

Story Sacks and Chatter boxes

Storysacks

A story sack is usually a drawstring bag that contains a range of items to support a particular book. It includes at least one copy of the book, possibly a CD or tape of the story or related rhymes and songs, some small soft toy or plastic characters from the story, and a non-fiction book related to the theme.

Launching a set of story sacks is a good reason to invite parents to a session on using them at home. Many settings have found these sessions really useful in opening up a dialogue about books.

You can buy commercially produced story sacks and you might want to start with one or two of these, but one way to ensure a supply is to get parents involved in making them. This is not only cheaper but, more importantly, it gives parents a chance to think through how to use a particular story and which props might be useful, and then to be creative in finding and making resources. Many settings have set up story sack-making groups where parents meet regularly to create new sacks and to review the books they wish to use.



Chatterboxes

A chatter-box can be made from any reasonably tough box - shoeboxes are ideal - and the inside of the box is 'landscaped' and equipped appropriately.

For example, a Three Billy Goats Gruff box might contain three goats of varying sizes, a troll figure and a bridge. On one wall of the box might be some textured green material stuck on either side of a stream made of shiny paper.

The children can re-enact the story in different ways and create different endings and plot twists.

A chatter-box need not be explicitly book-related. It may contain a range of figures on a theme - for example, a collection of small astronauts, a rocket and a bumpy lunar landscape with a black sky, stars or planets; or perhaps some sand, shells, a small bucket and a plastic crab, two fish, a boat and a small sailor figure.

This invites the children to use their imaginations and tell and develop the tales that occur to them.



Notes for Parents/Carers

Encouraging babies and young children to become involved with sharing story books is really important. We want them to develop a love of books - they often thoroughly enjoy handling them (and sometimes chewing them) as they learn about turning pages, lifting flaps and talking about the contents.

There is no one way to read a story. Even when two people read the same book, they do it differently – and that is ok! The role of the adult is to encourage, support and model what to do with a book. It is not important if the story is not read from cover to cover; it's more important to talk about what the pictures and props reveal and what the child wants to comment on.



Using books and props to tell and talk about stories in this way can open up all sorts of different and exciting possibilities in developing children's listening skills whilst also encouraging language.

You could also try 'telling' a story from your memory or making one up in your head. Some parents feel uncomfortable doing this – it can be difficult to do at first without using a book to help. This is however a skill that can be learned. Make a quick note of a simple story and practise telling it aloud – as you get better at this you can encourage your child to tell part of the story too – remember, there is no right or wrong in this activity! Make things up as you go along – and enjoy yourselves!

Potential benefits of Sharing Stories

Learning and Development: Stories are often repetitive and this makes the words easier to learn. Text should be supported by pictures and props which provide visual contexts and support and encourage children to use story language. They are a flexible and fun way of helping children acquire language skills and great building blocks for their future learning. Sharing stories can benefit children when they start school by helping them learn the rhythm of language which helps when they are learning to read. The 'mood' of the story can be used to introduce the language of emotions and characters, whilst developing concentration, anticipation and listening skills. It also develops children's narrative skills and offers increasing opportunities to build on social interaction with the expression of feelings, ideas and comments.

Social Skills: Some stories include physical interaction, which adds to the fun and surprise and gives many opportunities for children to act out the stories with you. Through stories children can learn turn-taking and joining in, essential skills for communication development.

Fun: Include children in the story you are telling, make up different versions of the story or use props and puppets which will help the stories to come alive.



Planning the Sharing Stories through Chatter-boxes and Story Sack Session

Invitation for Parent (send out in advance)

Things to consider:

- Use the child's voice when inviting the parent
- Jog parents memory about books and stories they enjoyed as child – ask for these to be sent in 2-3 weeks before the session

Preparation and practice (practitioners will need to feel confident to demonstrate ideas to parents). Choose a book that will appeal to the children (consider age-range).



- Make sure you are familiar with story
- Think about the kinds of prompts and questions you will use
- Prepare 'Talk Tags' - small laminated cards hole-punched and attached to a key ring, so they are very easy to use). Making these could form part of the session.
- Collect suitable books and associated props.
- Collect together a variety of containers (sacks or boxes) big enough to hold selection of appropriate props and books
- Think about how you may be able to relate story to the children's lives, the new vocabulary that will be introduced whilst reading and talking about the story, and the follow up activities you will suggest to parents to consolidate learning

Session Plan

Resources	<p>Name labels (big enough so visitors can read each other's name) Pre-printed 'Talk Tags' for selected book Card, pens, laminating pouches, hole-punch, treasury tags. Props – appropriate for the selected book Display – Talking point in gathering area – you may consider photographs of children engaged in activities, poster showing children engaging with books and how 6 areas of learning can relate to this activity. Discovery table with a variety of Baskets, Bags or Boxes with other examples of homemade Story Sacks or Chatterboxes. Information sheets - www.leics.gov.uk/dialogicbooktalk or www.leics.gov.uk/index/education/childcare/early_years_service/foundationstage/ecat/chatterboxes</p>
Timings	
5 minutes	<p>Gather parents (put name labels on so all can see) in an area where you have display – this could be photographs of children completing activities, learning journals or just a discovery table with objects for parents to look at until everyone has arrived.</p>
5 minutes	<p><u>Talk to parents about -</u> The benefits of using books with their children to provide a context for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extending their children's experiences and developing their vocabulary. <p>How to value and listen to their child when they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contribute to a discussion • relate the content of a story to their own experiences • develop their own ideas <p>Creating a positive relationship which builds and supports communication through discussion in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share experiences • understand the feelings of others • learn to interpret the behaviour of others • listen to and empathise with others • develop the ability to converse with peers and adults
5 minutes	<p><u>Practical Demonstration</u> Use the story book/chatterbox that you have chosen and demonstrate how you as a practitioner would engage a child with that story.</p> <p><u>Points to Include</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puppets and props relating to the story – to gain/retain attention, to act out, to provide context and multi-sensory learning • Story Prompts – including open ended questions and enabling statements 'Talk Tags' provide examples • Relate the story to the child's experience – you could facilitate discussion at this point as parents will have knowledge and ideas about this • Extend the children's vocabulary – explain this • Introduce positional language, concepts and emotions – under,

	<p>through, wet, blue, hungry or happy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to consolidate new vocabulary or develop follow-up experiences and activities
5-10 minutes	Let parents select a Story Sack or Chatterbox and ask them to produce some 'Talk Tags' which could be laminated so they can use them with the chosen book at home. Try to encourage open ended questions and comments not just 'What's this' or 'Where's the ...' appropriate to their child's developmental level. Provide lots of examples as some parents will find this task quite challenging.
	<i>You could invite children into the session at this point to join in a Sharing Book session. The complete session could then be demonstrated by the practitioner or for each child to join their parent. It is important to remember differing confidence levels. You may decide this could form a second session.</i>
Thank you	Thank everyone for coming and talk about other sessions that are going to be offered. Use this time to talk about what you are doing in the setting and how they could be involved.



Talk Tags - for Hungry Caterpillar

Acknowledgements:

Bromley, H **Fifty Exciting Ideas for Story Boxes** (Lawrence Educational)

Clere, L (2004) **The Little Book of Bags, Boxes and Trays** (Featherstone Education). A multitude of ideas for every sort of collection and container, like story sacks and boxes

Cooper, Helen (1993) **The Bear Under the Stairs** (Red Fox)

The National Strategies | Early Years (2009) **Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners** (Second Instalment: Spring 2009)

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