

MAKING UP STORIES

with Children

Workshop Notes

We hope you will share your making up stories sessions with us on

www.makingupstories.co.uk

where you can type in ideas and stories, upload videos
and see what others are doing.

Introduction

The booklet *Making Up Stories with Children* will give parents and carers the confidence to create fun times and magical moments with their children, making up stories from scratch. It outlines the basic building blocks of storytelling, (who, what, where, why, when), and gives some fun suggestions and examples to stir the imagination.

With the help of delightful illustrations, the booklet points out sources of inspiration that are already at everybody's fingertips, so that adults and children together will soon be creating, (and even keeping a record of), a story world of their very own. We hope you will share them with us on **www.makingupstories.co.uk**

Rather than just giving out the booklets to each household you are in contact with we would suggest you support the recipients with an introductory session – and these notes are to help you do just that.

Spending time together

One of the most important skills a parent gives their child is the ability to listen and respond. By spending time together building up a story, a child is learning to understand facial expressions, body language and speech. By taking part in a two-way process they are also learning to listen and take their turn.

The personal attention devoted to the storymaking process will give great pleasure to the participants, as well as preparing the child to take an active and self-controlled role in nursery and school.

Devoting time to making up stories without the distraction of television, computers and phones allows the growth of individual imagination and is a time free from the demands of the outside world, its adverts and fast pace.

Setting up a *making up stories workshop*

Who should attend?

Parents and carers of young children (from early years to primary) will benefit by acquiring some basic ideas and tools to make up stories with their children. They will gain the confidence and inspiration to spend fun time building up their relationship with their child; imaginations will be stimulated; memories shared; an understanding of the world and listening and language skills developed.

One session or many?

These notes will give you the basic contents for one session. However you could devise a whole series of sessions: introducing the basics, making a treasure sack, creating Key Points cards, making up a story to a theme, keeping a story record, having a session with the children.

Time

Give yourself plenty of time to organise the venue and resources, to tie in with a suitable theme and to get it into the diary of busy adults.

Although there may be occasions when it is appropriate to involve the children in such a session we would certainly recommend running some for adults only. This will give them space to try out techniques without distraction, particularly if you run it at a time when dads can come!

Place

Although it may be easiest to run the session on your own premises, some adults may feel more comfortable in a completely neutral place, so you could run it in partnership with a local attraction (zoo or museum or park), or the library, or in a meeting room in a pub.

Numbers

Up to ten people is a manageable number. More than that and it will be difficult to get everybody participating.

Publicity

Talk to as many parents and carers as possible. There is nothing like a personal invite! Involve the children in producing the invitations, both by creating some 'pictures' and in taking an invitation home.

If you have a substantial multi-ethnic population, involve a parent in producing the poster and invitation in the chosen language. The techniques apply whatever the language! You may even get extra support to run this event from your local authority.

Don't forget to display a poster at the entrance as well.

Take photos of the event for use on your display boards and for your local paper – great publicity for your organisation. Remember to get appropriate permissions if there are children in the picture.

Choosing a theme

The main theme is, of course, *making up stories*! But picking a more specific theme might involve the less confident adults. For instance, you could tie-in with Storytelling Week, a food initiative, a religious festival or local/family history.

If you want to target dads then why not focus on sport, machines or building things?

Tie it in with whatever initiative you may already be running, such as 'developing your outdoors', or 'healthy eating', by having the event outside or tied in with a picnic.

Resources

Make sure you have enough copies of *Making Up Stories with Children* to give one to each participant to use during the session and to take home afterwards.

A key tool for making up stories is a 'treasure sack'. If making one is going to be a central activity to your session then make sure you have enough boxes or bags and items to decorate them. You may like to have some sample contents, (small toys, shells or stones, bits of jewellery). Can you get a local business to sponsor you by providing the 'sacks' or some contents?

If you are doing a series of sessions then you might consider one for making up, decorating, five Key Points Cards. In this case you will need sufficient card and decorating materials.

If you offer a separate session on Keeping a Record (see below) you will need to have access to a video or camera; provide scrapbooks or notebooks; provide pens and pencils.

Offer refreshments so that you can have a relaxing break time for participants to just have a chat.

Running the session

Share some reasons to make the effort

Share with the participants some of the reasons why it is worth making the effort to a) make up stories with your child, and b) make it fun.

For the child:

- it's great fun and can be exciting
- you and your child will benefit from spending time together
- it stimulates your child's imagination
- it helps them to understand the world and how it works
- it develops their listening and language skills
- you share memories, which helps them identify who they are and where they come from
- you help them to build pictures in their minds.

For the parents and carers:

- anticipation for a story will more easily get kids to bed!
- and it gets them to sleep quicker!
- helps you to cut off from the day's work
- reduces stress by entering into a magic world
- it's a reminder of the child within you.

Get everybody warmed up

1. Ask everybody to share their first name and the name of a favourite story from their childhood.
2. Ask everybody to make some funny faces to exercise all their facial muscles. Then suggest they give their forehead, temple and neck a quick rub. Finally a few shoulder rolls will help everybody loosen up.
3. Get them to hum any note for 10 or more seconds then go up and down their vocal range. Do the same with an open 'Aaah'.

Talk through these points and get the participants to add to them

1. Where the ideas are going to come from?
 - from daily life: your pet, a day out, a bus ride
 - family history: your childhood, a grandparent's story
 - an upcoming event: a hospital appointment, a house move, starting at a new nursery or school
 - a traditional tale: a pantomime, a fairy story, a favourite cartoon.
2. Involving your child:
 - they could well be your main source of inspiration
 - involve the child by asking them to contribute with names and ideas
 - be prepared to use their ideas even if they are quite different to what you were thinking – allow the magic to happen.

3. Time and place:
 - bedtime is the most obvious but making up stories can help pass the time on a long journey or make a day out more memorable
 - when at home try and get rid of as many distractions as possible – turn off the TV, computer, radio and ignore the phone.

Some important basics

1. Be confident.
2. 'See' the story in your head.
3. Change the pace as you tell the story:
 - use the energy in both voice and body, look at each other, smile, making appropriate faces, voices and noises
 - use variety by changing your voice to reflect what is happening in the story: louder, softer, higher, lower, normal voice, different voice.
 - take your time; use pauses – enjoy the effect of silence as a contrast.
4. Make up a 'treasure sack':
 - having one is a way of finding inspiration
 - talk about types of containers (sacks, shoe boxes, drawers)
 - talk about content (family memorabilia, child's favourite toys, bits found in junk shops like jewellery or figurines, items found on a walk like stones or shells).

Key points to a story

These are: Who / Where/ When / What / Why. Use the *Making Up Stories* booklet to explain each key point and build on the suggestions made by getting each participant to add their ideas.

Making up stories

Now get the participants practising. You could:

- use the story skeletons from the *Making Up Stories* booklet on pages 20-22.
- kick off yourself with a first sentence and then get each participant to add the next sentence in turn.
- if you are running a themed session, display appropriate objects from your own 'treasure sack' and steer a story in the direction of the theme.
- split the main group up into groups of 2 or 3 and get them to make up a story.

Remember: at all times you are building up the participants' confidence. This means that you never dismiss a suggestion but always talk it through. If it is inappropriate then discuss why that is and alter it to fit. Some people feel they have no imagination so it is your job to ask questions that will draw ideas out of them and help them to use the props from the 'treasure sack'. That is what it is there for.

Keeping a record

If you are just doing a one-off session then you will probably only have time to touch on this (see page 23 of the *Making Up Stories* booklet).

If you are running a series of sessions then have a session on the different ways participants can keep a record of the stories they make up:

- live recording
- story scrapbook
- notebook.

Can you video the whole session for your records? If you do (and have received the participants' permission), then please send it to us for use on

www.makingupstories.co.uk

Evaluating the session

It can be very helpful to ask for feedback from your participants, particularly if you need to raise funds for your activities. You may already have an evaluation form but here is a suggested series of questions that you could lay out on a sheet of paper with room for each participant to fill in:

MAKING UP STORIES WORKSHOP, PLACE/DATE

We would be very grateful if you could just spend a few minutes sharing your thoughts about this workshop. It helps us so much in planning further events.

1. What was the most useful part of the session?
2. What did you find least useful?
3. What action(s) will you take as a result of today?
4. Is there any further information or support you feel you need?
5. Do you have any other comments?

Once you've run one successful session then look for a new theme and a different time to run another. That way you can involve more parents and spread the word about enjoying making up stories with children.

Useful resources

If you would like to bring someone else in to run your Making Up Stories session(s) then please get in touch with Alison Shakspeare by phone on 01363 776987 or by email at stories@shakspeare.org

National Literacy Trust host source for a wide range of free resources and information including Reading Connects, Talk to Your Baby, National Reading Campaign, Reading Champions: www.literacytrust.org.uk 020 7587 1842 or contact them at: National Literacy Trust, 68 South Lambeth Road, London SW8 1RL

Society for Storytelling for anyone with an interest in oral storytelling, whether teller, listener, beginner or professional – <http://sfs.org.uk>

StoryBee, where you can listen to professional storytellers spinning their wonderful tales – www.storybee.org

Storyshapes sell tactile prompts as reminders of the key elements of a story – www.storyshapes.com

Storysack Ltd: a company offering commercially produced story sacks for sale, as well as tips on how to use the sacks. Visit www.storysack.com

SurLaLune Fairy Tales features annotated fairy tales, their histories, similar tales across cultures and modern interpretations – www.surlalunefairytales.com

Your local library may run storytelling sessions and that's where you can find books to help with ideas.

Also available from Southgate:

How to Enjoy Reading Aloud to young children

This booklet is about HOW to read with expression and confidence, making sharing stories with children much more rewarding and enjoyable – for both adult and child.

The booklet is full of easy-to-follow techniques and advice using short extracts from well-loved children's stories, such as *Giraffes Don't Dance*, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Thomas the Tank Engine*. The colourful Voice Coach takes the reader through sections dealing with making noises, doing voices, showing feelings and being scary.

The skills learned and the confidence gained from using *HOW TO ENJOY READING ALOUD TO YOUNG CHILDREN*, offer a solid foundation for making sharing books a daily pleasure for adults and children.

The techniques illustrated are distilled from Edmund Pegge's resource for teachers 'Expressive Speech', based on his experience as a stage and screen actor and his poetry and creative writing workshops.

FREE NOTES are provided, with suggestions about running a workshop for parents, after which you could send them away with a copy of the booklet.

Edmund Pegge and Alison Shakspeare
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