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The power of picture books

Engaging illustrations and imaginative tales can inspire creativity in your practice and children's learning, says Anjali Patel...

WHEN CHILDREN ARE LEARNING creatively, they are exploring possibilities, making connections and discovering new and exciting ideas and meanings. The opportunity to make sense of their worlds in this way is fundamental to child development.

By providing an environment rich in creative possibilities, flexible in nature and driven by the needs and interests of the children, we enable them to explore their fascinations and deepen their engagement. If we take a genuine interest in children's enquiry and engage in sustained shared thinking, we encourage them to take risks in their learning. These are all essential conditions for developing and supporting emerging creativity.

Creativity is not just limited to the artistic areas of learning. Practitioners who value creativity understand and actively promote links between the arts and all other areas of a child's development. They provide opportunities for children to develop spatial and physical awareness, scientific understanding and imaginary play through the provision of natural or repurposed materials that have sensory interest and boundless scope. Music and singing play a fundamental role in the daily life of a setting, as does expressive movement and dance – provision that lays foundations for essential language and mathematical development.

Creativity through picture books

A high-quality picture book can stimulate many creative learning opportunities – and of course, a great book can support our own subject knowledge on concepts we may feel

less secure in explaining. Making a wise book choice provides a springboard from which to develop planning that is meaningful, enabling children to explore new ideas in contexts with which they can relate.

When considering a picture book that encourages creativity and critical thinking, choose one that has strong characterisation. A character can be a motivating conduit with whom the children can interact through notes and messages, and with whom they can develop empathy or deal with issues through drama and role play. Choose a book with illustrations of artistic merit that support the retelling as well as providing opportunity for deeper exploration of aspects of the story, such as character behaviour, feelings or events. Books with memorable story shapes, structure and models of rich literary language enable retelling and re-enactment. Books that

take us on journeys, to new places or through emotional experiences, stimulate opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the world. Of course, stories are especially engaging if they reflect our children's interests, concerns, home lives, languages and cultures – and if they contain humour, so much the better! Whether they are story books, rhymes or information books, we can engage the children in creative approaches in a number of ways.

In practice

MAKE A MODEL OF A CHARACTER

Monsters are ideal characters for this, using books such as *Bedtime for Monsters* (Puffin) by Ed Vere...

- Before reading the book, show the children illustrations of the monsters and ask them to talk about who they are and what they might be like. Ask them to create models of their own monster, using play-dough, junk modelling and embellishments or drawing. Crucially, as they are immersed in their creations, the children are internally developing vocabulary that can be extended further through talk. Children can tell a friend about them and introduce them to each other's monsters.
- Give children time to create small-world settings, stories and dialogue involving their monsters. Create recipes together to feed the monsters and routines to care for them. Inspire the children to research a range of geographical settings in which the monster could inhabit.

Also try *Not Now Bernard* (Anderson) by David McKee





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TRAINING & RESOURCES

Two ways to add creativity to your setting’s practice...

The Core Book List – Hundreds of recommended titles and free teaching plans can be accessed at www.corebooklist.org.uk.

The Power of Reading in the Early Years – This five-day development project, set within the expectations of the EYFS 2014, engages teachers and children in the early years language and literacy curriculum. Participants are provided with a set of 12 high-quality books, website subscription and access to hundreds of teaching plans.

CLPE is an independent UK charity with a global reputation for high-quality research into literacy and teaching. For further information, or to book training, visit www.clpe.org.uk

DISCOVER A NEW PLACE

Read books that are set in another location, such as the Antarctic region of the polar bears in *Iris and Isaac* (Little Tiger Press) by Catherine Rayner...

- Read the book aloud and look at the illustrations carefully. How does the author/illustrator describe the setting in words and pictures; can you picture what it is like to be there? Provide a range of ice shapes with which the children can explore: coloured cubes, observing as they melt into warmer clear water; the sounds ice makes as it melts in different ways, dripping or crackling; and ways to build or sculpt with ice. They could even devise ways to rescue animals or gems trapped within ice.
- The children can watch a snow blizzard scene on film and use paint to depict it, or create a snowflake dance to evocative music using white fabric, all of which supports children’s use of descriptive language. Children could create a role-play tourism office and produce a visitor’s guide or brochure for the location.

Also try *Anna Hibiscus’ Song* (Walker) by Atinuke

CREATE A SOUNDSCAPE TO EVOKE ATMOSPHERE

This works well with a book that offers distinctive settings or shifts in mood or atmosphere, such as *Shh! We have a Plan* by Chris Haughton (Walker), for which his animated book trailer features an original score by Matt Wand.

- Read the book aloud several times, encouraging the children to join in with the repetitive refrain and become familiar with the strong story shapes and structure in their own retelling, using hunter and bird props. Recap on the main events in the story and swiftly map out the story on a long roll of paper using images and some key phrases.
- Together, retell the story orally, evoking mood or atmosphere with intonation, expression or vocal sound effects. Children can create the mood or atmosphere of a key scene using voices, musical instruments or other resources. They could create a soundscape of the whole story, using the story map as a guide to denote sequences of events, setting changes and shifts in mood or atmosphere.

Also try *Lullabyhullabaloo* (Hodder) by Mick Inkpen.