

# Part 1

## Storytelling, an introduction

### 1 Why use storybooks?

Children enjoy listening to stories in their mother tongue and understand the conventions of narrative. For example, as soon as they hear the formula 'Once upon a time . . .' they know what to expect next. For this reason, storybooks can provide an ideal introduction to the foreign language presented in a context that is familiar to the child. Stories can also be the starting-point for a wide variety of related language and learning activities which are described in the accompanying notes. Here are some further reasons why teachers use storybooks:

- Stories are motivating and fun and can help develop positive attitudes towards the foreign language and language learning. They can create a desire to continue learning.
- Stories exercise the imagination. Children can become personally involved in a story as they identify with the characters and try to interpret the narrative and illustrations. This imaginative experience helps develop their own creative powers.
- Stories are a useful tool in linking fantasy and the imagination with the child's real world. They provide a way of enabling children to make sense of their everyday life and forge links between home and school.
- Listening to stories in class is a shared social experience. Reading and writing are often individual activities; storytelling provokes a shared response of laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation which is not only enjoyable but can help build up the child's confidence and encourage social and emotional development.
- Children enjoy listening to stories over and over again. This frequent repetition allows certain language items to be acquired while others are being overtly reinforced. Many stories also contain natural repetition of key vocabulary and structures (for example, the shopkeepers and the phrase 'Would you like ——?' in *The Elephant and the Bad Baby*). This helps children

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to remember every detail, so they can gradually learn to anticipate what is about to happen next in the story. Repetition also encourages participation in the narrative, thereby providing a type of pattern practice in a meaningful context. Following meaning and predicting language are important skills in language learning.

- Listening to stories allows the teacher to introduce or revise new vocabulary and sentence structures by exposing the children to language in varied, memorable and familiar contexts, which will enrich their thinking and gradually enter their own speech.
- Listening to stories develops the child's listening and concentrating skills via:
  - a visual clues (for example, pictures and illustrations)
  - b their prior knowledge of how language works
  - c their general knowledge.This allows them to understand the overall meaning of a story and to relate it to their personal experience.
- Stories create opportunities for developing continuity in children's learning since they can be chosen to consolidate learning in school subjects across the curriculum.
- Learning English through stories can lay the foundations for secondary school in terms of basic language functions and structures, vocabulary and language-learning skills.