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# LGA3103 Stories for Young Learners

Topic 4: Selection of Stories for Young Learners



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## Topic 4: Selection of stories for young learners

Teachers need to be able to decide what stories to tell / read to their students. There are several obvious factors to consider:

### Appropriate language level

The language in the story needs to be *mostly* known or understood by the children. It's quite alright for there to be some new words – these can be introduced during the pre-reading or pre-telling part of the lesson.

It is also important to remember that children can (hear and) understand much more than they can say. So, for example, while they may only be able to say sentences in the present simple tense, they should be able to handle a story told in the past tense.

Some (educational) story books or readers come with information about the vocabulary count and the ability level the story was written for.

### What you can do

Let's presume that you are looking at a story book with a view to reading it aloud, or maybe retelling the story.

- Flip through the book and notice the commas and full stops – pay attention to the types of sentences. Are the sentences mostly simple and/or compound, or are there a lot of complex sentences which can be hard to follow (and even hard to read aloud).
- Look for the verbs – what tense are they? Are they mostly simple present and simple past? Present perfect is not too hard, but past perfect can start being difficult. Passive verbs could be a problem if there are a lot of them. Generally these more complex types of verbs tend to go along with complex sentences.
- Look at the nouns – are there a lot of different nouns that you are going to have to explain the meanings of? Are there some words that you have been teaching them? This could be a good way to reinforce their learning.

If the story has slightly difficult language but it's a really good story – you can tell it in slightly simplified language rather than reading it.

### Content

You probably need to select a story to fit a particular content theme (World of Self, World of Stories, World of Knowledge), or a particular topic, rather than simply a language concept. It is not vital to make a perfect match between the content and the story; it can help reinforce learning - such as vocabulary - if you can make a strong link.

As well as reinforcing vocabulary acquisition, a story can be used to reinforce learning about a natural or scientific phenomenon, to teach about culture or history, or to teach about morals and consequences.

## How can you find content-related stories?

### On the Internet:

Firstly, you could do an Internet search, such as Google. Make sure that you use words like “story” and “young learners” in your search string.

Generally a story website will have more than one good story, and links to others, and you can ‘follow the lead’ to other stories and websites. (One example is <http://www.regandlellow.com/> which has stories about a series of characters, and PowerPoint presentations.)

### In the library:

Searching library shelves is not as simple as searching on the Internet. However libraries generally have a referencing system – on cards or on the computer – and books should be categorised in useful ways.

### In the bookshop:

Sometimes bookshops categorise the books in more useful ways other than just by the author’s name – although not always with children’s books.

## Visuals

For young learners, this may be the most important issue when selecting a story! There must be something for them to look at and focus on or they will not be able to concentrate.

If you are *reading* the story aloud from a book, there need to be enough pictures, and big enough, for you to hold up and let everyone see them.

If you are *telling* the story, then you need to be the ‘visual’ with lots of facial expression, gestures, and movement. You could also use pictures (big enough), puppet(s), and/or realia.

### What do you do if there are no visual aids in the book?

So what can you do if you find a book with a great story in it but there are just not enough, or not big enough pictures? Some ideas are:

- Scan/photograph the (too small) pictures and create a PowerPoint from the pictures.
- Collect suitable clip-art or pictures (from Google Images, for example) and make a PowerPoint presentation.
- Use some of the children as the characters in the story, and get them to act out a little as you tell/read the story.

## Language learning potential

Any well-told story has language learning potential. How successful this is depends on how the teacher uses it. This includes the pre-reading/telling activity, while reading/telling visual aids for difficult vocabulary or concepts, pauses and questions (asked and answered by teacher and/or students), post-reading activities to clarify and reinforce learning.

However, when selecting a story the teacher will be thinking ahead to what could be learnt from it.

## Looking for Language Learning Potential

Read/think through the story and notice the language. *For example:*

- Notice the prepositions – are there lots of different prepositions, maybe some repeated ones too, that could be paid special attention to, along with actions or gestures, to help reinforce this difficult learning.
- Notice the adverbs of time and verb tenses – could the sequence of the plot be used to teach progress of time and how to express it?
- Look at the characters names, and the use of pronouns – could careful use of intonation and gestures along with the story telling/reading help to make this concept clear?
- Look at the nouns – are there a lot of related vocabulary items, such as animals, fruits, colours, family members, or transport?
- Look for numbers – does this story have times, dates, money or other numbers?
- Look for predictable patterns. Children love stories with predictable patterns, and they are great for language learning practice. These could be for example: Familiar sequences, repeated phrases, rhyming patterns, recurring patterns, or cumulative patterns (Cox, 2008).

**Read the following article and answer the questions below:**

## **Using Children's Literature with Young Learners**

by Eowyn Brown

The biggest practical challenges in using English language children's literature rather than readers created specifically for EFL/ESL students are:

- choosing an appropriate book
- preparing to teach, from writing lesson plans to developing supporting teaching materials
- brainstorming creative teaching ideas

This paper will serve as a guide for those who would like to use literature in the classroom with their young students, but aren't sure how to begin.

### **Introduction**

For some readers, the very word literature brings to mind dusty, difficult books stacked in a rarely frequented corner of the library. Typically, in an EFL/ESL context, literature is associated with advanced university students or other high level adults. However, children's literature is an important part of English language literature as a body of work, and using it for EFL/ESL teaching has many benefits for students.

Given a creative teaching approach and suitable supplemental activities, children's literature can be used successfully as the content base for an integrated-skills EFL/ESL classroom. Appropriate selections give students exposure to new, illustrated vocabulary in context, provide repetition of key words and phrases that students can master and learn to manipulate, and provide a sense of accomplishment at the completion of study that finishing a single unit in a textbook cannot provide. Turning to the last page of a well-read book is a pleasure, and students feel a sense of accomplishment when they have mastered a piece of literature written in English, regardless of whether it is *The Cat in the Hat* or *Ulysses*.

The suggestions here are based on my teaching experience with first, second, and third grade EFL learners from fairly low to intermediate levels of proficiency. Most of these students were still developing a vocabulary base with which to navigate their new language, and so were in the pre-production to early production stages of language acquisition (Haynes 2001). As such, every phase of this approach aims to increase students' exposure to English and to help them build their English vocabulary.

### **Choosing a Book**

Choosing the right book may be the most difficult, and most important, part of teaching literature. In a study of the increasing popularity of using literature in the second language classroom, Radhika O'Sullivan (1991, Selecting Literature section, para. 1) observed that, "It is all very well to point out the advantages of teaching literature but the key to success in using literature in the ESL classroom depends primarily on the works selected." If the selection is too easy, students will feel bored and

you will have difficulty designing enough activities. If the selection is too difficult, students will feel frustrated and you will be overwhelmed. The following guidelines may help you narrow down the field of choices.

When evaluating potential books, look at:

- The length and complexity of the story. Simple, short stories with repetitive language work best for young EFL learners.
- Does the book look overwhelming? Type that is too small, or too many words on a page, can intimidate young students.
- The level of vocabulary. How much of it will be review for your students? If students know less than 75% - 80% of the vocabulary, they may lose confidence in their ability to understand the story.
- Illustrations should be interesting and should help students understand both the vocabulary and the story.
- Finally, select a book that you think you will enjoy. It will be difficult to convince students to be enthusiastic about a story you don't like.

A selection of recommended titles is provided in the Appendix.

## Preparing to Teach

### *Lesson Planning*

Before you start designing worksheets and wordlists, make sure that you know where you're going. Think about your teaching objective, consider how much time you have to spend with the book, and then create a plan so that you have a systematic approach in mind as you design materials.

### *Allow Enough Time*

Spending enough time with the book is very important. In order for young students to fully absorb an English language book, they must interact with it extensively. Dr. Seuss's *The Foot Book* contains 131 words, 47 of which are the word feet or foot, yet spending five or six hours on a simple book like this is appropriate with young, beginning learners. Even more advanced young learners need plenty of time. *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, a book based on a popular children's summer camp song, is very short and simple by adult standards, but my second grade EFL students spent over ten hours and sixteen class periods studying it. They were never bored, and, in fact, their enthusiasm for the book seemed to increase in proportion to the time they spent studying it. This observation is supported by Sabrina Peck (2003, p. 141), who advises teachers of young learners that, "Many children do not tire of practicing a repetitive and rhythmic text several times a day, many days a week."

### *Use What You Find*

Look for features of the book that you can highlight in the classroom. For example, *The Foot Book* uses opposites and counting. You can work these two concepts into your supplemental activities. *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* is a great springboard for teaching vocabulary about nature (forest,

river, cave, mud, snowstorm) and prepositions (over, under, through). *Inside a Barn in the Country* provides an obvious focus on animal names and sounds.

### *Developing Materials*

Developing materials yourself, while challenging and time-consuming, can be very rewarding. Not only is it a good learning experience which may help give you insight into your teaching, it also allows you to target the types of activities that will be most valuable to your students, and to tailor them exactly to fit their needs. To go a step further, Brian Tomlinson (1999, Introduction section, para. 2), asserts that the most meaningful learning takes place when students are "involved intellectually, aesthetically, and emotionally" in their own education. When teachers choose to use student-created materials, instead of pre-fabricated, one-size fits all published ones, they can begin to accomplish goals like these.

### *Workbook*

Young students need hands-on activities. A teacher-created workbook can act as a basis for one of those types of activities.

Keep things simple. The workbook need be nothing more than a collection of papers stapled together. On the first day of teaching a new book, allow students to illustrate the covers of their own workbooks. This can provide a personal connection to the story at the outset of their study. You can use the pages as a place for students to draw artistic responses to the story. For example, if they've learned "house/mouse/train/rain" in class, then the lesson wrap-up may include time for them to draw a picture featuring the vocabulary words and labelled in English.

### *Flashcards*

Again, materials do not need to be professionally produced to be effective. Assign different key vocabulary words to different students and have them help make flashcards. You can collect and laminate the drawings and use them for various activities in follow up lessons. It is amazing to see the rapt attention students are willing to give materials they created themselves.

### *Cassette Tape*

Many books are available with a companion cassette tape, which often includes versions of the story set to music or with sound effects. These tapes are well worth the investment and, if possible, students will benefit from purchasing their own copy as well so they can listen at home. The story set to music is more entertaining for your students, who might express it by borrowing from Emma Goldman, and saying, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your EFL classroom."

If no tape is available, don't despair! If you are a virtuoso, you could set the story to music yourself and record it. If not, you could coerce your older, higher proficiency students to read the story and record it as a class project. You could enlist precocious young ones to make drumming sounds at pre-determined intervals or, if you have truly musical students, you could find some way to use their talents. My sixth grade students particularly enjoyed noticing how "easy" the literature for first graders was as it gave them a real sense of their own progress.



## Teaching Ideas

### *Sequencing Activities*

Young learners in particular need a very active classroom and variety throughout the lesson. Ten minutes is probably the maximum length of time you can expect students of this age to focus their attention before you need to change gears. One guideline that works well with young learners is to assure that, in any given lesson, there is always a little enthusiastic singing, a little quiet listening, a little enthusiastic dancing, and a little quiet artwork.

The following approach is one that works very well:

- **Sing.** Students sing, recite, or read a passage from the story in teams.
- **Listen.** Students listen to the story from beginning to end.
- **Dance.** Students get out of their chairs for some physical activity. Often, this can be acting out the actions from the story, but there are unlimited possibilities.
- **Draw.** Students sit back down and illustrate new vocabulary.

While considering how you will allocate class time, don't underestimate the students' enthusiasm for listening to a story again and again. In fact, according to Anne Burns (2003, p. 22), a surprising result from her study of second-language learner attitudes toward literacy learning included the insight that "students were almost unanimous in their desire for teachers to read aloud to them." She credited the value of hearing fluent reading in English, listening to the written words, hearing correct stress and intonation patterns, as well as providing a model for imitation as possible reasons.

### *Types of Activities*

- Listen to the story on tape/as read by the teacher without looking at the text.
- Listen to the story and read along.
- Listen to the story and put illustrations depicting parts of the story in order.
- Read the book silently.
- Read the book to a partner, then switch.
- Write your favourite words/new words/words starting with A from the story in your notebook.
- Write a portion of the story in the workbook.
- Answer (or practice asking) simple who, what, when, where, and why questions about the story.
- Play "Pictionary". Divide students into teams. One member of the team draws a picture on the board while team members try to guess what it is within a limited time period.
- Speed reading game. Call out a word from the text, then let students race to find it. The first one to find it reads the sentence aloud. A word of caution: this game is rather hard on books.
- Have students display the flashcards they made, let them be the teacher and ask the class, "What is this?"

- Make up a dance or do actions to the words of the story. A good example of this kind of story is *The Foot Book*. The text repeats, "Left Foot/Left Foot/Right Foot/Right." Students can get out of their chairs and jump from left to right as suggested by the text.
- Do the opposite of dancing. Have students "freeze" a moment of the text by acting out exactly what is described in the text at some specific moment, and holding perfectly still. You could photograph these moments if you have a digital camera.
- Do a verbal fill-in-the-blank exercise. As you read, stop at random and have students shout out what word comes next.
- Check comprehension of key concepts by asking students to draw pictures. For example, students could demonstrate understanding of the difference between "I like *kimchi*."/"I don't like *kimchi*." by drawing two different pictures.
- A note about memorization. A lot of students really do enjoy memorizing the books. Allow them to recite what they've memorized in teams. Many students love to show off their English, and feel very proud of being able to produce a minute or so of non-stop English.

## Conclusion

Using children's literature can be an effective and enjoyable way to teach language. Students who are enthralled by a story forget their worries and anxieties about the new language. In an interview with Tova Ackerman (1994, para. 2), storyteller Dvora Shurman says that, "The best way to teach is not to impose teaching, but to allow the listener to become so involved in hearing a story that his 'defences' are no longer active." It is our sense of enjoyment, excitement, and emotional involvement that is a necessary condition for learning, and using literature in the classroom can provide the content base for the magic.

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## Appendix

### *Suggested Titles*

#### For Absolute Beginners:

These are very short stories with a few simple words that repeat over and over again. They will not overwhelm beginning students.

- I Like Books by Anthony Browne
- Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See? by Bill Martin, Jr. and Eric Carle (Illustrator)

#### For Beginners:

These stories have more text, but still use simple vocabulary and a repetitive narrative structure.

- The Foot Book by Dr. Seuss
- Inside a Barn in the Country by Tedd Arnold (Illustrator) and Alyssa Satin Capucilli
- Silly Sally by Audrey Wood and Don Wood (Illustrator)

#### For Intermediate Students:

These books are well-suited for young learners with a full year of English study experience. Vocabulary is generally simple, but the stories are much longer. They do retain the features of repetitive passages and the first three on the list are set to music, which will help students absorb them.

- We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen and Helen Oxenbury (Illustrator)
- Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star Illustrated by Iza Trapani
- The Itsy-Bitsy Spider Illustrated by Iza Trapani
- Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Seuss

#### Resources on the Internet for Finding More Titles:

The Children's Literature Web Guide (David K. Brown) <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown>

(Brown, 2004)

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## Questions for Using Children's Literature

### 1. Appropriate selections (choosing the right books):

- give students exposure to .....
- provide .....
- and provide a sense of .....

2. What pleasure do students feel when they turn the last page of a book?

.....

3. The key to success in using literature in the ESL classroom depends primarily on.....

.....

4. What five things should you look at when evaluating potential books?

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

5. What would be an appropriate length of time to spend on a book like Dr Seuss's *The Foot Book*?

.....

6. What do young children never tire of doing 'several times a day, many days a week'?

.....

7. What Language Learning Potential does the writer find in:

*The Foot Book* .....

*We're going on a bear hunt* .....

*Inside a barn in the country* .....

8. What goals can be accomplished 'when teachers choose to use student-created materials, instead of pre-fabricated, one-size fits all published ones'?

.....

9. Give some examples of what could be included in a teacher-created workbook about a story.

.....

.....

10 What four possibilities are recommended for sequencing activities?

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

The article above is talking mostly about story reading rather than telling. The following excerpt from Carole Cox's text book *Teaching Language Arts: A student-centred classroom* includes a list of "Do's and Don'ts" for reading aloud, as well as some pointers for selecting books to read aloud.

Some of these points may be useful when you create your checklist at the end of this topic.

## Do's and Don'ts of Reading Aloud

Jim Trelease's (2006) book *The Read-Aloud Handbook* suggests the following do's and don'ts:

### Read Aloud Do's

- Stop at a suspenseful spot each day.
- If reading a picture book, make sure the children can see the pictures easily.
- After reading, allow time for discussion and verbal, written or artistic expression. Don't turn discussions into quizzes or pry interpretations from children.
- Use plenty of expression in reading, and read slowly.
- Bring the author to life by adding a third dimension when possible – for example, eat blueberries while reading *Blueberries for Sal*, by Robert McCloskey (1948).

### Read Aloud Don'ts

- Don't read stories that you don't like yourself.
- If it becomes obvious that a book was a poor choice, stop reading it.
- Don't feel that every book must be tied to something in the curriculum.
- Don't be unnerved by students' questions during the reading. Answer and discuss them.
- Don't use reading aloud as a threat or turn it into a weapon.

Trelease (2006) has also suggested selection criteria for a good read-aloud book. In sum, such a book should have these qualities:

- a fast-paced plot, which quickly hooks the children's interest
- clear, well-rounded characters
- crisp, easy-to-read dialogue
- minimal long, descriptive passages

(Cox, 2008, p. 272)

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The article below by Mart makes some excellent points about both choosing books and using stories in order to encourage young learners of English.

As always, the questions below are designed to help you focus on the important points in the article.

## Encouraging Young Learners to Learn English through Stories

Cagri Tugrul Mart

### Abstract

Reading is an important part of successful language acquisition. Motivating young learners to learn English through stories at an early age provides them the opportunity to widen their horizons and stimulate their early enthusiasm and enhance their awareness of the rich use of English. Stories are unquestionably a significant part of children's literacy development. When we read to our children, we do not confine them to academic excellence but extend into their emotional and behavioural learning (Ai Lian Kim, 2008). Reading at an early age is essential. Therefore, this article focuses on how to spark student's interest towards English through stories and how stories develop their language learning.

**Keywords:** Young learners, Reading, Learning English, Stories

### 1. Introduction

Storytelling is an accepted and widely used approach in the teaching of English language classroom. It represents a holistic approach to language teaching and learning founded on the understanding that learners need to interact with rich, authentic examples of the foreign language (Mourao, 2009). "In using stories in language teaching we are using something much bigger and more important than language teaching itself" (Wright, 2003: 7).

*Story in its widest sense is also the carrier of life's messages and has, I believe, a vital part to play in the education of the young child, particularly in the development of language. I suggest that the teacher, working from a story "bank" rich in all manner of literary genres and crossings a variety of cultures, can produce the kind of learning environment which not only stimulates and carries the children along on the crest of their interest and enjoyment, but offers meaning potential without which the learning of language is rigid (Garvie, 1991: 56).*

### 2. Why Story Books?

It is widely believed that literature-based instruction can positively influence the language development of primary school students (Morrow, 1992). Weinreich & Bartlett claim that in children's literature "the child ... must be regarded as a necessary condition which the author consciously or unconsciously relates to in the creative process" (2000:127). For McDowell (1973), the term "children's literature" is applicable to books written for, and read by, that group referred to as children by any particular society. For Oberstein (1996: 17) "children's literature" is "a category of books the existence of which absolutely depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience: children". Hollindale (1997:30) defines "children's literature" as a body of texts with certain common features of imaginative interest, which is activated as children's literature by a reading event: that of being read by a child". According to Ghosn (2002: 172) "children's literature is fiction written for children to read for pleasure, rather than for didactic purposes". Huck et al. (1997: 5) children's literature is "the imaginative shaping of life and thought into the forms and structures of language". Galda and Cullinan (2002: 7) claim that literature "entertains and ... informs" and "it

enables young people to explore and understand their world” and “enriches their lives and widens their horizons” and through literature children “learn about people and places on the other side of the world as well as ones down the street. They can travel back and forth in time to visit familiar places and people, to meet new friends, and to see new worlds. They can explore their own feelings, shape their own values, and imagine lives beyond the one they live”. Tomlinson and Lynch-Brown (2002:2) define children literature as “good quality trade books written especially for children from birth to adolescence, covering topics of relevance and interest to children”. Lewis (2001) states that there are good reasons for children reading picture-books:

*Consider the fact that children born into the first years of the twenty-first century are likely to possess a richer and more deft understanding of visual imagery and its modes of deployment than any other generation in the history of humankind. Their world is saturated with imagines, moving and still, alone and in all manner of hybrid combinations with texts and sounds. This is the world in which they must function (p.59).*

Ghosn (2002: 173) summarizes the reasons why authentic literature is valuable for children:

- Authentic literature provides a motivating, meaningful context for language learning, since children are naturally drawn to stories.
- Literature can contribute to language learning. It presents natural language, language at its finest, and can foster vocabulary development in context.
- Literature can promote academic literacy and thinking skills, and prepare children for the English-medium instruction.
- Literature can function as a change agent: good literature deals with some aspects of the human condition, can thus contribute to the emotional development of the child, and foster positive interpersonal and intercultural attitudes.

### 3. How to Select Story Books?

Brown (2004) claims that appropriate selections of children’s literature give students exposure to new, illustrated vocabulary in context, provide repetition of key words and phrases that students can master and learn to manipulate and provide a sense of accomplishment.

“Smallwood (1988:66) recommends that criteria for the selection of children’s literature for language learners should include “age-appropriate theme; simple language; limited use of metaphor and unfamiliar experiences; use of rhyme; unambiguous plot; realistic but simple dialogue; potential for reading aloud; brevity; and good illustrations”.

Smallwood adds these criteria some more:

- Does the book help meet curriculum objectives or enhance the thematic units being studied?
- Is the book’s content appropriate to the children’s age and intellectual level?
- Does the book use language that is at or slightly above the level of the learners?
- Does the book contain repeated, predictable language patterns?
- Are there clear illustrations that help the story?

In addition to these criteria Steinbeck (2008) lists the characteristics of using stories with young learners as:

- Stories should be action oriented
- Stories should be personal (the use of familiar characters, the pre- and post- activities should make use of the personalization technique.
- Stories should not be too detailed, both in terms of the story and the visuals used.
- Stories should allow for context extension.
- Stories should use comprehensible input (the language that is at the right cognitive and linguistic level) so that the output is more structured.

Heide Niemann (2002), when selecting a story book for young learners, states that the following questions will support parents to direct their ways.

- Are different types of storybooks (animal stories, fantasy stories ...) represented in the classroom?
- Are there differences in the style of the illustrations between the books?
- Are the main characters boys as well as girls?
- Is the book (psychologically) suitable for the age group?
- Can children identify with the main character or with any other character?
- Will there be links to their personal experiences?
- Is the book fun, has it got humour in it?
- How does the language match the children's language skills?
- Does the book match cross-curricular topics?
- Is it a book the children can read themselves?
- Is it a book they can read words or passages from?
- Is it a book they can understand without reading the text?

According to Vardel, Hadaway, and Young (2006: 735) the most important criteria in selecting books for learners of English as a second language is that they are appropriate in relation to age, interests, and maturity.

#### **4. Teaching Young Learners through Story Books**

Stories contribute to children's language development. According to Winch et al. (2004: 402), children's literature "provides a wonderful opportunity for children to see language in action", "a great resource for more formal learning about the structures of language", and "a locus for learning about these structures in meaningful contexts".

Children love stories. They ----

- are always eager to listen to stories
- know how stories work
- want to understand what is happening
- can enjoy hearing stories in English when they start English lessons.
- enjoy looking at storybooks by themselves



- can reread the stories they like when they read in English themselves.

(Slatterly & Willis, 2001)

Heide Niemann (2002) lists the importance of storybooks as:

- Storybooks are part of a country's culture and thus they combine language learning and cultural awareness.
- Storybooks are challenging the imagination.
- Storybooks help children expand their own world, sometimes they may even help them cope with their reality.
- Storybooks provide language in a meaningful context.
- Storybooks provide grammatical structures in an authentic context.
- Storybooks provide children with the possibility to browse, choose their own pace, look carefully at details.
- Storybooks introduce topics and language in a child oriented way.
- Storybooks help children develop creative powers.
- In picture books the combination of a text and illustration is supportive for the understanding and the interpretation of a story.

Stories are useful in language learning for young learners. "Young learners acquire language unconsciously. The activities you do in class should help this kind of acquisition. Stories are the most valuable resource you have. They offer children a world of supported meaning that they can relate to. Later on you can use stories to help children practise listening, speaking, reading, and writing" (Slatterly & Willis, 2001). Story telling can be effective for teaching English to young learners for the following reasons.

- The purpose of telling a story is genuinely communicative.
- Storytelling is linguistically honest (It is oral language, meant to be heard).
- Storytelling is real (people do it all the time).
- Storytelling appeals to the affective domain.
- Storytelling caters to the individual while forging a community in the classroom.
- Storytelling provides listening experiences with reduced anxiety.

(Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004)

Xu (2003) states that literature in English can provide language learners with opportunities to master structure through exposure to repeated and predictable linguistic patterns. Huck et al. (1997:12) claim that "literature plays an important role in all aspects of oral language development. When young children are read to their own phonological production- the number and range of sounds that they produce-increases significantly", and "reading aloud has significant effects on the complexity of children's sentence structure and expository text". Gambrell et al. (2000:2) lists the characteristics of their approach to literature-based instruction as:

- Literature is used as an important vehicle for language arts instruction

- High quality narrative and informational literature provides the basis for a consistent read-aloud program in which children read daily [www.ccsenet.org/elt](http://www.ccsenet.org/elt) English Language Teaching Vol. 5, No. 5; May 2012 104 ISSN 1916-4742 E-ISSN 1916-4750
- Literature is the sole or primary basis for initial reading instruction, or it is a significant supplement to a basal program.
- Opportunities are provided for students to listen to and read books of their own choosing.
- Students are provided with sustained time for both independent and collaborative book sharing, reading and writing activities.
- Discussions of literature among students and teachers are commonplace.

“Children delight in imagination and fantasy. It is more than simply a matter of enjoyment, however, in the language classroom this capacity for fantasy and imagination has a very constructive part to play” (Halliwell, 1993: 7).

“Stories may bridge the gap between language study and language use and also to link classroom learning with the world outside. Some of the activities do not always have a very large language element but are nevertheless important in creating a feeling among the pupils that learning English means fun, activity, creativity and enjoyment”.

(Ellis & Brewster 2002: 17)

Repetition of stories enables young learners master the language better. “Children enjoy listening to stories over and over again. This frequent repetition allows certain language items to be acquired while others are being overtly reinforced. Many stories contain natural repetition of key vocabulary and structures. This helps children to remember every detail, so they can gradually learn to anticipate what is about to happen next in the story. Repetition also encourages participation in the narrative” (Ellis & Brewster, 2002: 2).

Stories are motivating, challenging and great fun for young learners. They “can help develop positive attitudes towards the foreign language, culture and language learning” (Ellis and Brewster, 2002:1). Winch et al. (2004:401) states that through literature-based activities “guided discussion promotes many literacy behaviours: it improves vocabulary, offers opportunities for more sophisticated sentence constructions and syntax, and lets the children hear the sounds of words as their peers say them”. Fox (1993:185), about literature based instruction, writes “storytelling and hearing stories read aloud, expose children to linguistic and narrative conventions in the course of the power and pleasure they experience in the play”. Using “stories allows the teacher to introduce or revise new vocabulary and sentence structures by exposing the children to language in varied, memorable and familiar contexts, which will enrich their thinking and gradually enter their own speech” (Ellis & Brewster, 2002:2). “Listening to stories helps children become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of language” (Ellis and Brewster, 2002:2). About literature for children Ferguson and Young (1996:598) claim that “(literature) provide language-rich illustrations of the uses of dialogue and often elicits a “chime in” response from students, thus providing a natural link to the give and take of conversation, vocabulary usage, and appropriate syntactical structure”.

Young learners exercise their imagination through stories. They “can become personally involved in a story as they identify with the characters and try to interpret the narrative and illustrations. This imaginative experience helps” (Ellis & Brewster, 2002:1) students develop their own creative potential.

Stories also “develop the different types of ‘intelligences’ that contribute to language learning, including emotional intelligence” (Ellis & Brewster, 2002:2). Stories “develop children’s learning strategies such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning and hypothesizing” (Ellis & Brewster, 2002:2). “Learning English through stories can lay the foundations for secondary school in terms of learning basic language functions and structures, vocabulary and language learning skills” (Ellis & Brewster, 2002:2).

“It seems a pity to deprive learners of opportunities to hear authentic uses of past tense forms and contrast with the other tenses, in the meaningful contexts of stories, and I can see no intrinsic reason for supposing that use of past tense would prevent children understand a story. In fact, if they are familiar with stories in their first language, they will probably expect to hear past tense forms and may misconstrue the verbs” (Cameron, 2001: 166). According to Hsieh (2006), storytelling combined with total physical response can motivate young learners and is beneficial to their learning of English vocabulary, sentence patterns, and comprehension.

For teachers stories allow “to use an acquisition-based methodology by providing optimal input” (Ellis & Brewster, 2002:2). It is great to use real storybooks because they “add variety and provide a springboard for creating complete units of work that constitute mini-syllabuses and involve pupils personally, creatively and actively in an all-round whole curriculum approach. They thereby provide a novel alternative to the course book” (Ellis & Brewster, 2002:2).

A Canadian critic, Michele Landsberg (1987) writes:

*Good books can do so much for children. At their best, they expand horizons and instil in children a sense of the wonderful complexity of life. No other pastime available to children is so conducive to empathy and the enlargement of the human sympathies. No other pleasure can so richly furnish a child’s mind with the symbols, patterns, depths, and possibilities of civilisation (p.34).*

The following are some recommended storytelling techniques from Brewster, Ellis & Girard (2004).

- If students are unfamiliar are with storytelling, begin with short sessions which do not demand too much from them and over-extend their concentration span.
- Read slowly and clearly. Give your pupils time to relate what they hear to what they see in the pictures, to think, ask questions, make comment. However, do vary the pace when the story speeds up.
- Make comments about the illustrations and point to them to focus the pupils’ attention
- Encourage your pupils to take part in the storytelling by repeating key vocabulary items and phrases. You can invite them to do this by pausing and looking at them with a questioning expression and by putting your hand to your ear to indicate that you are waiting for them to join in. Then repeat what they have said to confirm that they have predicted correctly, and if appropriate, expand by putting the word into a full phrase or sentence.

- Use gestures, mime, facial gestures to help convey the meaning.
- Vary the pace, tone, and volume of your voice. Are you going to whisper to build up suspense? Are you going to introduce an element of surprise by raising your voice?
- Pause where appropriate to add dramatic effect or to give children time to relate what they hear to what they see, and to assimilate details in the illustrations.
- Disguise your voice for the different characters as much as you can to signal when different characters are speaking and help convey meaning.
- Ask questions to involve children. What do you think is going to happen next? What would you do?
- Do not be afraid to repeat, expand and reformulate. This increases opportunities of exposure to the language and gives children a second chance to work out the meaning and have it confirmed.

(Shin)

## 5. Conclusion

Stories are motivating for young learners, and stories can create a happy and enjoyable learning environment.

Stories are the most ideal sources for young learners in effective language learning. Children like stories, and they find stories easy to access and understand. Stories provide an outstanding opportunity for young learners to master the foreign language.

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(Mart, 2012)

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**Answer the questions below. Work with a partner (or group).**

### Questions about Encouraging Young Learners to learn English through stories

1. "In .....  
we are using something much bigger and more important than language teaching itself".

2. Through literature children:

"learn .....  
....."

They can travel .....  
.....

They can explore .....  
....."

3. What criteria should be included when selecting books, according to Smallwood?

- "..... theme
- .....language
- limited use of .....
- and .....
- use of .....
- unambiguous .....
- .....dialogue
- potential for .....
- .....(short)
- good ....."

4. Smallwood gives 5 more criteria. Summarise them:

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

5. List Steinbeck's 5 characteristics of stories to use with young learners.

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

6. Summarise each of Niemann's 12 suggestions for parents selecting books for their children.

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

Now look at the criteria in 3, 4, 5 and 6 (above) and classify them into four groups:

- Age/ability/language level
- Suitable Content
- Appropriate Visuals
- Language Learning Potential

Place them in the table below. [Note: You may find that some items could potentially fit into more than one column.]

Level	Content	Visuals	Language Learning Potential



### Exercise 1: Create an instrument

1. Design a checklist for deciding the suitability of any given book or story.

- Include questions within all four areas listed in the chart.
- Include a statement about how to score a particular story – how many positive marks does a book need to have for you to use it?

2. Create a presentation for your checklist to share it with the rest of your class. (It could be a PowerPoint presentation, or some other format.)

### Exercise 2: Apply your Instrument and Examine Language Learning Potential

Choose a story – either from the Appendix, or one of your own.

1. Apply your checklist to the book or story. You may find you need to adjust or change or checklist (or its format) to make it more user-friendly.

2. Look specifically at the Language Learning Potential of your book or story.

- What target language and/or language learning outcomes could you use it for?
- What activities could you do with the children before, during, or after reading/telling the story to teach or reinforce these language learning aspects?

3. Present your assessment of the book/story and your activity ideas to your partner/group/class.

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