

INTRODUCTION TO STORY-TELLING

Whether you are a parent or a teacher, or both, you already know how much children like listening to stories. At times their imagination is fired by the story, at others they are desperately trying to predict what happens next, and sometimes they offer their own version of events or comment on the action or the illustrations. All this activity can be transferred to the foreign language.

These notes on storytelling look at the processes involved in choosing, preparing and telling a story and at how a range of follow-up activities can provide links with many parts of the curriculum. The story and accompanying resources on this CD serve as examples of what can be done. It is hoped that teachers will be able to apply the same principle to the selection and adaptation of further stories.

Why tell stories?

There are many reasons for introducing story-telling to your foreign language programme:

- No matter the stage that you are at in your foreign language learning, it is always easier to listen and understand than to speak. This is true for pupils too.
- Listening to a story in the foreign language develops listening skills as pupils focus on words that are familiar and try to work out what is being said. Illustrations help that process of comprehension, especially for pupils who learn best when aural work is supported by visual stimuli. Pupils learn to make deductions through a combination of listening to the foreign language and looking at the illustrations.
- Listening to correct pronunciation by native speakers is good in itself for pupils.
- It is enjoyable, both for the pupils and for the teacher. The pupils find it relaxing and teachers enjoy the rapport of working with the whole group on a pleasurable activity.

Choosing a story

As a rule, if you like the story and tell it with enthusiasm, then your pupils will enjoy it too. However, there are a few points to bear in mind when choosing a story:

- There must be a good story-line. It should not be too complicated; understanding the story should not depend on one phrase/word at the end. How infuriating if you fail to understand such a crucial phrase/word!
- There must be a sense of climax so that pupils want to know what happens next.
- The content must be acceptable to pupils, neither too babyish nor too adult. The language must be at an appropriate level.
- The story should be neither too long nor too short. If it is too long pupils lose concentration - — and you might forget the text! If it is too short pupils feel let down: they have only just started to become involved in the story when it is over.

Adapting a story

If you are happy with the story's content, style and length, you can adapt the story to suit your pupils. Bear in mind the following points:

- There should be repetition of key language to allow pupils to become involved and to allow them to assimilate the language.
- There should be a limited amount of new language so that pupils do not feel overawed by the story.
- The illustrations must help pupils to understand the story. They must be clear and self-explanatory - and a little bit of humour goes a long way too!

Preparing yourself to tell the story

You should make yourself familiar with the story, using whatever resources are to hand. Usually this will be a book; in the case of this Mini Module Storytelling series there are text and sound files as well as the PowerPoint slide show you can use. If you are not a trained linguist you may wish to make use of the resources in private before you tackle the story with your pupils.

Preparing your pupils to listen to the story

You may opt to tell the story without any preparation, especially if the story is straightforward and uses vocabulary your pupils already know well. You can use mime, gesture and a variety of question and answer techniques to check that pupils are understanding. With judicious questioning and by stressing the items of vocabulary/language structures you wish your pupils to learn, it is perfectly possible for your pupils to enjoy the story and to learn new language at the same time. Story-telling can be a novel and successful way of introducing new language points.

However, you may want to prepare pupils beforehand so that they will get as much from the story as possible. The following suggestions for preparation are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. Be adventurous, add your own ideas.

Key language points

First of all, identify the key language. This is the language which is essential in understanding the story and which you feel will be re-usable in other contexts. Then decide how you will practise this language. There are many ways of doing this:

- flashcards
- card games
- songs
- mimes
- board games (using a game board)
- class games (using OHP or white board)
- physical games, etc.

You can do one or more of the following activities:

- Revise core language that pupils will meet in the story. Recognising familiar vocabulary will give them confidence to deal with what is new.
- Choose suitable items from the resource file to introduce the people/places/situations that pupils will encounter in the course of the story.

- Draw a noughts and crosses grid on the board and number each square. Use the vocabulary recently revised to allocate items to each section on your own master grid. Allocate two teams. Ask one of the teams to choose a number then make the teams guess which items of vocabulary you have allocated to the square. The winner is the team which gets three in a row correct.
- Listen and draw: give pupils a sheet of paper and instruct them to fold it into six squares. Demonstrate as you show them what to do, keeping your language simple. Ask the pupils to number each section. Then give instructions for drawing.

By this time pupils should be familiar with a good proportion of the vocabulary they will meet in the story.

Telling the story

Teachers have many of the qualities that a story-teller needs — it's part of our teaching act! Be yourself and enjoy telling the story. If you show the pupils that you are enjoying it then they will enjoy it too.

- Use gesture and mime.
- Play to your audience: involve pupils through question/answer sessions; get pupils to chorus certain phrases; encourage them to complete sentences for you; test their memory of previous illustrations or parts of the story by going back over the story to reinforce it as you go along.
- Practise key sounds.
- Try to remember the story so that you do not have to refer to notes. Alternatively, you can ad-lib as you tell the story, perhaps picking up on pupils' suggestions. If you use this method, encourage the pupils to remember what you said to help them to understand the story, and ask them to remind you later of what you said.

In many stories for young listeners, as in these modules, there is a lot of repetition. Make the most of it by encouraging the pupils to join in once they have heard it for a second time. They will soon begin to notice a pattern and anticipate what's coming. Challenge them: see if they can guess what comes next. This gives you a triple dividend: pupils are practising the vocabulary that you have prepared with them, they are totally involved in the story and they are keen to outdo the others and get the answer right.

Taking the story further

You are trying to get pupils to remember the language heard in the story so that they can take this language and use it in other contexts. Some activities are provided with each story and others are suggested below. There is so much that you can do, depending on the time that you have available, the enthusiasm and level of the class and your own talents. After all, singing does not appeal to everyone!

- Do a few consolidation activities to allow you to check up on the pupils' comprehension - and to see if they are ready to be moved on to an activity where they have to use/produce some of the language themselves.

- It is more than likely that you will want to tell the story again once you feel that pupils have become familiar with it. In this case, draw back from being the main story-teller and encourage pupils to take over your role. You could begin by reading out some of the phrases and asking pupils to mime the actions. If this works well, you can retell the story, several times, each time getting pupils to take over more of the role of story teller.
- Provide copies of the pictures which tell the story, but present them out of order. Ask pupils to sequence them as you (or they) tell the story, or an abbreviated version of it.
- Ask pupils what they think the people in the pictures are saying. Make speech bubbles to be filled in.
- Where cut-out characters are provided, use them to re-tell the story. Alternatively, create suitable finger puppets or lollipop stick puppets and use them to 'act out' the story.
- Using the resources provided, pupils could make a frieze re-telling the story.
- Give pupils a copy of the text, cut into sections. Ask pupils to match the story text to the pictures.
- Using the text alone, sequence the sections so that they tell the story.
- Read and draw. Each pupil gets a phrase or two from the story and has to illustrate it. Sequence the resulting pictures and text to create a frieze and encourage pupils to read 'their' version of the story.
- Use the story-book leaflet for colouring in, for reading aloud, for recording, or for homework, perhaps with an MP3 file they can play on their iPod.
- Word pictures. Encourage pupils to choose a word from the story and to draw a picture to represent that word.
- Act out the story, with various pupils playing the roles of the people involved. You could stick to the text, or you could encourage pupils to add language which they already know to extend or improvise the dialogue.
- Encourage pupils to create their own version of the story, either orally or in written form. This can mean telling the same story in their own words, creating a different story along the same lines, or telling the story in a different way.
- Finally, how about a song? In some of the modules a musical version of the story is provided. If not, suggest a tune and get pupils to retell the story in song.

The fun needn't end here; there are many ways of building on the story, depending on the interests and abilities of your pupils. Pupils will already have favourite activities in foreign language learning and you can adapt these to reinforce the language of the story. Not all of the activities suggested in the modules will be appropriate for all pupils, but they do demonstrate the possibilities. Use the picture and sound clips to make up further activities of your own.

Adapted from notes originally prepared by Patricia Dobson.