

Dreams

*Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.*

*Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.*

Langston Hughes

Stories and Fairy Tales in an English Classroom

Stories evoke happy memories of our childhood. You say they are just dreams? Life is different? It doesn't go the way it goes in fairy tales? Oh, then you must have forgotten how important fairy tales were in our mental development during our childhood. Why should fairy-tales be written and read just in our native language? Their powerful magic can work in our English lessons as well.

We were told fairy tales even before we were able to read. We asked our story-tellers to retell the same fairy tale again. We insisted on the version we knew. We corrected the teller and offered prompts. Later on we started reading the fairy tales ourselves and we kept on reading the favourite ones.

From the educational point of view we appreciate that storytelling involves necessary mental processes like imagining. Children create a mental picture of what they hear or read. They also train predicting and recalling. They are naturally curious and try to predict what is going to happen next and try to find connections with what has happened previously. Children are brought up with fairy tales. They build their own values, make judgements. They identify with their own experience.

Every fairy tale or a story is an experience of some kind. Stories offer supporting thinking strategies, enforcing strategies for learning the language, developing study skills, and developing knowledge of other subjects as maths, science, history, geography, art and craft, music and drama. No wonder we may use them in the classroom as an alternative to textbooks.

The **choice of stories** or fairy tales varies depending on the aim of the lesson or a sequence of lessons. We may distinguish traditional stories and fairy tales, picture stories with no text; animal stories fantasy stories, everyday stories, humorous stories or rhyming stories.

All of them are full of wonderful words that don't suffer from lack of emotional flavour. **Vocabulary** is what we can mainly train thanks to the fairy tales. To help understanding and remembering we try to find various ways. We may use real objects to show meanings of words. We may draw the objects on the board or they can appear on flashcards. Illustrations and pictures in the books may help the teacher a lot. Miming, facial expressions and gestures are also of great use. We should not forget using opposites for adjectives or adverbs. Pupils

may try to guess the meaning of words from the context. If the teacher tries to elicit, some pupils will be happy to contribute with their knowledge and experience. Translation should be named as the last because it doesn't bring any challenge.

Besides vocabulary also **grammar** can be practised together with **pronunciation, speaking, reading and writing**.

Right **story-telling** shouldn't be devoid of some important **characteristics**. We should read slowly and clearly not forgetting the possibilities of our own voice. Its varied pace and tone can make the storytelling more interesting and attractive. Illustrations can be accompanied by comments from the teacher as well as from children. The teacher should be a good actor; too, therefore he/she naturally uses facial expressions and gestures.

Authentic story books might be too difficult to understand. That's why the teacher tends to simplify the story. We can simplify difficult words and find easier synonyms, we may simplify idioms, tenses, structures, sentence length, the number of ideas in the story, and the way ideas are linked or explained. All these simplifications must be done with careful sensitivity to the story.

As soon as the children get acquainted with some of the English stories we may ask them to make stories of their own. The stories may be based on a thing which will be personalized, on a song, on a short list of words, on clues given.

Storytelling doesn't seem to be a regular part of a lesson. It's rather an additional than an ordinary part of teaching. Anyhow, it should not be forgotten.

Some activities which can be used with stories:

1 Logical sequence: Children listen to a story and put the pictures in order. The same can be done with words taken out of the story.

2 Another variety of logical sequence: The text of a simple story is cut into pieces (paragraphs). Children try to put them in order.

3 T/F sentences: Children are given sentences concerning the story. After listening they decide which of the sentences is true or false.

4 Completing a story: Children listen to a story which has no end (or the last sentence missing). They have to invent the solution of the story or just find the last sentence.

5 Choosing a picture: Several pictures are offered before the story is read. Children decide which picture illustrates the story.

Suggestion of activities mentioned above are just small hints on how we can proceed enriching our lessons.