

Tell it Again! The New Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers

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Tell it Again! is a revised and expanded version of the *Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers*, which was first published by the same authors in 1991. The Introduction claims that this book provides 'a completely revised and updated methodology section, including new guidelines on how to assess pupils' story-based work, learning to learn, learning about culture and using multi-media.' (p. iv)

It might be useful, therefore, to approach this review from a comparative stance, highlighting and assessing the additions and improvements to be found in this latest edition.

Tell it Again! comes in a colourful and attractive A4 ring-bound book of 188 pages, divided into *Parts 1, 2, and 3*. The original 275 pp. of *The Storytelling Handbook* appeared in an A5 format divided into two Parts, bound in a rather uninspiring two-tone cover. The new A4 format uses a larger font, bolder sub-headings, clearer charts, and increased use of bullet points. The text is laid out in two columns per page. This new format has a visually appealing impact, and makes the contents appear more readily accessible than the previous denser presentation. As in the earlier edition, a cassette is available with some of the stories, and all of the songs, chants, and rhymes which are referred to in the *Story Notes* in Part 2. Unlike the original cassette, it does not include a recording of the phonetic alphabet. This used words from the stories to illustrate the sounds of English, a feature not entirely compatible, perhaps, with recent developments in young learner methodology. The cassette can be bought separately, which could be considered a bonus for teachers who wish to share resources and reduce costs.

Tell it Again! is divided into three parts: *Part 1, Methodology: Storytelling, an introduction* (47 pp.), *Part 2, Story Notes* (93 pp.), and *Part 3, Worksheets* (50 pp.), the latter being an entirely new section. Unlike the original edition, the *Introduction* provides the reader with useful information concerning the targeted age range for the stories and activities: 8 to 11 years old.

In Part 1, the original version was divided into six chapters, whereas the new edition is divided into five: *Storytelling, an introduction; Selecting storybooks, Using storybooks, Developing language-learning skills, and Classroom management*. This is because Chapter 5 of the first edition, *Story-based activities*, has been integrated into Chapter 3 and the *Story Notes*.

Chapter 1 provides the reader with a brief summary of publications and web sites dedicated to story-based learning, and makes a case for less teacher resistance to this concept. The fact that Part 1 is entitled: *Methodology* indicates that this edition is going to take a more structured approach to storytelling. To the original rationale for using storytelling, i.e. developing learning strategies, conceptual reinforcement, and cross-curricular links, the authors add to the latter the concept of 'citizenship', defined as: '... *developing cultural awareness and tolerance of other cultures ... promoting equality of the sexes ... developing attitudes of democracy and harmony*'. (p. 3). The *Story Notes* refer to the citizenship content of each title, thus providing help to teachers who are unfamiliar with this aspect of storytelling.

A further addition to this chapter is a section called *Creating your own story-based syllabus*, which is supported by a very useful full-page activities brainstorm for *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, together with a story-based syllabus planner for six of the story titles. Teachers new to storytelling should find this invaluable.

Chapter 2 provides new material on the value of using Real Books, and unlike the original edition, proposes to classify the stories which are included in the book into two categories instead of three. Replacing the original headings of *narrative features, content, and layout are genre and topic*. A clear full-page classification chart on p. 9 of the twelve titles according to this simplified division provides another valuable resource for teachers. An extra section, *Developing visual literacy*, discusses the importance of encouraging children to 'read' the pictures and illustrations, thus helping them to develop various ancillary conceptual skills. Another improved feature of this chapter is the chart on p. 11, which sets out a much clearer and more comprehensive set of criteria for the selection of storybooks than the one to be found in the original version. A new section, *Features to look for in storybooks*, is full of tips and helpful pointers to take the reader beyond the 12 titles included in the book, and guide them to the next step of selecting a storybook for themselves. This is one of the ways

that the new edition takes the teacher beyond the original, by empowering the reader to interpret and use the information beyond merely following the *Story Notes*.

Chapter 3, *Using Storybooks*, provides the greatest volume of new material in this book. The sub-headings are presented in the form of questions most frequently asked by teachers. One of the most significant additions here is the presentation of the 'Plan, Do, Review' model upon which the storytelling methodology is based. 'Pre, while, and post-storytelling activities' are the basis for this model, and a concrete outcome is the cornerstone of the framework. It is interesting to note that any reference to the terminology 'controlled practice and production'—a throwback to the more adult orientated PPP method 'Presentation, Practice, Production', has been removed from the new edition. This represents a clear indication of the authors moving towards a much clearer methodology model. In this chapter, ample advice is also given on how to plan a story-based lesson, and teachers are encouraged to diverge from the *Story Notes*. Plentiful examples are provided of the type of concrete outcomes that could result. Broad guidelines are also given on how to integrate language from some of the titles into and across the school curriculum. However, probably one of the most useful additions to this chapter is the greatly extended and detailed discussion of how to present a story. The distinction between reading and telling is outlined, storytelling techniques are explained, relevant questions to ask are listed, and a checklist of how to assess yourself as a storyteller is provided.

Another very useful addition, is a two page *Observation sheet* (pp. 22–3) which teachers can use in conjunction with the advice given on how to assess children using story-based work. A final section on how to involve parents in story-based work helps teachers to understand the importance of the home environment to learning in school. All in all, an incredibly rich chapter.

Chapters 4 and 5, *Developing language learning skills* and *Classroom management*, remain basically the same. However, Chapter 4 has a greatly extended section on *Learning to learn*, and includes a clear and useful chart incorporating the metacognitive skills developed in each title. Socio-affective strategies and useful techniques for 'teaching' culture are another great addition here. Chapter 5 includes a new section on *Using multimedia*. This includes a discussion of video, computers, CD-Roms, and the Internet. Again the 'Plan, Do,

Review' model is referred to wherever appropriate. In the section which discusses setting up a reading corner, the two-page *Class Library Pupil Record Cards* have been removed from the original version. However, the authors refer the reader to the *Primary English Teacher's Guide* (1992) to examples of these.

Part 2, *Story Notes* provide detailed notes for teachers to exploit 12 authentic stories. These were written for native speakers, and are mostly selected from the *Puffin Picture Book* series. Seven of the stories are completely new to this edition, although some old favourites, such as *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, are retained. The stories include traditional tales, some from other cultures, modern retellings of fairytales, animal stories, stories about everyday life, and fantasy stories. Teachers **do** need to buy the storybooks in order to use the *Story Notes*, although the text of two of the stories, *The Kangaroo from Wollomooloo* and *The Clever Tortoise* is included in the activities worksheets. This will, of course, add to the cost of using this book.

The number of stories has been reduced from 16 in the original version. However, what has been lost in quantity of titles has been made up for in quality of detail. Like the first edition, the *Notes* for each title contain an average of 6 lessons, and cover 6 to 10 hours of class work. There are also several improvements to the layout of the *Notes*. Following a brief introductory paragraph containing a synopsis, special layout features, and the origin of the story, one or two main outcomes of the entire storytelling event are clearly stated, i.e. to play a board game to review the story or to put on a finger puppet show. Concrete outcomes are integral to the storytelling methodology outlined in Part 1. Hence clear guidance in this respect is consistently provided.

The lesson plans are more explicit in terms of materials needed and questions to ask in either the mother tongue or L2, which steps to take, and how to tell the story, and they also contain the key to worksheet activities. The stories which appeared in the original version have been revised also, and all the lessons follow the overall 'Plan, Do, Review' model outlined in Part 2. The layout is much clearer than the original, as there are very few diagrams. In the original version, suggestions for worksheets were included here. As these now appear in Part 3, Part 2 has a more streamlined appearance. However, one anomaly which I would point out is that only the first title, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See?* makes a broad reference to age-level suitability. As there is a considerable range in

conceptual levels between the 8 to 11 age range, I feel that more guidance on this point could have been provided in the 'Story Notes'. I find the classification of stories (p. 10) into *Language level of stories* and *Difficulty of activities* somewhat inadequate. Attention to age level suitability is a criticism which is made by Annie Hughes in her review of five young learner resource books in *ELT Journal* 54/2:199.

Part 3 *Worksheets*, comprises photocopiable worksheets for the activities suggested in the *Story Notes*. These worksheets are clear, well laid out, and easy to use. Finally, there is a page of *References and further reading*, which is a new addition, and provides 25 useful references to methodology books and articles. It is interesting to note that 18 of these were written post-1991, which certainly gives credence to the claim made in the *Introduction* that the new edition draws on recent 'accumulated experience as well as recent developments in language teaching' (p. iv).

On the back inside cover is an outline of a world map, also photocopiable. It is another thoughtful addition to support the teacher in using stories from other cultures.

Eddie Garvie (1990:26), the guru of storytelling, summarizes the helpfulness of story thus:

It helps to contextualise the items of the syllabus/course, offering a field of learning which is meaningful, interesting and motivating, while at the same time it covers the English work that has to be done. It can also give cohesion to the work. Above all it brings a more informal, lively and communicative component to what at times can be a highly structured and often tedious programme.

This revised edition of *The Storytelling Handbook for Primary Teachers* will undoubtedly guide teachers to do all of the above, and in doing so develop their own confidence in using the medium of story in language teaching.

Samples of activities in the *Handbook* can be downloaded from www.PenguinEnglish.com

References

Garvie, E. 1990. *Story as Vehicle*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Hughes, A. 2000. 'Materials for Teaching English to Young Learners'. *ELT Journal* 54/2: 198–200.

The Reviewer

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