

Tips for reading in the Foundation Phase

South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE)

Since 1994 the South African curriculum has used the 'balanced approach' to the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase. Beginning with children's emergent literacy, the balanced approach involves reading real books, writing for genuine purposes, as well as giving attention to phonics. All four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing are integrated.

In this article we want to share some ideas for using stories with young children to support a balanced approach to the teaching of reading – using all the language skills, and in more than one language.

Choosing stories

Choosing appropriate stories for children is an important part of helping children to learn to read. What are children interested in? What do children love doing? Questions like these help us choose stories that children will be motivated to read.

Preparing to read a story

Before we share a story with children we should read it ourselves, asking ourselves:

- What questions might the children ask about the story?
- What will the children like about this story?
- What can the children learn from this story?

This will help us to be sure that we have chosen a suitable book, and it will also help us to prepare for a discussion with the children after reading the story.

Look at this example of a page from a story called *Chicken and Millipede* (Winnie Asara, 2014).



For the full story see: www.africanstorybook.org/stories/chicken-and-millipede

Try this:

Write down the questions you think children might ask about this page and decide how you are going to answer their questions.

Reading the story

Of course the teacher can read the story to the children, but it is as important that children have an opportunity to read to each other, and to read on their own. Even if they are only reading the pictures, or talking about what they read, or pretending to read, they need to have an experience of the book and enjoy what they are doing.

If you look at page 10 of *Chicken and Millipede* again you will see that there are a number of opportunities to engage the children in learning from this story. For example:

- Vocabulary – what words on this page are new for the children? You or the children can write those words on cards and make a word wall. This can be a multilingual word wall – words in English as well as in the home language/s of the children.
- Rhythm and repetition
 - Can you find the rhythm on this page? Ask the children to clap or stamp their feet to the rhythm of “Then she swallowed and spat. Then she sneezed and coughed. And coughed.”
 - What patterns of language are repeated on this page? Can the children find all the words that end with ‘-ed’? What does that mean?
- Acting out – which words can the children act out? The children will love to act ‘burp’, and ‘sneeze’ and ‘cough’.

You can take this further and help the children to act out the whole story. Let the children choose different characters to act out, make labels for the characters to wear, and even hats or costumes for them to use. The children can write out the words that they need to say. You can add characters to the story if you want more children to participate.

- Asking questions that make the children think, such as
 - “Why did the chicken burp?”; “Is it rude to burp?”; “Why was the millipede disgusting?”
 - “What do you think happened before this picture?” and “What do you think will happen next?”

Creating stories

Try this:

Give children the picture on page 10, without the writing. Ask them to write a sentence about what they see.

This may be difficult for them in the beginning and you may need to provide support. You may even need to write their thoughts for them, especially if they are very young. But as they get practice they will be able to write for themselves, about more pictures, and create their own stories.

Changing stories

Maybe the children are not yet able to read in English. Don't feel shy to translate the story for the children to read in their home language. Write the new language by hand under the English words, or ask the children to write.

On the website www.africanstorybook.org you will find hundreds of stories in English and many African languages. You can use them, change them to suit your children's needs or translate into a language that they understand. You can do this for free, and print them out for all the children to read.