



STORYTELLING AND THE CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

Active learning is at the core of storytelling and storymaking – engaging, enjoyable, stimulating, creative, collaborative fun! Storytelling is about telling and listening to stories first and foremost. It is about enabling children and young people to become good listeners, storytellers and storymakers.

Storytelling is a multi-purpose tool which can be used with children and young people at all levels, from nursery to S6. When storytelling is part of the teaching day, you will find that you are automatically meeting many of the experiences and outcomes of the Curriculum framework in Literacy across learning, Literacy and English, and Health and Wellbeing across learning. In particular, storytelling and storymaking address the experiences and outcomes of listening and talking within Literacy across learning and Literacy and English.

Storytelling and storymaking provide opportunities for sharing thoughts and ideas as a class, group or with an individual. It is a motivational tool which encourages learning, good communication skills and engagement with writing. Storytelling is also an ideal tool for supporting children with special educational needs.

Through listening to and telling stories children extend and enrich their vocabulary and develop their understanding of what is special, vibrant and valuable about their own and other cultures and their languages. There are opportunities to communicate, collaborate and build relationships when children share stories and participate in storymaking activities as a small group and as a class. Retelling stories and storymaking through different media show children the wide range of ways in which they and others can be creative. Storytelling helps children to reflect on and explain their literacy and thinking skills, using feedback to help them improve and sensitively provide useful comments for others through positive feedback and **formative assessment**.

The skills of good storytelling – based on structure, pacing, gesture, eye contact, expression, emphasis and choice of words used to engage others – can be observed and developed by children. Having listened to several storytelling sessions, children might be invited to observe their teacher or a storyteller tell a story badly (avoiding eye contact, being distracted, mumbling, using limited voice range etc.) and share their observations. This is fun and further develops their understanding of what it means to communicate and share stories well. They can then use what they have learned when telling stories themselves. Their observations can also form part of **formative assessment**.

These skills relate to children and young people's development as storytellers but naturally they enhance their own personal communication skills, confidence with language, self esteem and understanding about appropriate and positive communication outwith the storytelling situation, in different contexts. Over time, children learn what stories and styles of communication suit different audiences and purposes.

Storytelling and Storymaking deliver the four capacities:

Responsible citizens

Storytelling is a shared activity and encourages skills of cooperation and support. The subject matter and content of stories themselves can encourage awareness of responsible citizenship, and understanding. Stories from different cultures often encourage an awareness of the similarities between ourselves and others as well as highlighting differences, which can then be explored and talked through in the safety of the classroom setting. Stories exploring the environment, global citizenship, cultural diversity, bullying and other relevant topics can provide a launch pad for fuller discussions.

Confident individuals

The skills of communication, cooperation and creativity nurtured through storytelling and storymaking activities, where everyone's contribution is valued, help to develop confident individuals, and foster good self esteem.

Effective contributors

All class members can contribute to storymaking and storytelling activities and often those children that find the traditional routes to learning challenging can flourish through their involvement in listening to, retelling and making stories as part of the class, in groups, working in pairs, or independently.

Successful learners

Active learning is central to storytelling and storymaking. Children are engaged and motivated. Storytelling can be used as the springboard for learning in different curriculum areas at primary levels and through collaboration with different departments at secondary levels.

Storytelling can facilitate all of the four points detailed in the '**Where do I begin?**' section of Listening and talking across learning:

- engage with others in group and class discussions of appropriate complexity
- learn collaboratively – for example, when problem solving
- explain their thinking to others
- explore factors which influence them and persuade them in order to help them think about the reliability of information.

Storytelling and storymaking can tie into **personal development planning** with children collectively discussing and deciding with their teacher what the targets and outcomes of the activities will be.

Progression in learning is intrinsic to storytelling. Stories should be told to children and young people at all levels. Listening to and telling stories regularly, sharing a wide range of stories of different complexity and length encourages progressive learning within and between levels.

LISTENING AND TALKING: HOW STORYTELLING HELPS TO MEET THE EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES

Enjoyment and choice are implicit in developing children and young people's awareness of stories and the life messages they contain.

Listening to stories regularly allows children and young people to experience and enjoy a range of story types from various cultures as well as different story genres. For example, rhymes, riddles and songs, traditional Scottish stories and Travellers' tales, folktales, fairy tales, myths and legends, Pour quoi stories, international tales, Wonder tales, and fables. Children will **form opinions** about which stories they like and dislike and they can be encouraged to **explain the reasons for their preferences**.

Storytelling and Storymaking nurture skills and knowledge in literacy and language. Sharing stories, rhymes and riddles enables children and young people to **enjoy exploring and playing with the patterns and sounds of language**. There are opportunities to join in with refrains, to repeat phrases and rhymes within the flow of the story, and to enjoy the musicality of language. This can be of particular help when encouraging children with English as an additional language to participate. Refrains, phrases and words in different languages, dialects and from different cultures can be part of a story and all children can be invited to join in. This kind of activity, and the sharing of stories from a range of cultures, affirms the languages and identities of children within the class.

Scots riddles, rhymes and songs can be used in class affirming the home languages of many children. Scotland has a rich oral storytelling tradition. Storytelling offers learners the chance to explore the history, heritage and culture of Scotland. Stories in **Scots and the languages of Scotland**, which include the **languages which children and young people bring to the classroom**, can be celebrated and shared through storytelling. Scots riddles, rhymes, stories and songs are plentiful.

By actively listening to stories over time, and using their teacher or a storyteller as the role model, children understand and absorb the techniques and skills of good storytelling. They can **recall** and **retell** the stories heard and move into creating their own stories and initiating storymaking activities. Storymaking encourages **creativity and choice**. Children and young people **enjoy exploring the events and characters** in stories and this encourages the use of ideas and substance for creating their own. **Thoughts and feelings can be explored** and expressed verbally and through play or storymaking. Storymaking opportunities give children a chance to enjoy 'playing' with stories through different media, e.g. creative writing, visual art, animation and storyboarding, music and song, dance, drama and role-play, ICT and email projects. Storytelling and storymaking projects create the potential for **curriculum areas to overlap**, and for **different departments to collaborate**. Stories and storymaking activities may relate to a specific subject and purpose and can underpin a class project or even a whole school project.

"The encouragement of listening, remembering and retelling play a constructive part in the development of the understanding of how to communicate effectively. Discussion is one of the main methods used, first of all in small groups which report to the class. When the group is comfortable and have learned to listen and negotiate then they will work creatively. Group retelling should be encouraged and this will develop into creative storymaking. At this stage, story boarding a favourite part of the story enables discussion and then understanding of story structure."

(from Introduction, by Storyteller Senga Munro, to 'Circles of Trust').

Children **learn to encourage and support one another** through listening to stories, learning to **value one another's contributions** and use these to **build on thinking**. Guided by the teacher the children can be invited to positively assess one another's storytelling, using stars and wishes. For example, by contributing two things that they liked about a child's telling of a story (star), and then by suggesting that the next time they could speak more loudly or slowly (wish). This approach can feed into **formative assessment**.

Tools for listening and talking are developed through the act of sharing stories. **Engaging with others** is at the heart of storytelling. Storytelling encourages children to listen 'eye to eye, mind to mind and heart to heart'. Children are engaged with the story and are motivated to listen – they want to know what happens next. The storytelling experience helps children and young people to understand **when it is appropriate to listen and when it is appropriate to talk**. They learn when and how to **contribute effectively**, how to **respond to one another with respect, take turns, interact** and to **work collaboratively** as a group through retellings and creative storymaking. Simple approaches, such as using a talking stick or wearing a story hat while taking a turn or sharing part of a story, stimulates an awareness of when it is appropriate to talk and to listen. Children have the opportunity to observe the **different**

features of spoken language and, by recalling and retelling stories, can use what they learn, adapting what they know to suit the audience and purpose.

Stories provide a fun and engaging basis from which children can develop their skills in **finding and using information**. As a group they can be encouraged to identify and discuss the **purpose, main ideas and detail** contained within the story. Different story genres, structures, styles and motifs can be explored and the information and messages carried within the story can be discussed. Children can be encouraged to **select ideas** and relevant information, **organise information** and ideas in a logical sequence and, using the structure of traditional stories as the 'skeleton', create their own stories using **suitable words and vocabulary** which their audience will find interesting.

Older children from P5 to P7 may retell traditional nursery rhymes and stories, rework rhymes, and create new stories to tell to younger children. In planning this kind of 'peer storytelling' activity, the children need to take into account the appropriate level of complexity, length, vocabulary and content suitable for the younger age group being told to. Peer storytelling boosts the confidence and self esteem of the older children, and helps them learn how to manage an audience and communicate with younger children.

Through storytelling children can learn to **understand, analyse and evaluate** stories – the messages that stories contain and the reasons they contain them. **Active listening encourages questioning** and sharing stories helps to develop **critical literacy**. Sharing stories in class can provide a safe environment in which to discuss the content of a story. Collectively, children and teacher can look into the themes, roles and stereotypes, actions of characters and consequences of actions. Children can discuss if and how a source is aiming to influence the listener and how useful or otherwise that may be. **Storytelling is a transformational experience, enabling and motivating children to make their own discoveries.**

Through taking part in regular storytelling experiences children learn how to communicate and express themselves clearly. Imagination is stimulated and creative storymaking in even the youngest of children can flourish, helping children to share ideas and invent characters and events imaginatively. Hearing and joining in with rhymes, riddles and stories motivate children to explore vocabulary and the patterns of language further. This helps children to express their feelings, ideas and thoughts clearly. The communication skills nurtured through storytelling enable children to communicate appropriately within and beyond the classroom, helping them to **share information, ideas and opinions, to offer explanations and to seek clarification through questioning**. Progressively between and through the levels, storytelling can lead to the understanding and use of increasingly **complex ideas, structures and vocabulary**.

An understanding of the structure and essential elements which make a good story provides a platform upon which new stories can be created successfully and imaginatively by children and young people.

HOW STORYTELLING CAN HELP SUPPORT OTHER PARTS OF THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

Reading

"An awareness of the world of stories leads children to books as a source for new material. Over a period of time children who appreciate the techniques of storytelling and the use of language can transfer these skills to critical reading. A P4 teacher at Pitreavie Primary has commented 'I've had children discussing J.K.Rowling's use of traditional motifs thoroughly pleased with themselves at having uncovered the secret of her writing!' "

[from Storyteller, Judy Paterson]

Writing

“Storytelling seems to demystify the process of writing. The natural patterns of language in traditional oral stories release the child from the pressure of trying to write in a literary style. The structures of traditional stories provide the bones upon which they can fill out the flesh with imaginative writing.”

[from Storyteller, Judy Paterson]

Storytelling projects may be designed as a stimulus for creating texts and for helping to meet the experiences and outcomes of Writing within Literacy across learning and Literacy and English.

Health and Wellbeing across learning

The mental, emotional and social wellbeing of children and young people can be supported through participation in group storytelling activities. Children become more confident about participating and expressing opinions. They learn to recognise and support individuals with different abilities and needs.

Storytelling in the classroom encourages a culture of respect. Listening to stories, retelling stories and creative storymaking provide opportunities for children to build relationships. Stories help children to understand and express feelings and develop the ability to talk about them.

Supporting and positively assessing one another encourages learning and confidence. The content of stories themselves can also provide material for discussing issues of diversity, transition and change, moral questions, loss and displacement.

Taking part in storytelling as a group and the development of communication skills build self esteem, and encourage children to speak more comfortably to adults and with groups. These skills are transferable and can support children and young people outwith their learning environment and throughout their lives.

Scottish Storytelling Centre, 2009