

There are lots of stories on Learn English Kids which you can use to motivate your child or students. These stories have been especially written for children learning English. They range from very simple to quite demanding in terms of the level of difficulty so choose carefully.

Whether you are a parent reading a story with your child or a teacher using a story in the classroom, there are many ways of using and exploiting the stories to help children understand and add to their enjoyment. Here are some suggestions for using the stories on Learn English Kids.

[http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/kidsstories\\_frame.html](http://www.learnenglish.org.uk/kidsstories_frame.html)

## **A. Activities to prepare children for reading**

### **1. Using pictures/illustrations**

It is always a good idea to exploit pictures to help the child understand and visualise the story. Some of our stories have illustrations which can be used to introduce the story, elicit vocabulary they know, introduce difficult words in that story and generally excite the interest of the child for the story. For example the story 'Nessie's Grotto' has excellent illustrations which can be used to practise the vocabulary of descriptions and introduce words like 'grotto' meaning cave.

### **2. Pre-teaching vocabulary**

Many of the stories on the Learn English Kids website are related to a theme. These themes often have 'specialist' vocabulary which may cause problems in comprehension. You will usually find other related exercises on thematic vocabulary which can be taught first. For example, for the story 'Circus Escape' you will also find a vocabulary worksheet which teaches vocabulary such as 'acrobat', 'ringmaster', 'big top' and other specific circus vocabulary. Another very popular topic is football. Together with the story 'Football Crazy' you will find a vocabulary exercise to practise the words highlighted in the story. For other stories such as 'A Howling Halloween', you need to check that children know words like 'ghost', 'haunted house' and 'spooky'.

### **3. Focus on forms**

Most stories are written in the past simple tense. However, you will also find stories with a much wider range of narrative tenses (for example 'Circus Escape' or 'Alan and the Alien') as well as some very simple stories written only in the present simple tense. For example the story 'The Snowman' is a very short flash-animated story suitable for beginners with only a few present tense verbs. The story 'The Lucky seed' is also a simple flash-animated story which is useful for practising the structure 'too+adjective'.

### **4. Introduce the theme**

Some of the stories on LearnEnglish Kids, although written for the purpose of learning English, also have an underlying theme. It is a good idea to familiarise the child with this before reading, just by talking about it or perhaps giving a situation for discussion. For example the story 'Football Crazy' is about a girl playing in a boys football team, breaking down barriers, adults treating boys and girls differently. This is an important issue for children. Try asking the children to imagine a situation in their school or town. 'What would happen here if....?'

### **5. Input cultural background**

Many stories assume a knowledge of cultural norms in the UK, for example, the daily school routine. Children are usually interested in finding out the differences between their own culture and the lives of children in the UK. Some stories have more overt cultural background. In the story 'Hairy Henry's Holiday', typical sights of London are mentioned, such as 'Big Ben', 'The London Eye' and 'Madame Tussauds'. You could use a map or guidebook to London to find out what these are before children read or listen to the story.

## **B. Activities during reading**

### **1. Use a variety of ways to read**

There are many different ways to approach the story. It is quite likely that younger learners will want to read/hear/or listen to the story several times, particularly the shorter, flash-animated ones. This should not be discouraged as it helps learners to equate aural and written forms which is important for the development of reading skills.

- A parent could read/listen to a story together with the child on the computer
- A teacher could use a data projector for a class to listen to/read a story as a whole-class activity
- A teacher could read the whole or parts of the story to a class with the text
- The child can read by themselves silently, either on-screen whether at home or at school
- Some stories can be read as texts with illustrations and then children can watch the flash movie version, or this order could be reversed

### **2. Sustaining reading**

If the story is very long then the parent or teacher could stop at convenient 'cliff-hanger' points and ask the child 'what happens next?' This use of prediction skills makes the learner want to read on to the end of the story to find out if their own idea is correct. In a classroom this could be done as a 'guessing game' if the teacher is controlling the pace of reading. Some stories such as 'Nessie's Grotto' have this kind of question built in for this reason.

### **3. Total physical response**

With very young or active learners the story can be mimed while the teacher reads or the children listen. Even a very short story like 'The Snowman' could be used for this. The actions of waking up, running into the garden, building the snowman and the 'melting' are all easy to mime.

### **4. Characters and Voices**

In stories which have a lot of characters you could ask a child to read the dialogue of a character. Teachers or parents could read the dialogue of characters in different voices first. For example the story 'Alan and the Alien' is fairly long, but could be livened up with acting out the alien funny voices and nonsense words!

### **5. Vocabulary help**

If a child is reading individually at home or at school they could also use Cambridge Dictionaries Online to check on the meanings of unknown words, if the learner is at a high enough level to use this independently.

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

## **C. Post-reading activities**

### **1. Quick comprehension check**

If you are a parent or a teacher it is always a good idea to do a quick comprehension check when the child has finished reading the story. This may take the form of a few 'gist' questions about the whole text in oral form, asking children for a response eg whether they liked the story, which character they liked or didn't like or it could be done in written form. Some stories have a 'quick quiz' attached, for example 'Nessie's Grotto', which contains quick multiple choice questions on the text. Other stories

have worksheets for follow-up work, for example 'Eric the Engine' has a follow-up worksheet with a sequencing activity to check comprehension which could be used by an individual or a whole class.

## 2. Follow-up vocabulary/topic work

Many stories have simple vocabulary matching exercises to practise words from the story. For example 'The Snowman' story has several matching activities on clothes and weather vocabulary. Other stories have links through to thematic worksheets. For example 'Time Travellers' links through to the theme 'ancient Egypt' and 'Dinosaur Dinner' has further links to dinosaur games and a quiz.

## 3. Make a poster/illustrate the story

You can use any story as an opportunity for some creative drawing and illustration, perhaps with vocabulary labels in English. For example, in the story 'Carnival Crime', you could ask a learner to draw the carnival costumes in the story and label them. As a follow-up they could design their own carnival costume or a costume for a festival in their country.

## 4. Stimulus for writing

Many stories lend themselves to acting as a stimulus for creative writing, depending on the level of your learners. Younger learners could continue a story or create their own story orally with a parent or teacher. Learners who are developing their own writing skills might for example write their own ghost story after reading 'A Howling Halloween'.

Other ideas for follow-up writing are writing a letter to a character in a story, or writing extra dialogues between the characters.

## 5. Role-play/acting out

Interpreting stories as role-play can be as simple or complicated as you like. It could start with miming basic actions, then speaking or improvising dialogue. In the classroom the teacher will need to be organised in advance with moving furniture, providing simple props etc. You could even use face-paints. Short stories like 'The Snowman' or 'The Monster Shopping trip' are simple to act out. For 'The Snowman' for example you would need a hat, a scarf and a carrot. For the really ambitious class project you could make masks for the characters.