

Using stories and storybooks

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Introduction

Welcome to Section 5. In this section you will think about and practise different ways of using storybooks in your lessons. The activities involve planning for teaching so they will help you with your daily work as a teacher of early literacy.

In Section 3 you explored strategies for preparing children for learning to read. These included:

- strategies of listening and speaking
- developing literacy through movement
- developing comprehension skills.

For example, you explored:

- talking about pictures to develop listening and speaking
- using games, songs and rhymes for literacy and movement
- a strategy of asking questions to encourage children to think about what they read.

In Section 4 you explored three different methods to support early reading:

- letters and sounds (phonics and phonemic awareness)
- look-and-say
- learning experience.

At the end of Section 4 you worked with four quadrants that helped you to think about how you can work with different children in different ways at different times to meet their different needs.

All of these strategies and methods are important for developing literacy in a holistic way. In this section you will see how children can read and interact with stories to build their speaking and listening, thinking, and reading and writing skills. Different stories will provide different opportunities. Your job as literacy teachers is to think about and plan how we can use each story in creative and productive ways to support literacy development in young children.

In this section you will use the three stories that you either downloaded or wrote down titles of from the ASB website in Section 2.6. If you noted down the title you can easily find the story again by typing the title into the search function on the ASB website (indicated by a magnifying glass).

Activity 5.1: Reviewing your progress

(We recommend you spend 20 minutes on this activity)

Go through the notes you have made in your study notebook and reflect on what you have learnt, comparing it with the summary above. Note down three things that you will use in your teaching. If possible, discuss your ideas with a colleague.

Using storybooks to develop speaking and listening skills

Storybooks can be used in many ways to support children's early reading. Children listening to their teacher read aloud a story supports listening comprehension, which is a crucial skill for developing children's text comprehension. Having listened to the teacher read aloud the story, children can be encouraged to retell the story. Retelling stories is valuable because:

- children have to listen carefully
- children need to use their memory
- it helps to develop children's vocabulary – they need to find and use words to say what they remember.

Most importantly of all, it is by listening to and retelling stories that children learn the 'narrative structures' that will help them to make sense of the world around them.

But what kind of stories are good for retelling? Ideally, they should:

- be in the children's home language, or a language that they understand and can speak well
- be enjoyable
- be easy to remember
- have a recurring sequence
- have patterns like rhyme, rhythm and repetition
- contain memorable events and characters.

If the stories are in a book, then it is also helpful to have clear, interesting pictures.

In Activity 5.2 you will think about a storybook that is good to use for children to retell the story. It will be good if you can make time to do the activity with a small group of children. In the activity you will use one of the three stories you have found from the ASb website.

Activity 5.2: Retelling stories

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

1. Choose one of the three stories that you either downloaded or wrote down titles from and read it.
2. If you are with a group of other teachers or colleagues, talk about three important reasons why you think this is a good story for a retelling activity with children, using the criteria above.
3. Write down the reasons in your study notebook.
4. If it is not a good story for retelling, say why and choose another one.
5. Retell the story yourself without reading it and using your own words. Then reflect on this: was it hard or easy, and what did you gain from the experience yourself?
6. Now read the description below of retelling stories and do the activity with a group of children or with your colleagues pretending to be children.

- a. Call a child or a small group of children aside.
 - b. Read the story in the way you would usually tell a story. That is:
Show the children the picture on the cover.
Read the title and talk about what it tells us about the story.
Ask children predictive questions, such as 'What do you think the story is about?', or 'Who do you think is the main character of the story?'
Introduce any new words before you read. Ask the children if they know the meaning of new words, so that they can learn from each other too.
Read the story.
 - c. After you've read the story, ask the children some simple, closed questions about it.
 - d. Ask the children to make up some questions for each other about the story.
 - e. Retell the story yourself, and ask the children to help you with some simple prompts: 'Why did she do that ...?', or 'What happened when ...?'
 - f. Ask if anyone would like to retell the story.
7. When you have finished reading and retelling the story, write a reflection in your study notebook using the following questions to guide you:
- a. How well did the children retell the story? What was easy for them, and what was not so easy?
 - b. What will you change or improve next time?
 - c. Could children do this activity independently? Are there any props that they could use? Could they do it in pairs or small groups?

Using storybooks to develop thinking skills

In Section 3, you learned about open and closed questions. Here we explore ways of how you can develop open questions to promote thinking.

You can judge whether the children in your class understand a story by listening to their answers to your questions. Asking good questions requires practice – questions should be clear and simple, and help children to think critically about what they have heard or read.

You should use questions for different levels of language ability and participation, and questions that will get children thinking and using their imagination. You can use different kinds of questions, like ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions:

- ‘Yes/no’ questions are good for very young children, or for children answering in a second language. These questions are easier than ‘what’ and ‘who’ questions because there is one answer. You should not make all of your questions ‘yes/no’ questions.
- ‘What’ questions are easier than ‘where’ or ‘when’ questions, for example ‘What did she see when she went outside?’
- ‘How’ and ‘why’ questions are the most difficult, especially for new speakers of a language. There is not one ‘right’ answer, so children would have to draw on a range of vocabulary to give an answer.

In Activity 5.3 you will select a story that is a good story for asking questions, which will make children think. You will then do the activity with a small group of children.

Activity 5.3: Asking questions to promote thinking

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

1. Choose any book that you want to read with children.
2. Try reading the story aloud, with expression and gestures. How will you introduce the story to the children?
3. Before you read the story to children, download the ‘optional reading’ at the bottom of the page. Read through and select three questions you can ask the children.
4. Make a table in your study notebook like the one below.
 - a. Write down questions you can ask during or after the story. Use open-ended questions and questions that encourage children to use their imagination.
 - b. Write down questions you think children will ask about the story.

Name of the story:	<input style="width: 100%;" type="text"/>
Questions that you can ask:	1.
	2.
	3.

	4.
	5.
	6.
Questions that children might ask:	1.
	2.
	3.

4. Write your questions onto question cards, highlighting new words.
5. Call aside a small group of children and read the story.
6. Have a conversation with children about the story, using the questions that you prepared. You can show children the questions on the question cards as this will help them to recognise some of the key words.
7. Allow the children to ask their own questions.
8. When you have finished the activity, reflect on how it went in your study notebook:
 - d. Did the children enjoy the story?
 - e. Were the children able to make meaning from the story?
 - f. What did the children enjoy about the activity?
 - g. What did the children not enjoy?
 - h. How well did the children answer and ask questions about the story? What was easy for them, and what was not so easy?
 - i. What will you change or improve next time? For example, will you change the types of question you asked or maybe the way you read the story aloud?
 - j. What opportunities can children have to do this activity independently?

Discussion

Planning questions in advance will help you to make sure that you ask a variety of different types of questions. Thinking about what answers they might give and the questions they might ask will help you to prepare for a discussion after reading the story.

There are different ways that you can ask the children to respond:

- the children can raise their hands
- you can ask an individual by name
- you can ask children to discuss the answer with a partner before giving an answer.

Sometimes it is helpful to ask more than one child for an answer – and if those answers are different, ask another child to say what they think.

In your questions and answers, try to use words from the story – especially if they are new words. This will encourage children to practise using those words when they answer the questions. You can use the words cards to remind them of the words!

Remember there might be more than one correct answer to the questions. Listen carefully to what the children say, and accept their answers if they are correct. There is no right or wrong answer to a question about feelings. Let the children use their imagination to think of an answer. As you become more confident in asking questions, you could ask children to ask their own questions about the story they have read or listened to.

We took an example from the ASb website of [a story about a cat and a dog playing ball](#). We thought of these questions as examples:

Name of the story:	<i>Cat and Dog and the Ball</i>
Questions that you can ask:	1. Do the cat and dog live in a house?
	2. Is there a roof on the house?
	3. What do the cat and dog play with?
	4. What colour is the ball?
	5. Who catches the ball?
	6. Who throws the ball?
	7. Where is the ball now?
	8. Who gets the ball?
	9. Why did the elephant get the ball?
	10. How do the cat and dog feel when they cannot get the ball?
	11. How do the cat and dog feel when the elephant gets the ball?
12. What do you think the cat and dog enjoy about playing ball?	
13. Do you enjoy playing games with your friends?	
14. What do you think will happen to the ball that the cat throws into the air?	
Questions that children might ask:	1. Why did the cat throw the ball high?
	2. Why do the cat and dog live in a house?

Using pictures in books and asking questions supports children's predictive skills. For example, in *Cat and Dog and the Ball*, you can stop on the picture with the sentence 'Cat and Dog cannot get the ball'. Then ask the children, 'What do you think the cat and dog can do to get the ball?'

You do not have to only ask the questions that you prepared. You can also ask the children questions that come into your mind while you are reading, for example, questions like 'What do you think will happen next?', and 'What happened before this picture?' Make sure you give the children enough time to answer questions.

Remember that you want the children to explore the ideas, so don't be too quick to come in with your own ideas and make sure that all the children who want to share their ideas have a turn. They don't have to always agree with each other.

Put yourself on the side of the children in the discussion. Show genuine interest in the story and the questions, for example, asking 'I wonder why ...' and 'I was wondering about ...'. Good learners are always ready to ask questions and are not ashamed if they don't always have the answers.

Optional reading: [*Tell Me: Children, Reading, and Talk with the Reading Environment*](#), by [Aidan Chambers](#), published by The Thimble Press, UK, 2011. The book includes a list of the different sorts of questions that you can ask children about books.

Using storybooks to further develop reading skills



Figure 5.1: *My Teacher*

In Section 4 you explored different methods for teaching reading. These were:

- letters and sounds (phonemic awareness and phonics)
- look-and-say
- learning experience.

If necessary, [go back to Section 4](#) and remind yourself about those methods. In the next activity you will explore further how you can apply these methods using storybooks.

Activity 5.4(a): Recognising the different approaches

(We recommend you spend 40 minutes on this activity)

Read Case Study 5.1 below about Ms Khumalo using stories with a group of young readers. It is quite a long case study, so it might help if you read it a couple of times. You can read *My Teacher*, the story that Ms Khumalo uses, on [the ASb website](#).

While you are reading, use the highlighting tools to identify when Ms Khumalo uses:

- letters and sounds (yellow)
- look-and-say (green)
- the learning experience method (pink).

Case Study 5.1: New words with Ms Khumalo

Interactive content is not available in this format.

[This case study is also available to download.](#)

Activity 5.4(b): Recognising the different approaches

(We recommend you spend 20 minutes on this activity)

Compare the examples of the reading approaches that you spotted with a friend or colleague. How could you use these ideas in your teaching?

Ms Khumalo's word wall is shown in Figure 5.2:



Figure 5.2: Ms Khumalo's word wall

Read the discussion below to find out how Ms Khumalo used letters and sounds, look-and-say, and the learning experience method.

Discussion

- **Letters and sounds:** Ms Khumalo works with ten children, focusing on recognising the sound associated with 'b', picking out and sounding words in the story than begin with 'b'.
- **Look-and-say:** Ms Khumalo works with a group of 20 children and reads the story with cards that highlight key words. The emphasis is on helping children to recognise the words through linking them with the pictures.
- **Learning experience:** Throughout the session, Ms Khumalo relates the story to children's experiences and encourages them to draw pictures of the words. This will help their comprehension of the words.

Selecting stories for a purpose

Different stories support the three methods and as you gather experience you will be able to pick out stories that are suited to each method.

In the next activity you will analyse one of the stories you found in Section 2.

Activity 5.5: Selecting stories for a purpose

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

1. Choose one of the stories that you found in Section 2.
2. Which of the three methods from Section 4 could you use with this story?
3. Discuss the story and the methods with your colleagues.
4. In your study notebook, briefly describe an activity using the method(s) that you will do with the children. Use this structure to write your description:
 - Name of story:
 - Method:
 - What will the children learn?
 - What will the children do?
 - What will the teacher/you do?
 - Where in your lesson plan will you do this activity?

Different storybooks can be used in different ways. As you develop your confidence you will be able to choose stories that are particularly suitable for different methods.

Optional activity: You can use the downloadable resource [‘Choosing stories for different purposes’](#) to find stories that you can use in your class. Spend some time looking at the stories suggested and thinking about how you could use them.

Managing your reading classroom

If you create a productive, dynamic, creative literacy environment, you will find ways to involve all the children in reading activities all the time. This can be very difficult if there is a large number of children in one space. You can use different grouping and reading strategies to help manage large groups of children:

- **Shared reading:** You read a story to a larger group of children. You read the story for enjoyment and talk about what the children see, hear, think and feel. You follow up the reading with discussion and activities, including children reading the same story in pairs or individually.
- **Group guided reading:** Children are in small groups of between six and ten. The children read the same story together with the help of an adult. The adult helps the children in different ways to guess and read difficult words using the most appropriate method (letters and sounds, look-and-say, and language experience). They also discuss the story together.
- **Paired reading:** Children sit in pairs to read together, or take turns to read a simple storybook that they can read themselves.
- **Independent reading:** Children read short, simple books on their own, that are easy enough for them to read without help.

Optional reading: The downloadable resource '[Strategies for managing reading with your class](#)' gives you more detailed information about shared reading, group/guided reading, paired reading and independent reading. [A learning resource about storytelling](#) from the TESS-India project may also be helpful.

Activity 5.6: Strategies for using stories to support reading

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

1. Using the information above, re-read the case study about Ms Khumalo in Activity 5.4. Identify in the case study when Ms Khumalo uses the different strategies described above.
2. In your study notebook, describe how you will plan to use the different reading strategies in one of your lessons.
3. If possible, discuss your ideas with a colleague.

Reviewing your learning

Activity 5.7: Reviewing your learning

(We recommend you spend 10 minutes on this activity)

[Now answer the questions in this quiz.](#)

Moving forward

In this section you have learned about the importance of storytelling and storyreading and how children need to hear stories on a daily basis. You have reflected on how storytelling enhances children's speaking and listening skills. You have had the opportunity to share a range of storybooks and considered how planning effective questions can support children's comprehension skills.

Section 5 has also introduced the idea of thinking skills and how using storybooks can enhance how children think about the stories they hear and the stories they tell. You have learned more about how reading and writing activities can be supported with a good-quality storybook and how children can be encouraged to make links between the stories they hear and the stories they write. This section has also introduced you to different ways of organising your classroom for reading, including shared reading, group/guided reading and independent reading time.

[In the final section](#) you will think about how to assess reading. You will be introduced to a tool that will help you decide what support young readers need, and to strategies that you can use to assess the reading of individual children in large classes.