



TONYA MEERS IS THE CHIEF STORYTELLER WITH LITTLE CREATIVE DAYS.

Get creative with your storytelling

Tonya Meers introduces a technique that will entertain and educate the children in your setting in equal measures...

WHAT IS CREATIVE STORYTELLING and how can you use it to teach children? Well, put simply, creative storytelling involves making things like puppets, story boxes, or character models to interact with a story. It's the interaction that is the crucial part, because when we truly interact with a story we are making an emotional connection, using more of our senses and engaging more areas of the brain. This helps to embed the message of the story in children's learning.

Children love making things and they tend to get very attached to whatever it is they have made – it's always a pleasure to see the pride in their faces and that triumphant look of achievement when their project is complete! I find that children are much more engaged with a story if they have made something connected to it, and learn far more as a result.

Running a session

CHOOSING THE STORY

When you plan a creative storytelling session, find a story that you know the children will not only enjoy but which they will learn from as well. I also look at what type of things I can get the children to make, so that they can interact with that story again afterwards, and obviously at the age of the children in the group, so that I can adapt things accordingly.

In one session I was involved with, which took place in a Reception class, we used *We All Went on Safari* by Laurie Krebs. It was the culmination of a series of sessions on different African animals. The story is set in the Serengeti Plain in Tanzania and is about four children who go on an adventure and count the wildlife they see along

the way. The numbers are given in both English and Swahili. As an educational book on its own it is great, but we took it a step further...

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES

After the story the children had great fun making their own Serengeti grasslands story boxes. To help the session run smoothly, I had pre-prepared the boxes by removing the four flaps from the top of each and cutting off one of the longest sides. Due to the limited time we had for the session I had also painted the three remaining sides blue to represent the sky. We then lined the bottom of the boxes with parcel paper to represent the floor of the Serengeti and added raffia for the

grass lands. We created trees from twigs and moss. We then added animals, which we had made over the previous weeks.

GETTING INTERACTIVE

This was when the magic really happened. We put the boxes together and had our own safari. We grouped animals together and moved them from box to box, counting them in English and Swahili.

The children learnt so much from this – in particular, that the animals they created weren't jungle animals, as they are so often portrayed, but grassland animals. They learnt what a grassland was: that it is dry with few trees.

The session also helped to develop the children's language skills, not just with learning some Swahili, but through the rich vocabulary and rhythm of the story as well as their communication with each other.

At the end of the session the children put their own animals back in the boxes they had made and used them to make up their own stories. It was lovely to see them engaging their imaginations and natural storytelling abilities.

The benefits

Creative storytelling is an ideal way to cover the EYFS, as it spans the prime areas of learning. For example, stories are a great way for children to experience a rich variety of language and broaden their vocabulary. Storytelling promotes cognitive development as little ones learn to understand tone of voice, gesture and pace, as well as encouraging empathy with the characters. It also gives them an opportunity to speak and listen. If children have made puppets, they can





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TRY IT YOURSELF

If you would like to have a go, why not try some of the following activities to make your creative storytelling a hit?

- Puppet making – you can provide a variety of art and craft materials for your children to unleash their imaginations with, or even use unwanted socks.
- Story boxes – the Serengeti grasslands boxes described above proved really popular, but with a bit of thought and preparation you could create any scene for your children.
- Face masks – fun to make and a great way to let children role play their favourite tales.
- Character models – these can be made from everyday objects and used to extend children's enjoyment of any story.

make up their own stories or act out the story they have heard, which helps to embed the learning.

Creative activities are a fantastic way to develop fine motor skills as children explore a variety of materials and techniques, as well as being able to experiment with colour, designs and textures. And we know that storytelling enhances children's personal, social and emotional development. It gives them the opportunity to play together cooperatively, learning how to work as a team as well as form positive relationships. It also affords them the opportunity to develop their thoughts and feelings, and understand the moral of a story. It is wonderful to see how making something for themselves boosts children's confidence, and it also give focus to those children who may have attention issues. I've also found that it is great for those with SEN, as it allows for all children to feel included in the activities.

There's more! If you have ever wondered how to help children understand the world we live in, then creative storytelling is a great way to look

at past events, people and the impact that certain behaviours can have. For example, a story about saving the rainforest can help to explain the effects of deforestation on animals, as well as looking at how the felled wood is used.

So by using creative storytelling you can grow children's knowledge and understanding in a real and engaging way. It invites children to use their imaginations, which will stretch them. It will also help to foster the curiosity and capacity to make connections, take risks and innovate. They will learn how to express themselves in different ways and with different media, which aids development of social skills and social interaction. It is a fantastic pedagogic tool: simple, versatile and suitable for all ages. Why not try it in your setting?

Little Creative Days produce puppet-making kits based on original stories for 3–9-year-olds, all linked to the EYFS, KS1 or KS2. For more information, including suggested themes for your own sessions, and blog posts, visit littlecreativedays.co.uk