by laughing at a moment of humour the child hadn't realised was there. Once aware of it, though, the child may well spend more time drawing out this moment with the next audience who come along.

Depending on your set-up, you may also notice children **bigging up** their storytelling to keep pace with their peers. At the bazaar I attended for this project in Kırşehir, I listened to one young teller who occasionally put on a mask to represent certain characters. Afterwards, I suggested she encourage her audience to join in with some actions. I then moved to hear another teller, and afterward suggested some sound effects she could build into her telling. By the time I'd listened to a third story, though, I looked back over to the first teller – and saw that she hadn't just taken up the advice I gave ***her***, but the advice I'd given the second teller too! What's more, in addition to getting her audience to join in actions ***and*** sound effects, she was even starting to give her masks to her audiences, using them as props.

How It Works

I have seen storytelling bazaars in which children performed stories of their own creation, others using existing fairy tales, and others that were a combination of both. The performance styles have also varied, even within the same bazaar – from simple oral storytelling, through puppet shows, to a child offering you a photocopy of their hand-drawn comic book. However you do it, though, the key to any storytelling bazaar is preparation.

First, work out how many **stalls** you will need. A stall is the bazaar term for a storytelling performance space. Each stall will have at least one story, told by either an individual child or a group of several children – so begin by working out how many stories you have.

It can be beneficial to have more than one story per stall, as this gives the tellers a break after every audience to recover their energies, while still supporting their peers. However, to ensure each story gets told at least twice (to allow for all the benefits mentioned above to occur), I would recommend no more than three stories per stall.

Then decide on the location of your stalls. If you only have six, you can potentially fit them all in a single school hall. As mentioned above, it can be beneficial for **bigging it up** if the children are within earshot of each other's stories. But it could quickly get too busy or noisy if you have a large number of children, stalls and/or audience in the same space, so you may want to branch out into other rooms – or even gazebos outside.

Photograph courtesy of Rackheath Primary School

Photograph courtesy of Vali Mithat Saylam Secondary School

The decoration of a stall should always be decided in conjunction with the children performing in that space, as it may influence – or be influenced by – their chosen method of storytelling (see below). Of course it will always be limited by the resources available to you – while I have seen some schools bring tents and cushions into their classrooms and co-opt another year group to run a sticker-based ticketing system, I have also been at schools where the children had little more than their story title drawn on A3 to mark their space. The important aspect, though, is that the children have some control over the look of the space – so they put their **imaginative investment** into it.

Methods of Storytelling

Before your children begin rehearsing for their bazaar, I recommend discussing different ways stories are told, which could be practical for them, and which one each separate child or group would like to use. You can, of course, set the performance style, and around half of the schools I've worked with require their children to tell their stories orally and/or as a short play. But it's worth remembering that every child is different, and will be able to get more of the benefits of **imaginative investment** if they are 100% happy with their performance method. Here are some options:

Oral storytelling – the simplest for you to demonstrate.

Short play, puppet show, or video screening – especially ideal for groups comprised of extroverts and introverts, because short plays don't just need actors. Some of the children in the group could get involved by scripting, designing masks, making puppets or props, producing sound effects on musical instruments, holding the camera, etc.

Book writing – stalls containing piles of photocopies of the children's written and/or illustrated work can add a special authentic marketplace vibe to your bazaar, and provide a quiet place for your audience to rest and read.

Audio recordings – advantageous for great but shy performers, who may still be happy to record themselves telling their tale to a microphone for later playback at a stall with a sound system.

Photograph courtesy of All Saints Primary School

Preparing Your Children

Allow your children plenty of time to rehearse, retelling their tales to each other a few times – perhaps even telling each other's stories back to them to allow room for bigging it up. A great way to help them quickly learn their story by heart is to use the **2min/1min** activity on the next page.

If your children are planning to use traditional storytelling or a dramatic technique – or if your goal is to encourage their use of these performance styles – then the other activities in this chapter can help you develop their use of voice and **RASP** participation.

Preparing Your Audience

At the beginning of the event itself, gather all your audience to explain the rules...

- **Move quietly between stalls**
- **You can join a story part way through, but please don't leave a stall in the middle of a story**
- **Please sit on the cushions/mats on the floor, or advise a nearby member of staff if you have health issues that will prevent this**
- **Please join in where possible!**

If you can, I recommend taking the lead from William Westley Primary in Cambridgeshire who produced programmes for the grown-ups to carry, which included a map of the stalls. I also recommend you strongly advise parents ***not*** to dash straight to see their own child, as each child will perform at his or her best ***after*** their first telling.

One final suggestion: keep a box of tissues close to every stall. I have seen parents moved to tears of joy by seeing their children confidently standing before them and telling a fantastic and detailed story of their own creation that receives a positive response from all those watching.

There isn't space in this guidance to provide any examples of **storytelling bazaars**, but in the evaluation of this project you will find the response of the teachers who ran bazaars with their children in Cambridgeshire and Kırşehir. Visit www.regiostorytelling.com for their case studies.

Photograph courtesy of Peckover Primary School

CLASS ACTIVITY:
2min/1min

This activity aims to help your children easily recall a story recently heard, read, or created, and so is best used as soon as possible after they've done so. But it also encourages them to tell a tale in their own words, without recourse to written work, story maps, etc.

Step One

Be openly enthusiastic about this activity – I usually introduce it by saying, "We are now going to play my favourite storytelling game in the world ***ever***." Which, incidentally, it is.

Split your children into pairs. If playing this game with children who have created stories in groups, it can be beneficial to ensure those children are paired with others who do not know their story (i.e. children from other groups). If you have an odd number, you or an assistant will need to pair up with a child, who will automatically be a 'number one'. Select number ones for all others pairs too.

Step Two (Round One)

Tell number ones they will have two minutes to tell their story to number two, but they are ***not allowed to finish***.

Provide the following additional rules:

- ***They must speak at a normal speed (i.e. they aren't allowed to talk super-slowly)***
- ***They aren't allowed to pause their story***
- ***They aren't allowed to* go beyond *the end of the story (e.g. making up a sequel) – they have to stay at the beginning or in the middle***
- ***If they want to, they* can *use different voices, actions, and even get their partner joining in***

If playing this game for the first time, you may wish to discuss some of the ways they could ensure their story lasts for longer than two minutes, such as adding extra character detail or setting description.

Tell number twos that they have an important job as well. They need to listen to the story, because at the end you will ask them if number one has been telling their story for the whole time, and did not finish.

Step Three

Let number ones attempt the activity. Stop them after two minutes, and ask number twos to confirm if they succeeded. Then give number twos a chance to try the activity, with number ones listening and reporting. (NB: If you or an assistant have been working with the odd one out, that child can here listen to another child's story.)

Finish this step by explaining that this game isn't just fun – it's great practice for being a storyteller. Because if they can keep their story interesting for over two minutes, their imaginations are working really well.

But it's not over yet...

Step Four (Round Two)

Tell number ones it's their turn again, only this time you're only giving them one minute... to tell ***everything***. The rules are...

- ***They can't miss out anything important – they must tell the beginning, the middle, and the end***
- ***They need to be clear enough for their partner to understand what they are saying***

Again, you may wish to discuss how this can be achieved – e.g. by ***removing*** unnecessary description. As before, number twos should be asked to listen carefully so they can let you know at the end if their partner succeeded.

Step Five

Let number ones attempt the activity. Stop them after a minute, and ask number twos to say if their partner ***did*** finish their story, ***and told it clearly***. Then let number twos give it a go, with number ones listening and reporting.

Finish the game by explaining that this is ***also*** great practice for being a storyteller. Because if they can make their story really small, it will take up less room in their brain – making it easier to remember. They can then use the fantastic imaginations they proved they had in Round One to let their stories grow again.

CLASS ACTIVITY:
A Bird in a Tree

This simple activity allows you to explore different voices with your children. It is based on the game ***Boom Chicka Boom***, popular in the UK with children's clubs such as the Scouts and Guides.

Explain to your children that you are going to perform a simple poem, and they should repeat after you whenever you hold your hand to your ear (you will do this after every line). However, they shouldn't just repeat the ***words***, but should use the ***same style of voice*** as well.

You can use the poem below, or the original ***Boom Chicka Boom***, or indeed any words of your choice.

I see a bird in a tree
I see a bird in a tree
I see a little cheeky birdie flapping feathers in a tree
Oh yeah
Uh huh
Once more
But in a... **or** ***But like you're a...***

Each time, the poem ends by announcing the next voice. Always begin with your normal voice, so that your children can easily pick up the words and the rhythm. The other voices you try are limited only by your imagination – which, as you should now be aware, is limitless! Try pitches (high, low), qualities (e.g. nasal, breathy), accents, characters (e.g. witches, babies), even sound effects (e.g. racing cars, howling winds).

CLASS ACTIVITY:
Penguin Racing

This classic drama game helps your children get inventive with creating simple physical actions, and then leading others in using those actions. These skills can then carry over into their storytelling as the 'action' element of **RASP** participation.

Stand your children in a circle and tell them they are going to follow some penguins on a race. Explain that there are several obstacles in the race that they will need to listen out for. Then teach them the following basic actions:

- ***Racing*** **(slapping thighs)**
- ***Turning left/right*** **(leaning to either side)**
- ***Chicane*** **(leaning left then immediately right)**
- ***Jumping***
- ***Tunnel*** **(crouching and wiggling)**
- ***Helicopter*** **(pausing to look up in wonder, watching the rotating blades)**
- ***Worm on the track!*** **(quick scream, then a slow finger crawl)**

After going through each of the actions, lead the first penguin race yourself. Make sure you use all of the actions at least once.

Next, ask the children to suggest new actions. Children have given me great suggestions in the past, from swimming, through surfboarding, to stopping to buy a lolly from an ice cream van. Lead another race or two with these suggested actions.

Finally, hand the lead over to another child (either of your choice, or a volunteer) and let them know they are allowed to invent extra actions if they like. Repeat until you've had too much fun!

Illustration: Erica Terry-Rose

CLASS ACTIVITY:

Yes/No, Try Again

Our final activity is designed to help your children get used to letting their stories be 'painted' by an audience, without affecting the actual plot – the 'suggestion' element of **RASP** participation.

This activity can make use of existing tales, stories already created by your children, or even stories improvised by your children throughout the course of the game.

First, place your children into pairs. If you have an odd number, then one child will need to partner with you or an assistant. Choose one partner in each pair to be the storyteller.

Explain that the storyteller is going to tell their story one sentence at a time. Each sentence must include at least one description word, for example...

Cinderella lived miserably in a huge house

After each sentence, the storyteller's partner must decide if they like the description. If they do, they say "Yes" – and the storyteller tells the next sentence of the story in the same way. The storyteller should follow the original plot of the story (unless you are allowing them to improvise a story specifically for this activity).

However, after any sentence, the storyteller's partner can say, "No, try again." If they do, the storyteller must repeat the sentence but with a change to the description. For example...

*Cinderella lived miserably in **an ugly** house*

The partner can say "No" as often as they like until the storyteller produces a description to which they want to say "Yes".

Chapter Summary

- **A storytelling bazaar offers your children the chance to improve their confidence in public speaking far more than conventional, staged presentations.**
- **There are many different ways to present stories, and each child will have their own preference. Allowing them to follow through on this will go a long way to improving their imaginative investment, engagement, and imagination as a whole.**

Conclusion:
Education for the Next
30,000 YEARS

Photograph courtesy of Peckover Primary School

If you are a teacher who uses storytelling in your classroom, then thank you: you are helping to ensure that the human race lives on for at least another 30,000 years.

Knowing facts, using existing tools, replicating existing practices... These are all helpful abilities for everyday living. They kept the Neanderthals alive right up until the climate changes of around 30-40 millennia ago.

But where modern humans survived was in their ability to rapidly adapt their way of life to new territories and conditions. They didn't have to wait to see which genetic mutations were able to continue unhindered across new terrain – they observed the changes, and instantly began thinking of how they could endure them. Whether you believe it came from God or evolution, mankind had already received its most important gift: ***the imagination***. This meant that, for Homo Sapiens, it was no longer a question of "survival of the fittest" – it had become "survival of the most imaginative".

As we've explored in this guidance, the imagination can help children pick up facts, tools, and practices. But it can also heighten their creative thinking – their problem-solving, ambition, hypothesising, empathy, etc. It can make them better human beings. And one of the easiest ways to improve their imagination is to place an emphasis on **narrative learning** in your classroom.

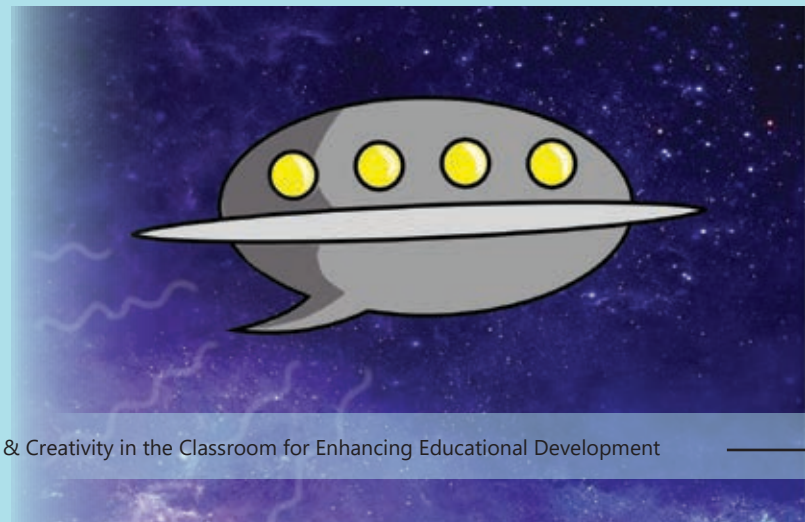
Remembering a list of dates will help us pass a test, but storytelling can help us develop strategies for coping with climate change... exploring our solar system... looking after our global neighbours... and so much more. And not only that, it's a more enjoyable process too.

So please help us share this information around. You can easily share this guidance with your colleagues, both those in your school and those further afield. But please don't forget – ***wherever you are in the world***, you can also contribute to the largest ever scientific gathering of data on the impact of storytelling in education. Simply complete the activities in **Chapter Three** as close to the instructions as possible, and submit the results via www.RegioStorytelling.com/results

If you do this, then we stand a greater chance of compiling a global case for storytelling-based curricula – potentially improving the education of children everywhere. We know it can be done. – aAfter all, if a little spider can take on a swarm of wasps with stings like fire, a snake that swallows men whole, and a leopard with teeth like spears... anything is possible.

Or, to put it another way: if a mind can *imagine* how a little spider might overcome overwhelming odds, then no odds can ever really be overwhelming.

Illustration: Lianna Weidle



About the Author

Chip Colquhoun began writing stories before entering primary education. From high school to university, he enjoyed writing plays for his peers to perform – some of which were produced by his schools to raise money for local charities. He graduated from the University of Cambridge with a degree in Law.

After brief periods as a film legal consultant and a marketing adviser, Chip joined Amy Robinson (a Cambridge graduate with first-class honours in English) to co-found Epic Tales in 2007. Together they secured funding from the Arts Council of England to research and develop many of the theory and activities found in this guidance. Since then, Chip has written, directed and/or performed for four national theatre tours, three international cultural festivals, and hundreds of schools across Europe, Asia and South America – as well as digital examples of storytelling produced by the Oxford University Press and Kevin Mayhew Publishing, many of which can be found online.

Chip is currently Vice Chair of the Society for Storytelling (a UK charity) and a member of the International Council on Monuments and Sites panel for safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. He has also been commissioned to write a collection of ***Cambridgeshire Children's Folk Tales*** to be published by The History Press in 2016.




What if there was an education technique that could apply to absolutely any curriculum subject, whilst improving your children's memory, language, social interaction, concentration, confidence and problem-solving... all simultaneously?

The good news is that there is – and it's a proven technique that has ensured the survival of humanity for over 30,000 years more than similar species such as the Neanderthals. The technique is ***oral storytelling***.

This guidance...

- **details how storytelling saved our species from extinction, where use of tools alone could not**
- **explores why and how storytelling works to engage, enthral, and enhance learning**
- **sets out techniques you can use to improve your own storytelling, regardless of your current level**
- **provides guidance on implementing storytelling in your lesson planning**
- **gives you a full approach to improving the creativity of your children, and using it to stimulate their interest in absolutely any area of your curriculum**
- **brings all these aspects together to help you motivate your children to share their development and learning, including encouraging them to write**

All this is presented with fun, effective and confidence-boosting activities – for your children ***and*** yourself and your colleagues.

Read this guidance to unlock the secrets to good storytelling, good story writing, and ensuring the continuation of humanity for the next 30,000 years...