



Creating Storybooks with Children

This Guide focuses on storybook development with children, especially younger children – less than 12 years of age. Creating and writing a story and developing a storybook is a rewarding process that involves a range of activities and competencies. The process can also be a way for children to reflect on their life experiences and to make meaning of those experiences in a story.

The main outcome of the process is for children is to write and create pictures for their own storybooks on paper and/or in digital form. Teachers and librarians can link or adapt the activities in this Guide to their curricula – especially literacy, language and arts subjects – and use the process for a school project. Storybook creation also works well as a holiday workshop.

Storybooks created on paper can be created digitally offline with the African Storybook Maker App, which is available for free from Google Play and Apple App Store. With a bit of practice, the App is a quick and easy way to create an illustrated storybook with a cellphone or tablet.

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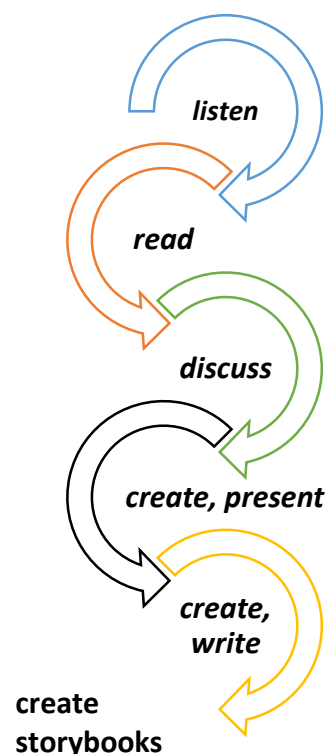
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Introduction to storybook development

Storybook development can take place over longer or shorter periods, but at least 1 day is needed for this process. With more time available, teachers and librarians can facilitate a storybook-making project using a few lessons per week over a term, and including a range of literacy and language activities that are linked to the curriculum.

Language and literacy competencies in story development process:

- *Listen to stories and speak about them.*
- *Read storybooks, view pictures.*
- *Discuss stories and storybooks.*
- *Create stories from pictures, and present ideas.*
- *Create and write story ideas in sentences.*
- *Write a complete story (writing process).*
- *Create a storybook with illustrations on paper.*
- *Create a digital storybook with illustrations.*



The process of storybook development presented in this Guide is flexible. You can adapt the process to suit your children and the type of project or workshop. You can decide on how long to spend on each stage of the process, and how many activities to plan for that stage.

Storybook development is a great project for a holiday workshop, at a library or community centre. For example, children could be involved in the process for 3 or 4 days, and the entire process is completed within a week. Holiday workshops don't need to be linked to the curriculum, and children can focus on exploring and making sense of their life experiences through art-making and storytelling.

Resources you will need

You will need the following resources for the activities in a storybook development process:

- **Relevant storybooks:** printed storybooks and digital storybooks, e.g. PDF files of storybooks for projection on a white wall, and loaded on tablets. Sets of up to 5 storybooks printed or downloaded for children to read in groups. This Guide refers to open licence, freely available, storybooks published on the African Storybook website (www.africanstorybook.org). See pages 7-8 of this Guide for ideas and suggestions for relevant storybooks.
- **Story starters:** a 'story starter' is anything that stimulates ideas for a story, for example:
 - **pictures** – should be interesting and with enough detail that it is possible to think of a story from things or people or a place shown in the picture. E.g. illustrations from open licence storybooks, open licence pictures printed from a website, interesting photographs, or pages from a magazine such as *National Geographic*. Laminate the pictures, or glue the picture on cardboard and keep in a plastic sleeve.
 - **objects** – old coins, unusual shells, an old suitcase, a clay pot, a coat button, a metal pencil box, a hat for cold weather, an empty wooden jewellery box, a piece of printed cloth, a toy car, etc. (Look at 2nd-hand stores and junk shops for interesting objects.)See pages 9 – 13 of this Guide for story starter activities.
- **Art materials:** for creating story illustrations, for example, pencil crayons, wax crayons, koki pens (felt tip pens) pastels, paints, inks, paintbrushes, sharpeners and erasers. And boxes or bags for the materials. The art materials will depend on your budget, but try to buy the best quality that you can afford as they will last longer and create better results. See the next page for more ideas for art materials.
- **Drawing books and/or white paper:** for making the storybooks – e.g. from children's stories and pictures. Ideally, each child will make their own storybook, but it is possible for a small group of children to work together to create 1 storybook (they will need the help of a group facilitator). Ideally, drawing books should be A3 format, but you could use A4 format – especially with older children. (See page 6 of this Guide for more about drawing books and formats.)
- **Lined paper:** for planning the story and writing out the story.
- **Optional:** tablets and/or phones with African Storybook Reader and Story Maker Apps.

If you are planning a holiday workshop, you will probably need to organise tea and lunch for the children. Depending on the length of the workshop and time spent on each stage of the process, you will also need to plan breaks and games. At the end of this Guide on page 20 are ideas for ***Games to play with children.***

Writing stories about our experiences and memories can evoke strong feelings, especially in book-making that focuses on children's narratives about personal experiences. On page 21, ***Memories, stories and sadness***, are some guidelines for facilitators for when children's stories reflect their experiences of sadness, loss or trauma.

Art materials



- Pencil crayons
- Wax crayons
- Oil pastels
- Koki pens (fibre tip pens)
- Fineliner pens
- Marker (jumbo) pens
- Highlighters
- Lead pencils
- Ballpoint pens
- Sharpeners, rulers, rubbers
- Water-based paints and paint brushes (and containers for water, and newspaper)
- Food colouring or inks (these should be diluted before children use them)

- Pencil cases or bags for storing art materials (e.g. 1 large pencil bag for a group of 4 children, with: 12 pencils, 12 crayons, 12 koki pens, pencils, ruler, rubber, sharpener)
 - Drawing books and/or white paper



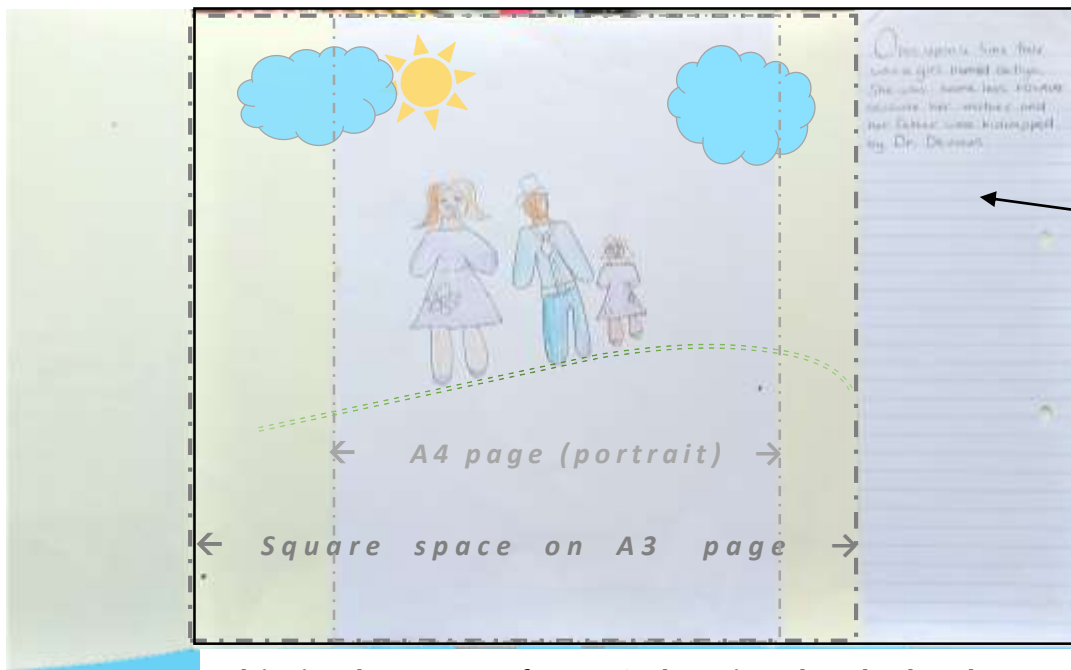
The space for pictures in African Storybook storybooks is a square space. Try to make sure that all of the children's pictures fit within a square shape, otherwise part of the picture will be cut off in the published book.

The drawing books on the right have been measured and cut square.

If children use square drawing books, make sure that they don't write on the same page as a picture, or write on the back of a picture page. Alternate one page for the drawing, and one page for writing.



In the example below, an A4 page is glued on to the page of an A3 drawing book. The A4 page is placed within a square shape measured on the page of the drawing book. In this way, children can work on paper to start with, rather than directly in drawing books. The original drawing on the A4 page can be expanded within the A3 square space. This approach gives more flexibility for selecting and creating pictures for the final storybook.



In this format, there is space next to the picture for the story words.

Using lined paper (glued next to the picture space) will help to keep the writing in the storybook neat and clear to

This is the page of an A3 drawing book (landscape)

Selecting storybooks

The choice of storybooks for your project or workshop is important as the stories must support the activities. Try to use print *and* digital technologies for sharing storybooks, for example: printed on paper, digital on the African Storybook Reader App, and digital projected on a screen or white wall.

Look for storybooks that:

- Children will find interesting and enjoyable,
- Have characters, happenings (events) and details that children can relate to,
- Reflect the languages of children,
- Are at the right levels for the children's reading levels,
- Are appropriate for the age range and context of the children,
- Have good pictures that link well to the written story.

Over the storybook development process, try to give children a variety of stories to read, listen to and view. This will expose them to different types of characters and the other elements that are important in a story.

As a way of preparing to write a story, children will be asked to think of and create different elements of stories. For example, they will focus on an object and/or a place, and/or an event, and/or a main character. They will illustrate and expand their ideas, create sentence, and connect them in a whole story. In order to introduce the main elements of a storybook, you need to select storybooks that provide strong examples of these elements.

On the next page are suggested storybook titles to search for on the African Storybook website. Storybooks are available online for reading, and for downloading for print and projection. Use the African Storybook Reader App to save storybooks on a phone or tablet, for reading offline. All of the storybooks are available in English, and indigenous African languages.



Stories about a child(ren)

- Kalabushe the talkative
- Khalai talks to plants
- Girl who got rich
- Fana and her animals
- Emeka and the old man
- Monkey and twin brothers
- Petros and his dog

Stories with an important object / place / event

- Akai's special mat*
- An egg for bridewealth*
- My first pair of shoes*
- Thabani's spear*
- My red ball*
- Chess and family roles*
- Azizi the doll*
- Abel and his sister's doll*
- Beloved daughter*
- My happy place*
- Soccer star*
- Africa unity race*
- Tamara starts school*
- Kidnapped!*
- Hyena, Hare and their basins
- Ms Phone
- Father's inheritance
- Drum
- Drought and the river of blessings
- Monkey and the drought

*Titles with * also have child main characters*

Storybooks with imaginary (magical) characters

- Old woman in a bottle
- Mulongo and the ogre
- Otukolia fights Lingiri
- Elephant and the spirit
- Creature with two
- Boy who nobody loved
- Magic baby



Good stories for children are:

- Enjoyable stories. Interesting stories. Exciting stories. Funny stories. 'Page-turning' stories, where the reader wants to turn the page to know what's going to happen next, to find an answer or solution, or to see what a character will do next.
- Stories that are written with a child's world in the mind of the writer, and which are appropriate for children. (Understanding that a child's ideas, joys, hopes and fears can be very different to an adult's – and should also be respected).
- Not necessarily 'real' or realistic stories, but meaningful stories with well-connected ideas, and details that will interest child readers.
- Stories with a variety of words and sounds – new and familiar vocabulary.
- Stories that play with language and sound – rhyme, rhythm, repetition.
- Stories with suspense, excitement, danger (risks *within the safety* of the story).
- Stories that are well written, without mistakes in grammar, punctuation or vocabulary. (The written story should model good literacy practices.)
- Storybooks with good pictures that support the meaning of the written text. And which can also add additional meaning and detail to the written story.

Storybook development process

Begin with a good story(book)

The activities on these 2 pages focus on listening, reading and discussing stories and storybooks. Children listen to oral stories and storybooks read aloud, they hear and read different types of stories, and are encouraged to express their opinions as readers.

Facilitators can also use these activities to find out what children know and think about stories, and their understanding of story content.

Activities:

- The story or storybook that you select to begin the process should have characters and/or events or other details that grab the attention of children.
- Practice reading the storybook aloud, to make sure that you can read it at a good pace and bring the story to life with the character's voices.
- Begin by asking children if they know any good stories – can anyone share a good story they know, or talk about a good storybook they read? Then introduce the storybook you have chosen to read aloud – which you think is an example of a good storybook (see pages 7-8 of this Guide).
- You can share a storybook with children by: projecting the storybook on a screen or white wall. In the photograph below, the facilitator is reading a projected storybook out loud while children follow the words on the screen.



- If you are working with a group of 15 or fewer children, you can hold up a A4-size printed storybook and read from the pages. A tablet that is A4 size will also be big enough to read aloud to a group of 15 or less. Remember to move around the group to make sure that everyone sees the pictures.



- As you are read, also point to the pictures so that children make the links between the words and pictures, as this teacher is doing in the photograph on the left.
- Ask for responses to the story you told or read:
 - Who were the characters, and what did they do in the story?
 - Where did the story take place?
 - What happened?
 - How did it end?
 - Was it a good ending? Why or why not?
 - Is it a good story – why or why not?
- You can extend this activity with further reading and discussion about storybooks, for example, reading and discussion in small groups with 3-5 storybooks. (Each group has the same set of storybook titles.)
 - You will need printed copies of storybooks, or for children to read the storybooks on tablets. You will also need to structure time for reading, discussion and feedback.
 - Ask children to read the storybooks in small groups, talk about the stories and then decide on their favourite story/ies and characters (and why they like them).
 - Each group could decide on their 'Top 3' storybooks – and then the groups compare their selections. Which storybook(s) did all or most of the groups rate in their Top 3? The idea here is to help children to think about and talk about the different elements of good stories, and to explore their responses to stories.



Storybook development process

Story starter: is a picture worth 1000 words?

The idea behind these activities is to use a picture from a storybook to stimulate children's imaginations (and words) for a new story. The pictures you select should be interesting and have some details which could inspire curiosity and creativity. If you laminate the pictures or put them in plastic sleeves, they will last longer. The pictures should be A4 in size, or close to A4.

Activities:

- Demonstrate the use of a picture story starter to stimulate ideas. Basically, ask questions about a picture that you have selected for this activity: **what, who, when, how, why, what next?** (Some of examples of questions are given below.)
- Then ask children to work in groups of 4 – with 1 picture per group – to think of story ideas based on what they observe in the picture. They are not actually writing the whole story, they just need to come up with ideas and a basic story outline. For example, they could record the group's ideas on a mindmap or in a list of points.
- Ask for someone from each group to present the ideas and story outline to the larger group.
- Get the whole group's responses to story ideas. Make a note of story ideas that could be developed into stories later in the process.

What kind of creature is this with wings?
What is it doing there?

Who is sitting inside? What is she feeling?
(How do you know?)

What happens next?



Who are the two people sitting on the grass (bottom left)? What are they talking about? How are they feeling? How do you know? What do you notice about the sun?

Who is climbing the tree?
Why do you think this person is climbing the tree? How did she get there? Where is this forest? Who or what is at the top of the tree? What happens next?

Storybook development process

Story starter: elements of a story

The goal of these activities is for children to think of and create at least 1 element – in pictures and words – that could be part of a story and used to develop a storybook. The elements could be:

- An object (or objects) that is important to the child, or an object from a story starter.
- A place that is significant to the child, or places in stories and story starter pictures.
- Significant events that have happened – or will happen – in the child's life, e.g. at school, in the family, community, village, etc.
- An unusual or interesting character (or characters).

Later in the story development process, children can use pictures and sentences from these activities to make up their storybooks (see page 6 of this Guide).

Activities:

- Read aloud a projected storybook, or from a storybook that learners have copies of. The story you select must have a particular character / object / place / event that is a strong feature and has important meaning in the story.
- Talk about 1 or more strong **elements in the storybook** you read aloud. Ask questions about the story and story elements to help children understand that most storybooks have the following main elements: ***interesting characters in a place, with an event or happening, often with an important object(s) – all linked together in continuous story with other details.***
- Ask children to think of their own important place / object / event or interesting character (start with 1 element), and then to create a picture and write 2-3 sentences about it. For example, draw a place that you like to visit, and then write why you like to go there.
- You can task children to think of another story element, and to draw and write a few sentences about it. Encourage children to think of or create a link between the drawings (elements). For example, a connection between a place and an event that could be developed into a story. If there is time and children respond well to this activity, they could work on more story elements in this way.
- Another possibility for generating ideas is to show **a real object** and tell a story about it. (Some examples of objects: an old pair of red boots, a locked suitcase, a clay pipe, a metal button from a coat, a carved wooden box, a straw hat, a pair of gloves, a sheet of music, a drum, a calabash, an old analogue camera, and a bunch of keys.)
- Bring and show interesting objects, and ask children to choose an object and imagine a story. For example, looking at a handful of interesting shells there might be a story about a shipwreck and survivors; or a beach holiday; or a sea creature.
- Ask questions about the object to inspire ideas, for example, Where do you think this is from? Who wore it / Who used it? When did they wear it / use it? Where did this happen? Who else was involved? How did this get here? What else can we think of?.
- And another starter is to share **pictures or photographs** of interesting places, and ask questions in order to stimulate ideas about story settings.

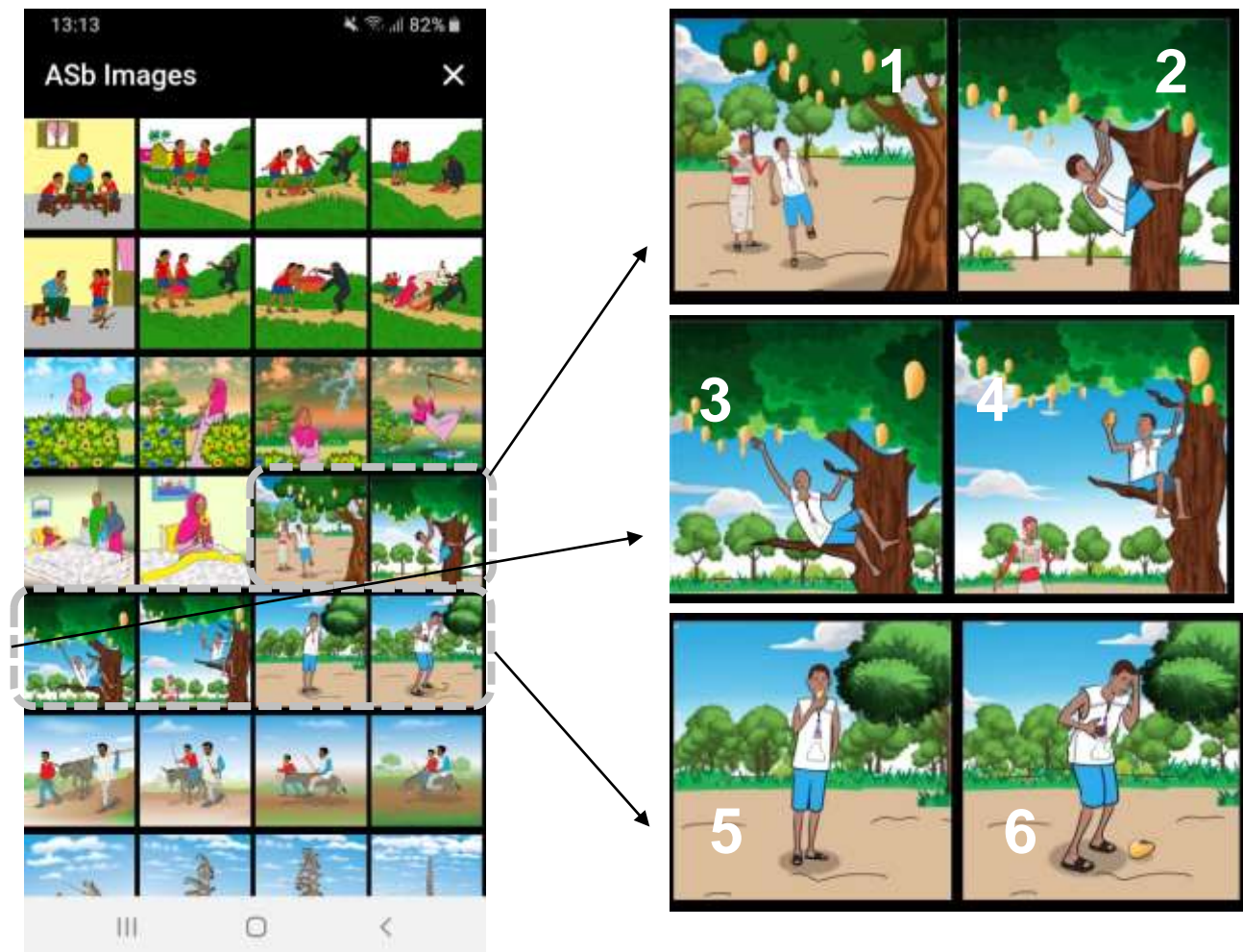
Storybook development process

Story starter: pictures on App

There are 250 story pictures that are loaded on the African Storybook Maker App, mostly sets of 4 to 8 pictures from storybooks that are published on the African Storybook website. Children can use pictures on the African Storybook Maker App to develop story ideas and plan a story – but without necessarily using the App pictures in their own storybooks.

A complete storybook can be created using only the pictures from the App (although most of such stories will be short and simple), or children can refer to the App pictures to create their own drawings. Or, a combination: children create some of their own pictures to use along with with App pictures.

In the picture collection on the Maker App, usually all the related pictures are grouped together within 1 or 2 rows of pictures. Below, 6 pictures are selected – about a ripe mango and a boy who didn't listen. The pictures could make a short storybook of 6 pages (with words and a picture on each page), or 12 pages with a picture for every second page.



Here are more examples and ideas from the picture collection on the App:

The 4 pictures in the white circles are not grouped together in a row (see also below). The pictures can be used as part of a storybook. Or, for an 8-page storybook with a picture on every second page, but text on every page.

These 5 pictures can be used for a story about a car accident.

The storybook could be expanded with 3 to 7 pictures drawn by children (i.e. 8 to 12 page book) altogether).

These 4 pictures of wild animals could be connected in a storybook.

These 4 pictures grouped in a square can be used together. The storybook will need more pictures added to be an interesting story. Four pictures could be used for an 8-page storybook with a picture on every second page.

These 5 pictures could be used for a story about dad's bad cooking!

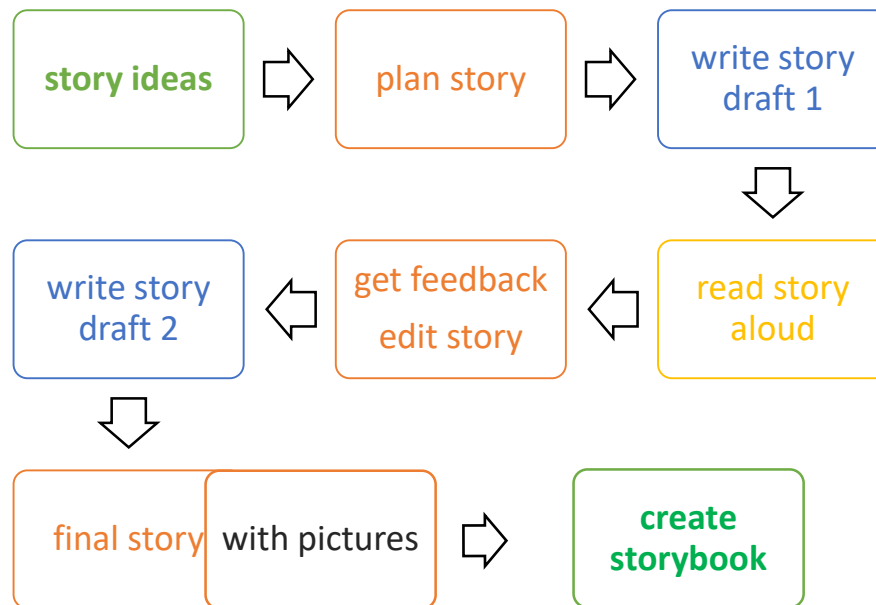
The artist is the same as for the pictures in white circles. The pictures could be combined in 1 story because the style of illustration is similar.



Storybook development process

Story writing process

A story writing process is like any other process: it's a series of steps or activities. When written out, a simple story for a 6 page storybook should be at least 80 to 150 words altogether (or at least 11 to 25 words per page). If there is time, children can create longer stories and storybooks with 8 to 12 pages (and even longer), up to about 40 words per page.



- Depending on the story starter activities that you used, children may already have thought about most of their story, and now can write it out. Or, writers might still be planning and connecting the elements of their story, e.g., using a mindmap.
- After writing the whole story on paper, it is time to check and edit – each writer should check their own work, or work in pairs. They should check the spelling, punctuation, grammar and use of vocabulary. Reading the story out loud can help writers to correct their writing. It is important to read slowly and carefully. Facilitators should also work directly with children to give feedback about their writing, and to support corrections.
- Children write a second draft of their stories, making the edits and corrections. This second draft should be broken up into paragraphs – with 1 or 2 paragraphs for each page of the book (paragraphs can be from 2 to 4 sentences long). Aim for storybooks that are at least 6 pages long, but ideally 8 or 12 pages as this will allow for better story development.
- Writers then decide how they will illustrate each page of their storybook:
 - Which pictures can they use or adapt from the story starters?
 - Should they change something in the written story in order to fit better with a picture that they have already created?
 - What new pictures should they create? How?
- Finally, the story and the pictures are put together to create an illustrated storybook.

Story writing process



- 1 Create and plan story (events, characters, places).
 - *Discuss & brainstorm ideas.
 - *Roleplay.
 - *Use a mind map.
 - *Write sentences.

- 2 Write first draft of the story (in any language).
 - *Focus on writing out the entire story, in full sentences.
 - *Then read the whole story carefully to check it makes sense.
 - *Read and check each sentence.



- 3 Read story out loud to others.
 - *Get feedback.
 - *Get help with editing story.

- 4 Edit story to improve writing.
 - *Use feedback to improve story.
 - *Check: grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, spelling.
 - *Make changes and corrections.



- 5 Write out second draft of story.
 - *Organise sentences in paragraphs, each with a main idea.
 - *Decide how many pages for storybook. (Aim for 1 or 2 paragraphs per page.)
 - *Work on translation, if necessary.

Most stories benefit from another edit and a third draft, before being finalised for a storybook!

Storybook development process

Create a storybook

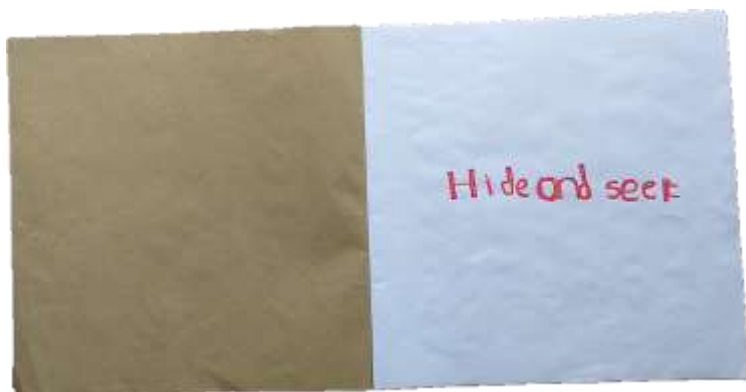
Once children have finalised the written version of their story they are ready to create their storybooks. They will also complete their pictures – created from story starters – and/or create new pictures for their finalised stories.

Help children to create their storybooks from pieces of paper (that can be stapled together as pages of book); or preferably, to create their storybooks in drawing books. You can use the African Storybook Maker App to create and publish the storybooks on a phone or tablet.

In both examples below, the story words for each page were written neatly on lined paper and then glued into a drawing book next to the picture for that page. In the example on the left, the drawing was done directly on the drawing book page. In the example on the right, the children started the pictures on A4 white paper and then glued each A4 page into the square space that was measured in the drawing book.



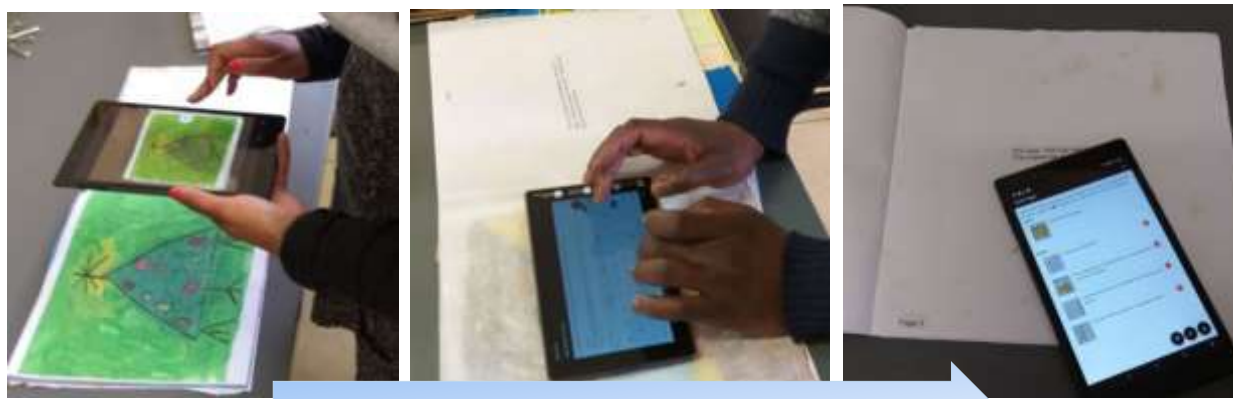
In the example below, the drawing book was cut square. Each page has a picture on it, or words on it. The child has written the title of storybook on the first page, the next page is the picture.



See page 6 of this Guide for more ideas for using drawing books.

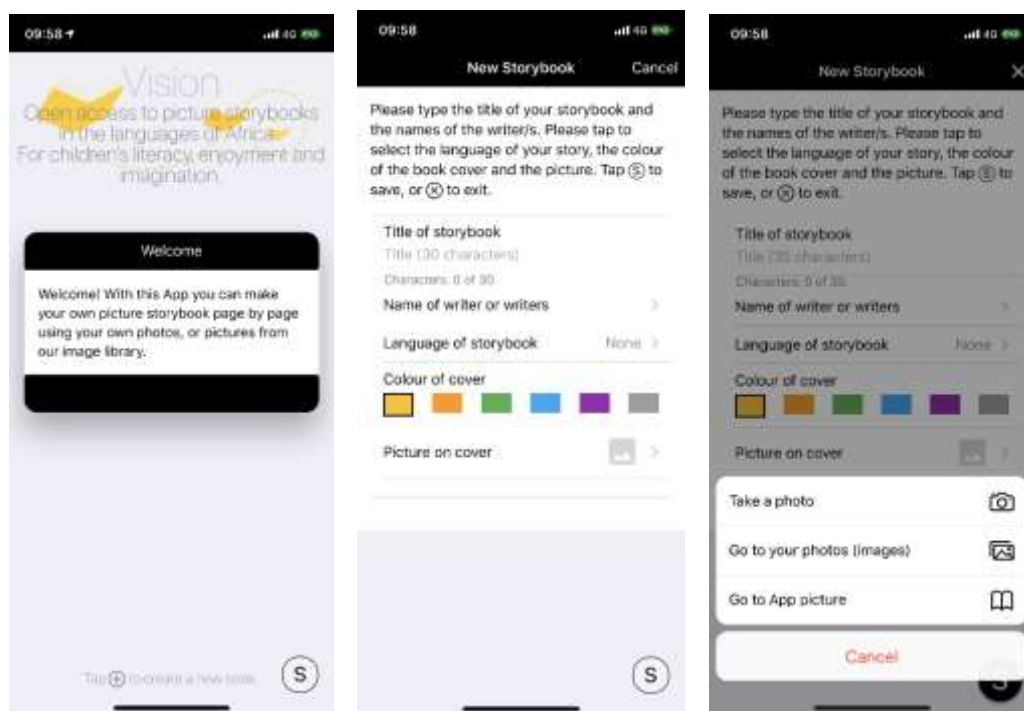
Storybook development process

Storybook Maker App



The photographs above show the 3 main steps in the process of creating a storybook on the Maker App from a drawing book. Each page is created on the Maker App by uploading a picture – a photograph of a child’s drawing – and by typing the story words for that page. Each page must be saved until the whole storybook is complete. Then the storybook can be published on the phone or tablet, and online (on the African Storybook website).

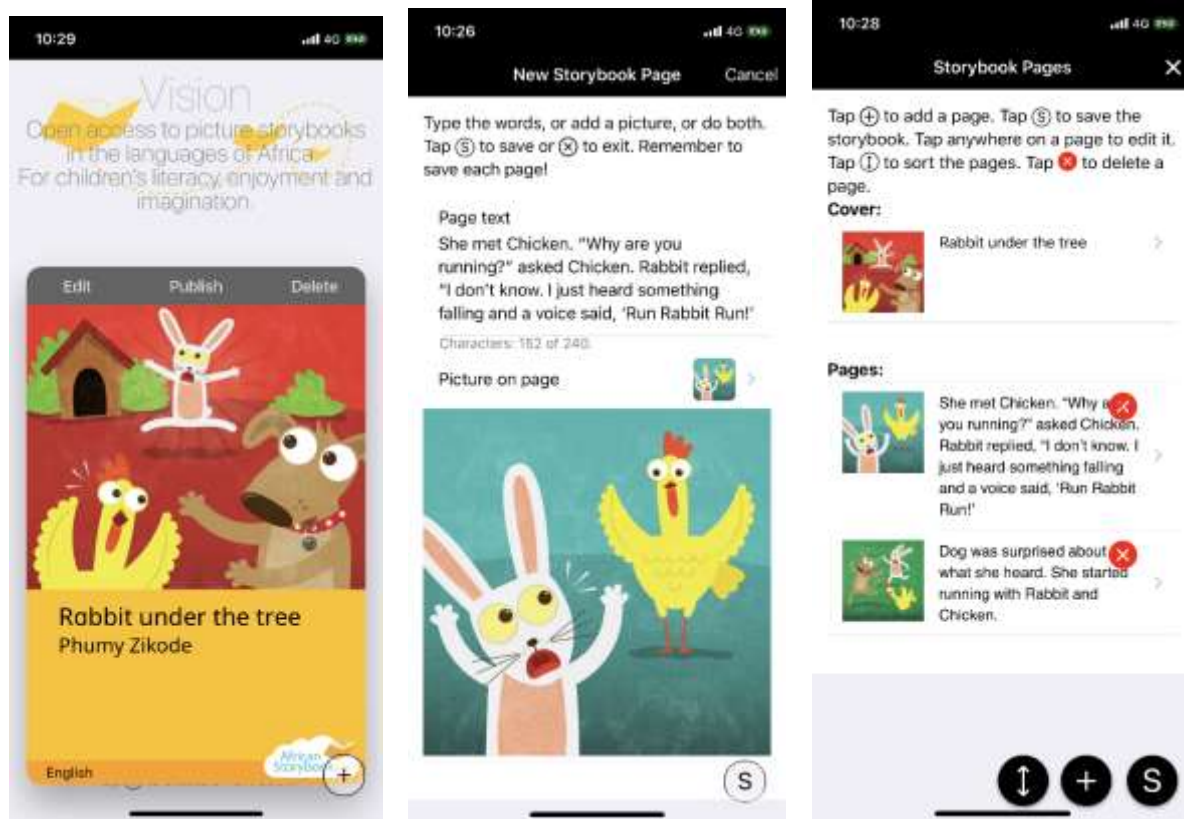
When you begin a new storybook, **type the title of the storybook**, and the **names of the writer/s**. Then, **select the language** of the storybook, the **colour** of the book cover, and a **picture** for the storybook cover. See the three screens below:



Storybook creators can illustrate their storybooks with their own pictures. They can:

- *Take a photograph of a picture (e.g. of a child’s drawing).
- *Use a picture or photograph from the cellphone or tablet.
- *Use a picture from the Maker App picture library. (See pages 13-14 of this Guide.)

After the storybook cover has been created, each page of the storybook is created in a similar way. Type the words for a page, or add a picture for a page – or both words and picture. Each page has space for a picture and up to 50 words. See the next three screens:



The storybook can be published on the phone or tablet by tapping the **Publish** button above the storybook cover. The storybook can be published on the African Storybook website if the device is connected to the internet. From the website, the storybook is available for reading, and for downloading as a PDF for printing or projecting.

And finally, don't forget to celebrate each child's achievement of creating an illustrated storybook! Each child (or pair or small group) should read aloud and present their storybook to the whole group, or to others at school. Participants will also be proud to receive certificates of achievement for storybook development.



Extra Resources

Games to play with children

Balls and names

Stand in a circle. Throw a ball or bean bag or small soft ball to someone else in the circle. As you throw call out the name of the person, to whom you are throwing. They then throw the ball on to someone else while saying their name aloud and so on. Introduce more balls as the game goes on. There is much laughter as balls are dropped. Participants start mostly with soft voices, quiet voices, but they do get louder and bolder. The game encourages the children to vocalise which creates a sense of self power and sets them up to speak out later as we work with narrating stories.

Shake Shake Banana

This is an adaptation of the game 'Simon Says'.

Play in a circle. The leader says. "When I say the word *Orange* touch your head, When I say *Apple* touch your toes. When I say *Shake shake banana* put both hands on your waist and shake your hips." The leader then calls out "Apples" etc. At first do the same action as you call out but as you go on call out one word and do the action for another. Children will get confused and there will be much laughter. Keep the atmosphere light and non-competitive. Use fruit that children will know. This is a crazy game which sets a fun tone and also shows the children that facilitators are fun and can play – not like teachers.

'Balls and names' and 'Shake Shake Banana' two games are particularly good for the start of a workshop, they are fun, don't need much explanation which can take time when working in translation, can be played with different ages and they involve body and voice.

Where is the ball?

Stand close together in a circle with hands behind. One person stands in the middle of the circle. Pass a small object such as a cloth ball around the circle behind you – hide it from the person in the middle by standing very close together. The person in the middle must try to guess who has the ball. If they point at someone in the circle the person must show their hands and if they have the ball they become IT in the centre.

Source: *Book-making with children from Sophiatown Community Counselling 'Families on the move' programme.*

Memories, stories and sadness

Dr Glynis Clacherty is a non-psychologically trained research professional who works with extremely vulnerable children. She advises that we should not “be afraid of asking children to write stories and make books that connect with their inner narratives”. Here is an extract from Glynis’s report about a story development workshop that she facilitated in Johannesburg in June 2019, with Sophiatown Community Psychological Services (SCPS) and African Storybook.

Extract from: *Book-making with children from Sophiatown Community Counselling ‘Families on the move’ programme.*

It is possible ... to explore difficult events if one applies a set of (widely accepted) safeguards. These are described below.

- Children (and adults) create psychological defences if they have experienced trauma or grief or loss. These defences allow children to carry on with everyday life.
- We can trust children to maintain these defences IF we do not push them to tell a story or probe details of part of a story they tell. We must accept just what they choose to tell.
- It is important to create an environment where this choice of what to tell is completely acceptable. I always tell children before we start working together that whatever story they choose to tell, that is fine – it is their choice. I sometimes even get young children to practice telling me that they don’t want to tell a story because it makes them sad – this legitimates that it is their choice.
- If a child does begin to feel sad or even cry, don’t be afraid or tell them to stop crying. You do need to acknowledge the sadness by placing a hand on their arm, passing a tissue or a drink of water, saying “I can see this story makes you sad.” Then sit in silence for a little while as part of the acknowledgement.
- Do not tell them that things will be better – they may not! Mostly this kind of statement just makes us as adults feel better but it actually reduces the enormity of the issue for the child to something trifling.
- If other children are with you say “This story makes Jenna very sad” so you are acknowledging that seeing their friend sad could make them sad too. If it seems appropriate you can ask the other children “Can we say something to Jenna to make her feel better, what about telling her the things she is so good at?” Let them do this then move quietly and slowly on to the next activity.
- Play a game after some time – games that make children feel safe are good at this point. (See the previous page.)
- Watch the child for signs of ongoing distress. If the child is particularly distressed you do need to follow up. The first place is the teacher, but if you are running workshops with children who you know may be vulnerable, you should know a local social worker or NGO to refer children to. (E.g., *Childline* and *Child Welfare* are national organisations.)

Acknowledgements and publishing information

This Guide was written and created by Lisa Treffry-Goatley, with input from Dorcas Wepukhulu. Along with other African Storybook colleagues and partners, over the years we have learned from our valuable experiences with children and adults in storybook development workshops. We welcome feedback about your experiences using this Guide.

This material was created with funding from the Google Impact Challenge.



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African Storybook is an initiative of Saide



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