

Story Sacks and Puppet Plays

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Engagement, listening and attention
- Social conventions and awareness of others
- Sentence structure and grammar
- Acquisition and use of vocabulary
- Comprehension
- Categorisation
- Retelling and elaborating
- Playful and creative use of language
- Description, prediction and reflection

Forbraíonn páistí coincheapa, meonta agus scileanna i ndáil le:

- Rannpháirtíocht, éisteacht agus aird
- Gnásana sóisialta agus feasacht ar dhaoine eile
- Stór focal a shealbhú agus a úsáid
- Tuiscint
- Athinsint agus mionléiriú
- Teanga a úsáid go spráúil agus go cruthaitheach



Introduction

Story sacks and puppet plays are two ways of mediating stories for children in their first and second languages. Story sacks are collections of objects such as soft toys, board games and fact books based on a picture book. Puppet plays can be based on stories using commercial or hand-made puppets and real items or pictures. The story sacks and puppet plays can be used to create opportunities for young children to participate in **active ways in storytelling at many stages of language development**. The ‘scripts’ or lines of the story or puppet play can

be adapted for **early Second Language learners** or more **proficient First Language speakers**. The story sacks and puppets can be lent to parents so that they can enjoy the stories with their children. A handout could be prepared for parents, explaining the approach and giving the words of the plays and the songs used with the toys and puppets. Story sacks can be purchased, including versions as Gaeilge. They also provide an opportunity to include children and parents in making and collecting the items.

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Using Story Sacks

Story sacks provide opportunities for shaping the language to suit the language level of the children, i.e., **simple basic phrases** can be used with Second Language learners of Irish or English or more **complex, richer**

language and sentence structures could be used with proficient First Language learners. The complexity and richness of the language can be gradually increased over several tellings as the children become familiar with the words and phrases. Two examples of story sacks are given on the next pages.

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The Gruffalo/ An Garbhán (Suitable for proficient speakers)

1. Teachers, children and parents assemble materials based on a book, e.g., *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson, 1999), which is available in both English and Irish (*An Garbhán*, Leagan Gaeilge le Rosenstock, 2000). This could include a copy of the book, a fact book about some of the animals mentioned in the story, soft toys of the animals, woodland scenes (drawings, photos or collage) and matching cards of characters and items from the story.
2. The **recurring phrases** in the story are identified, for example:

English version: *Where are you going to, little brown mouse?*

Leagan Gaeilge: *Ar strae atá tú? Ó mo bhrón!*

English version: *There's no such thing as a gruffalo.*

Leagan Gaeilge: *Amadán? An Garbhán? Ní hea, ní hea.*

The teacher tells the story to the children, using the soft toys and scenery. Suitable voices are chosen for the various characters.

3. The children could sing a suitable song to the main character at the end of the story.
4. After several tellings, the children will be able to identify the characters and to join in with the recurring phrases. They can hold the various toys and play the part in the story, non-verbally at first and, over time, say some of the words.
5. The teacher could then read the book, using the toys as props and emphasising the recurring phrases.
6. More proficient First Language speakers (English or Irish) could discuss the characters' tricks and strategies. Discussion on things that frighten them could follow, as well as their strategies for managing difficult situations.
7. Groups of children could play matching card games based on the story, using words and phrases from the story. They could paint/draw the characters or woodland scenes.
8. Some of the words and phrases could be integrated into other curriculum areas and times such as lunch-time. Links could be made to knowledge about woodland plants and animals for First Language speakers.

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Cá Bhfuil Oscar? (Suitable for beginner learners)

An Irish story that could be adapted for story sack reading is *Cá bhfuil Oscar* (Ní Shiomáin, 2011). The book is available in big book format as well as small size.

1. Teachers and parents assemble materials based on the book. This could include a copy of the book, a toy dog, pictures of the various rooms mentioned in the story and some coal. Games featuring the rooms in houses or a dolls' house could be added and a fact book on hygiene.
2. The recurring phrases in the story are identified, i.e., *Cá bhfuil Oscar? Ach ní raibh sé sa X.*
3. The teacher tells the story to the children, using the soft toys and scenery/pictures. Suitable voices are chosen for the various characters.
4. The book could then be read, using the toys as props and emphasising the **recurring phrases**.
5. The children could sing a suitable song to the main character at the end of the story.
6. After several tellings, the children will be able to identify the characters and to join in with the recurring phrases. They can hold the dog and various pictures and say some of the words. Over time, attention can be drawn to colours, actions, rooms and furniture.
7. Groups of children can play with the dolls' house and use words and phrases from the story. They could also make their own house scenes using pictures from magazines.
8. Some of the phrases from the story could be integrated into incidental talk during the day, e.g., *Cá bhfuil Y?*



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Using Puppets and Props for Language Development

Puppets have long been regarded as excellent resources to maintain children's interests in stories. Children recognise the playful nature of interaction with puppets and often become fond of various characters. Puppet plays can be developed in tandem with story sacks, board games, songs and

rhymes that the children are familiar with. These could be shared in children's first or second languages.

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Bran Amuigh ag Siúl

This example is designed for **early learners of Irish** and is based on the story, *Bran Amuigh ag Siúl* (*An Gúm*, 1982) in Irish or *Spot Takes a Walk* (Hill, 1982) for early learners of English. A toy dog, a selection of food and a toy bone are collected, as well as the story book, a matching card game,

a fact book about dogs and suitable songs. The fact book expands the children's knowledge about dogs and the game provides extra practice in using the language of the story. As the children's language competency grows, they can use the puppets and props to act out the story and suggest variations on the topic.



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Bran Amuigh ag Siúl: Dráma Puipéad

Cúlra an dráma: Tá ocras ar an madra, Bran, agus baineann sé triail as sagsanna difriúla bia timpeall an ghairdín go dtí go n-aimsíonn sé cnámh.

Ag teastáil: Puipéad/bréagán de mhadra (Bran), cairéad, práta, cnámh (bréige) nó rudaí eile.

Bran: *Tá ocras orm. Ba bhreá liom rud éigin le n-ithe (ag bolaíocht timpeall na háite).*

Múinteoir: *Ar mhaith leat cairéad? (á shíneadh chuige)*

Bran: (ag cogaint) *Ní maith liom é sin! Tá sé uafásach! Tá ocras an-mhór orm.*

Múinteoir: *Ar mhaith leat práta? (á shíneadh chuige)*

Bran: (ag cogaint) *Ní maith liom é sin! Tá sé uafásach! Tá ocras an-mhór orm.*

Múinteoir: *Ar mhaith leat cnámh? (á shíneadh chuige)*

Bran: *Cnámh! Ar mhaith liom cnámh? Cinnte. Yum, yum, yum. Go raibh míle, míle maith agat.*

Nóta: Is féidir an-chuid athruithe a chur air seo trí ábhair éagsúla a thabhairt do Bhran.

Rann/amhrán: ‘Bhí madra beag rua agam’ ón leabhar *Dreoilín, Dreoilín*, ‘An madra beag is an slimide’ ón leabhar *Rabhlaí, Rabhlaí* nó ‘Cór na nAinmhithe’ ón leabhar *Ící Pící*.

Mála scéalaíochta: Puipéad/bréagán de mhadra, cairéad, práta, cnámh (bréige) nó rudaí eile, an leabhar *Bran Amuigh ag Siúl* agus fíor-leabhar faoi mhadraí (*Mo Ghadhar ó Mhuintearas na nOileán* agus *Coileán* ón nGúm, mar shampla), bileog nó dlúthdhiosca d’amhráin nó de rainn ar ábhar an scéil agus bileog eolais do na tuismitheoirí.



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The Ravenous Beast/Stiúcaí Stiúgtha: Dráma Puipéad

Books such as *The Ravenous Beast*, (Sharkey, 2003) provide **rich opportunities for language play with rich vocabulary, nonsense words and imaginative content.** The book is available in English and in Irish (*Stiúcaí Stiúgtha*, Walker Eireann, 2012). The story can be presented in simple or more complex language to suit the language level of the children. The level of complexity can be gradually increased as children's language ability develops.

Below is an example of how the book might be used.

1. The teacher, children and parents assemble materials based on the story. These could include real items and pictures, a fact book about healthy eating, soft toys and photocopied matching cards from the book.
2. The **recurring phrases** are identified, for example:
English version: *I'm so hungry I could eat X, Y and Z.*
Leagan Gaeilge: *Táim chomh stiúgtha san go bhféadainn A, B agus C a ithe.*

English version: *Now THAT'S what I call hungry.*

Leagan Gaeilge: *Sin OCRAS duit anois.*

3. The teacher discusses words for describing eating, e.g.:
English version: *Gobble, nibble, munch, gnaw and bolt.*
Leagan Gaeilge: Gaeltacht teachers could use words from their own canúint, e.g., *Tá mo bholg thiar i mo dhroim. Tá clais i mo bholg.*
4. The teacher tells the story to the children, using the soft toys and props or pictures. Suitable voices are chosen for the various characters.
5. The children might sing a suitable song about the main character at the end of the story.
6. The teacher then reads the book, using the toys as props and emphasising the words for eating.
7. After several tellings and readings, the children will be able to identify the characters and join in with the words they know. They can hold the various toys and participate in the story, gradually playing the part of the various characters and using the language.

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The Ravenous Beast/Stiúcaí Stiúgha: Dráma Puipeád

8. More proficient First Language speakers could describe how they feel when they are hungry and what they like to eat. This could be followed by a discussion and reading a fact book on healthy eating.

9. The teacher could discuss the nonsense words in the story and ask children to make up their own.

English version: *Balderdash! Baloney!*

Leagan Gaeilge: *Ó, Brille Bhreaille!*

English version: *Flip! Flap-doodle!*

Leagan Gaeilge: *Bliodar Bleadar!*

10. Groups of children could play matching card games based on the story, using words and phrases from the story.

11. Children could paint or draw characters or scenes from the story.

12. Words and phrases from the story could be integrated into other curriculum areas such as SPHE and times such as lunch-break.

Summary

Story sacks and puppet plays provide **fun, interactive ways** of introducing new stories with **new vocabulary and phrases** to the children. They can be tailored to suit children's language competency at individual and class level and can be expanded over time. Children's prior knowledge can be incorporated into the tellings and they can be encouraged to take more active roles in the plays as they become familiar with the story and the language. This active approach to storytelling offers opportunities for integration with

many other areas of the curriculum, thus providing additional opportunities for language learning in differing contexts.

Story sacks and puppet plays can be tailored to suit children's language competency at individual and class level and can be expanded over time.



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References

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- Ní Shiomóin, S. (2011). *Cá bhfuil Oscar?* Baile Átha Cliath: Coiscéim. (Leabhar mór agus leabhar beag)
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Sources for Materials

Commercial story sacks in English are available at <https://www.storysack.com/>

Commercial story sacks as Gaeilge are available at <http://www.malamor.ie/>

Online resources for *The Gruffalo* are available at <http://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/the-gruffalo-story-primary-teaching-resources-activities-and-games> and <http://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/story-books/the-gruffalo-story-primary-teaching-resources>