

“Tell me a story....” Children love listening to stories, and inventing their own ones, too. Storytelling helps them to develop their literacy skills alongside social and cooperative skills, and can inspire them with a lifetime's love of literature. Making a special storytelling chair for the quiet area of school playgrounds can make the listening experience more memorable and transform the process for children, increasing their attention span and encouraging far greater participation.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Art & design

KS1 – 1ab, 2abc, 3ab, 4abc, 5abcd
 KS2 – 1abc, 2abc, 3ab, 4abc, 5abcd
 KS3 – 1abc, 2abc, 3ab, 4abc, 5abcd

Design & Technology

KS1 – 1abcde, 2abcde, 3ab, 4ab, 5abc
 KS2 – 1abcd, 2abcde, 3abc, 4ab, 5abc
 KS3 – 1abcde, 2abcde, 3abc, 4b, 6a, 7b

English

KS1 – En1, En2, En3,
 KS2 – En1, En2, En3,
 KS3 – En1, En2, En3,

HOW TO CREATE a Storytelling Chair and Props Bag

Every storytelling chair, whether specially made or improvised, can be an innovative part of the playground. It can also show that listening to stories is not a passive experience but one to which all children can make their individual contribution. Alvanley Primary School, Cheshire contributed their unique carved chair to the Growing Schools Garden and Loddon Special School, Hampshire provided an imaginative props bag to help bring stories to life.

Alvanley School enlisted local artist Paul Noon to help them build their own storytelling chair. Alvanley's brief was 'to design and make a storytelling chair for use by everyone using our school grounds.' First of all, the younger children sketched their favourite characters from traditional stories. The older children considered what would be the most appropriate materials to use.

Once it was decided that the chair was to be made of wood, the school invited local sculptor and wood carver Paul Noon to come to visit the school and talk to the children. He encouraged the children to share their ideas and make a positive contribution to the design of the chair, making it special to the school by incorporating features of Alvanley's beautiful Victorian school building into the design – the rose window and the school bell.

Paul Noon prepared the wooden panels for the chair and ensured that all the children were involved in making their own marks in the wood, using traditional wood-carving tools. The panels were of oak board and the seat made from the butt of an ash tree trunk. Paul assembled the panels and constructed the chair, with children helping to finish and varnish the wood.

Your chair could be a much simpler affair. Try customising an inexpensive folding 'director's chair' by inscribing the canvas back with large colourful letters to show its new identity as the school's storytelling chair. Add a shade parasol, and imaginative props like a director's hat, or make-believe lights, camera and action clapper. Using a foldaway chair also enables it to be stored under cover when the weather is wet.

Deciding special 'rules of the game' can help engage all pupils' attention and make the storytelling sessions go smoothly. For example, the inclusion of a real bell in Alvanley's chair also served as a prompt, so that ringing the bell was the signal to move on.

The chair may also serve as an incentive for children to write their own stories. Reciting traditional ballads, or rapping, or making up new poems and rap sagas might also be a creative use of your chair and add a dramatic dimension.

Loddon School showed that interesting objects from everyday life also have a role to play in creating the setting for a storytelling chair – and these can be ephemeral and interchangeable. They made a special props bag filled with objects to help enhance the storytelling experience.

For example, to conjure up the right atmosphere for a story about going to the seaside, the props bag could be filled with familiar things from a trip to the coast.

Children could sit on beach towels, rub some sun cream into their arms, listen to a tape of the waves, feel sand with their feet, build a sand castle, feel pebbles and sea weed, or even experience a water spray.

Large pieces of material could be used to simulate the sea, and the children could dress up in appropriate clothes for the sun (hats, sun glasses) and perhaps have waterproofs in case it rains. Other elements like masks, costumes or tapes of sound effects or music could also be added.

A simple storytelling chair



Story prompts in a props bag



Alvanley's carved chair surrounded by seats for listeners

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For details of local artists working with schools, your own local authority may be able to help.