

Storytelling Activities for Classrooms

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Ongoing researchⁱ on storytelling highlights the significant improvement in the literacy skills of students who listen to stories regularly. One articleⁱⁱ states that children who are exposed to storytelling at a young age develop important abilities, such as imagination, empathy, tolerance, and inference that help them navigate through life with confidence.

Stories that are narrated with the appropriate use of gestures, voice modulation, pauses, facial expressions and props become powerful teaching aids. Teachers can then use them confidently with students who struggle to learn a new language. Stories work best when they are selected according to the age, interests, comprehension levels and background of students.

Unfortunately, in many classrooms across India, teachers mainly tell stories to impart moral values or to explain grammar concepts. For storytelling to become meaningful, teachers must narrate tales with passion and for the joy they bring to the audience. Dissecting, analysing, interpreting, and paraphrasing stories for the sake of academics should come at a later stage. Stories could be used in classes for reasons ranging from developing literacy skills to becoming a more humane person.

This article focuses on how storytelling can improve and enhance Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing (LSRW) skills in young learners along with their ability to comprehend, sequence, predict, retell and write a story. The following is a list of creative activities that can be done in class.

Oral skills

Speaking a language fluently builds confidence in students and is achieved not by listening to lectures and repeating mechanically what the teacher has said, but by participating in joyful activities, such as storytelling.

Activity: Story bag

Objective: To help children make up stories, thereby improving their imagination and speaking skills.

Materials: A bag containing small objects, such as erasers, pencils, pens, sharpeners, coins, toffees etc.

Procedure:

- Narrate a story and explain to the children that each story has a beginning, a middle and an end.
- Ask six students in the front row to close their eyes and pick up any one object from the bag.
- Pick an object from the bag yourself.
- Start a story on the object that you have picked and let the children continue it by introducing their objects to the story.

Outcomes: Students will learn to weave a story by using realia, that is, materials and objects from everyday life used as teaching aids.

Retelling skills

Retelling is an important ability for building story comprehension which helps children recount stories in their own words. It also improves their listening and speaking skills along with sequencing.

Activity: Ball retelling

Objective: To help children retell a story

Materials: A ball

Procedure:

- Narrate a story to the class.
- Take a ball and toss it towards the students. The student who gets it must begin retelling the story from the start. After narrating the first line, the student must pass the ball to another classmate, who must add the next line to retell the story in sequence.
- The ball is passed around and every student who holds it participates in the retelling activity until the story ends.
- As a follow-up exercise for checking comprehension, make deliberate mistakes while telling the story and wait for the students to correct you.

Outcomes: Students will learn how to pay attention, understand and retell a story enthusiastically.

Listening skills

Good listening skills are important for learning a language, but listening does not only mean hearing the sound of words but also processing what has been heard. Children imbibe rich vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and clear diction by listening to stories and their reading and writing skills automatically improve with the teacher's guidance and support.

Activity: Musical story

Objective: To improve the listening skills of students using audio resources

Materials: Musical instruments or recordings of different sounds; mobile phones and speakers

Procedure:

- Choose a story that has many sound effects, such as the twitter of birds, the beat of drums, the swish of the wind, the gurgling of streams etc.
- Narrate the story in class.
- Retell the story by pausing at places where a sound, such as that of birds appears. Play a recording of birds twittering through a speaker.
- Students have to say the word aloud in English by listening to the sound, such as 'cheep-cheep', 'tweet-tweet' or 'twitter' depending on their age and level.
- Continue retelling the story until the list of 'sound-words' from the story is exhausted.
- As a follow-up exercise, students have to say aloud or write sentences by using some of the 'sound words' they have learned.

Outcome: Students' vocabulary and comprehension will improve through the use of musical instruments and recordings.

Sequencing skills

Sequencing helps children comprehend what they read or hear. It also helps them identify the components of a story and then retell it in a sequential manner. Sequencing skills are important comprehension strategies, especially for narrative texts.

Activity: Reading cone

Objective: To develop reading and sequencing skills

Materials: Story page, pencils, notebooks

Procedure:

- Choose a children's story page from a magazine or newspaper.
- Roll the page into a cone and keep a small hole

at the top to peep in.

- Encourage students to peep in through the hole and read words or phrases that are printed on the inside page of the cone.
- Open the paper cone. Read out the middle portion of the story and ask students to narrate or write either the beginning or the ending of the story.
- As a follow-up exercise, ask students to draw characters, objects or actions from the story.

Outcome: Students' motivation to narrate and write a story in sequence will increase.

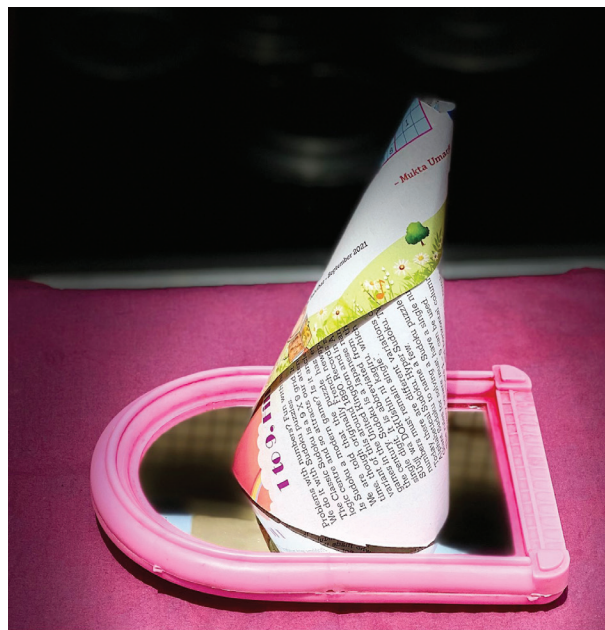


Figure 1. Reading cone

Sentence weaving

The ability to write correctly and clearly can transform any challenging writing task into a fulfilling experience. The development of sentence-making skills assumes vital importance, especially for students in the primary sections.

Activity: Game of halves

Objective: To help students kinaesthetically link the beginning and endings of sentences

Materials: Paper strips with partial sentences written on them

Procedure:

- Distribute paper strips containing half sentences from a story that was earlier narrated to students.
- Make students stand in two rows facing one another. Row 1 has the beginning of sentences and Row 2 has the endings.

- At your word 'Go', students from both rows have to run to find their respective partners and read out their sentences aloud to the entire class.
- Make all the sentence-pairs stand in order to reconstruct a story or a paragraph.

Outcome: Students will feel motivated to read, understand and put parts of sentences in order through the use of play.

Questioning skills

Questioning is an important skill that develops logic and reasoning. By learning to ask questions, a student's ability to gather information and knowledge improves, as do their verbal skills.

Activity: Five questions

Objective: To develop students' questioning skills

Materials: None

Procedure:

- Narrate a story to the class and ask a student (Pupil 1) to think of an object or a person from the story.
- Other students have to ask Pupil 1 five questions each to try and guess the correct answer. Questions about the physical features of the object (shape, size, colour) or person (age, mannerisms, dress) could be asked to get the right answers.

Outcome: Students will understand a story better and learn to ask questions.

Predictive skills

Prediction encourages children to ask questions and think critically. It also helps them understand and sequence a story better by paying more attention to what they hear or read.

Activity: Crumpled story ball

Objective: To improve students' listening, reading and writing skills

Materials: Story pages from old magazines and newspapers

Procedure:

- Cut out a story page from an old children's magazine or newspaper.
- Crumple the page into a ball.
- Call a student to your side and ask them to read aloud a few words on the 'story ball' and make them guess what the story could be about.
- Open the crumpled page and encourage the

student to read part of the story and let the other students imagine and speak aloud or write the ending.

Outcome: Students will learn how to predict and comprehend a story by improving their reading skills.



Figure 2. Crumpled story ball

Grammar competency

The parts of speech in grammar are considered 'the building blocks of sentences'. To write grammatically correct sentences in English, children must know at least some of these.

Activity: Story envelope

Objective: To help students identify and use parts of speech correctly

Materials: Slips of paper with words from a story written on them, envelopes

Procedure:

- Narrate a story to the class and make photocopies of its printed format.
- Cut out nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs from the text and put them into different envelopes.
- Divide the students into groups and each group gets a set of envelopes for creating sentences.
- The group that makes the highest number of correct sentences gets the chance to read them aloud to the class.
- As a follow-up exercise to assess comprehension, ask students to mime certain words or phrases from the story and let others come up with the right answers.

Outcome: Students will learn the right usage of grammar by listening to a story and playing a group game.

Reflections

The activities described in this article to develop literacy and other abilities in children have been tried out in schools across Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland and Odisha. Students' enthusiasm and performance in class have improved in certain schools, as have their abilities to comprehend,

narrate, retell, read and write stories on their own or with the help of their teachers.

The fun element of these story activities have motivated young children to learn better and quicker. They have also inspired teachers to use stories creatively in class. By doing so, both teachers and students have benefitted. This has emerged as an interesting activity that can make language classes so much more fun and educative.

Endnotes

- i The role of storytelling on language learning: A literature review. Semantic Scholar. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-role-of-storytelling-on-language-learning%3A-A-Lucarevschi/6afa2c67e6b53337ff4b833d975b6939ec3650e6>
- ii Why is storytelling important to children? BBC Teach. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/teach/why-is-storytelling-important-to-children/zvqcnrd>



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