

# Systematic storytelling

2

**Masuko Miyahara** shows how different approaches to stories can be put into practice.

In the last issue of *ETp*, I outlined five orientations that teachers can employ to plan their approach to the use of a storybook in the classroom:

- 1 Developing language awareness
- 2 Learning to learn
- 3 Creating curriculum links
- 4 Carrying out projects
- 5 Developing critical awareness

## Rosie's Walk

I should like here to demonstrate how those orientations work with a particular story, *Rosie's Walk* by Pat Hutchins. In this modern classic, Rosie the hen goes for a walk and is unknowingly stalked by a hungry fox, who gets himself into all sorts of trouble along the way. The outstanding feature of this picture book is the clever interplay of words and pictures. For each of the orientations, I suggest (in the tinted boxes) a range of relevant

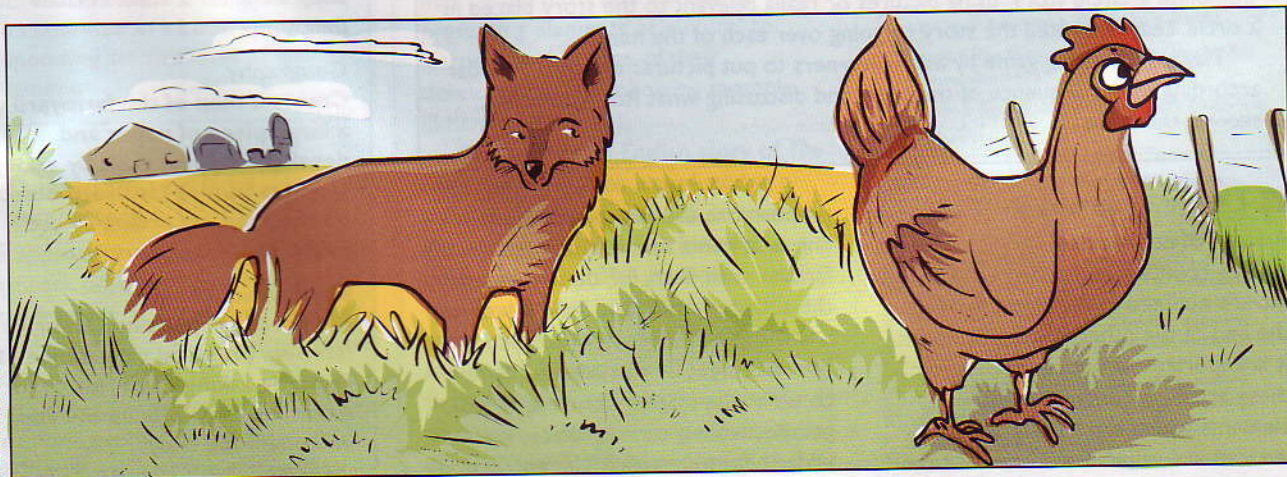
activities and suggestions for teaching points. While reading about *Rosie's Walk*, you may have another story that you use in your mind's eye, and lots of ideas for things that you could be doing with it may spring to mind.

### 1 Developing language awareness

Because of the wealth of language learning opportunities stories offer, this is the area language teachers would most likely consider exploiting in their lessons.

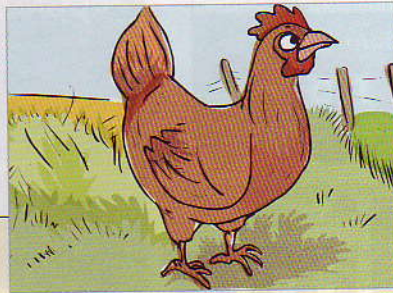
*Rosie's Walk* has just one long sentence in the entire book, so there isn't much 'language' explicitly contained in the text itself, other than prepositions such as *across*, *around*, *over*, *through*, *under*, and *past*. Other relevant vocabulary explicitly used in the story includes *yard*, *pond*, *mill* and *haystack*. Although it is not that obvious from the text, some extra vocabulary to support understanding of the story could be: *walk*, *farm*, *beehives*, *cart*, *frog(s)*, *rake*, *hen*, etc. Other features that language teachers could work with include the use of onomatopoeic words such as *plop*, *ouch* (when the fox is hit by the rake), *splash*, *splish*, *splosh* (when the fox slips into the pond), or other animal sounds (*buzz*, *baa*, *oink*, etc). Whatever area of language the teacher may decide to focus on, it will be important to categorise each linguistic item in terms of the particular teaching context:

- ★ new linguistic items can be used for exposure or introduction
- ★ previously learnt linguistic items can be used for review and or reinforcement



PHILLIP BURROWS

# Systematic storytelling 2



## Language awareness

### Before the story

- 1 Do some activities that activate schema, for example:
  - ★ brainstorming, eg talk about experiences
  - ★ using the support of companion texts
  - ★ introducing familiar songs, eg *Old MacDonald had a farm*
  - ★ doing activities to confirm the learners' understanding of farms and farm animals, eg

Prepare cards with pictures of objects found on farms, such as beehives, haystacks, mills as well as things you would not normally see on a farm, such as high-rise buildings, department stores, etc. Play games such as *Snap* or ask the learners to place the pictures on sheets of paper to make maps.

Find pictures (or use toys) of farm animals and zoo animals. Play a sorting game with learners placing the farm animals in one box and the zoo animals in another.

- 2 Do some activities to introduce, review or reinforce linguistic items that you would like to focus on in the lesson.

### During the story

- 1 Start telling the story by using the cover of the book. Confirm the key vocabulary.
- 2 Make the storytelling interactive by interjecting questions, eg *What's this? What do you see? Is this a ...?* etc.
- 3 Introduce new vocabulary, in this case prepositions such as *over*, *across*, *under*, etc, using the pictures in the book. Also introduce onomatopoeic words such as *plop*, *splash*, etc. (Introducing new vocabulary can also be done before the story. However, it is important not to give out too much information prior to telling the story. If learners can predict the outcome of the story, it takes the fun out of it.)

### After the story

Complete a 'circle story' using pictures or realia relevant to the story placed in a circle. Learners retell the story by going over each of the items.

Play a sequencing game by asking learners to put pictures or realia in order according to the sequence of the story and discussing what Rosie does first, second, third, etc.

## 2 Learning to learn

A range of activities involving study skills such as counting, comparing, sequencing, etc are outlined in the tinted boxes at the end of the other four orientations. It is important to notice that some of these activities contain important elements which can be said to have 'educational value'. For instance, if the

prepositions used in the story are linguistic items that learners are already familiar with, then, for these learners, the activity would have little value from a language point of view (except for reinforcement or review). But if we consider the matter from a broader perspective, we can see that it has a wider educational goal. The educational

value of an activity could be increased by including skills such as counting objects or making, understanding and interpreting charts, graphs and maps. Likewise, physical movement will enhance children's co-ordination and balance as they climb and move around, under, over and through various objects. It will also teach awareness of space, of themselves and of others. In arts and crafts, children will, of course, have the opportunity to improve their drawing skills as well as exploring colour, texture, shape, form and space in two and three dimensions.

## 3 Creating curriculum links

Stories can also be used to develop other subject areas in the curriculum.

### Curriculum links

**All the activities suggested here are suitable for use after the story has been told.**

#### Maths

**To develop the concept of counting, the learners count all the places Rosie goes, how many different animals they see in the book, how many times the fox gets hurt, etc. Older learners can produce charts.**

#### Science

**Talk about animal habitats, who lives where; for example, hens on a farm, frogs in a pond, etc. Create awareness of the creatures that live in and near their community by asking what animals the learners would see if they went for a walk in their neighbourhood.**

#### Geography

**Create a map of the farmyard on a large piece of paper and develop mapping skills by asking learners to plot farmyard objects on the map, according to the sequence of the story.**

#### Physical education

**Reinforce prepositions and give learners practical experience of them by asking them, for example, to go around the desk and under the chair.**

## 4 Carrying out projects

This approach has great advantages for the learners as they can use each of the four skills. It is dynamic in that it can take the learners out of the physical boundaries of the conventional classrooms to, for instance, the playground, or even a zoo or museum. Their involvement with a project also helps to exercise children's imagination and creativity. Project activities not only provide hands-on experience for the children, but they also offer opportunities to foster a sense of cooperation in order to attain mutual goals. By communicating and negotiating with others, learners are encouraged to enhance their personal and social development. The possible drawbacks to this approach are that it requires experienced teachers and can be time-consuming.

### Projects

**Have the learners go into the playground and create their own walks. They then return and report to each other where they went, eg 'I went under the monkey bars, around the sandbox, across the bridge, through the tunnel', etc.**

**Create another version of Rosie's walk, choosing different animals to be predator and prey, eg bird and worm or octopus and fish. Choose a setting and use directional phrases such as over a rock, through a cave, around a bush, etc.**

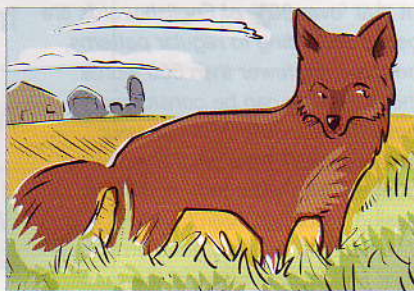
**Note: both these examples can be expanded in a writing project, depending on the level of the learners.**

## 5 Developing critical awareness

This approach may be the most difficult to embark on, especially with very young learners, as it tends to revolve around issues such as reflecting on our emotions or feelings, raising social issues, discussing beliefs or moral values or exploring cultural differences. With *Rosie's Walk* we can raise the issue of

the stereotypical images of wolves and foxes common in children's books. It seems that without any cultural exceptions, wolves and foxes are always described as being cunning and devious. The wolves in traditional tales such as *Little Red Riding Hood* or *The Three Little Pigs* certainly conform to this stereotype. However, it is interesting to note that counterbalancing tales such as *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* by Eugene Trivizas and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs By a Wolf* by Jon Scieszka have also been published. By incorporating comparison texts in the classroom, we can present a more neutral account of the situation.

The teaching of 'culture' to young learners is often limited to the transmission of information about how Halloween and Thanksgiving are celebrated in the United States or what people do at Christmas and Easter. It is often difficult to discuss abstract issues such as values or beliefs which underpin



every culture and society, even in the learner's native tongue, let alone in the target language. However, comparing and contrasting two or more stories may be the most feasible way of presenting elements of 'culture' to learners at this stage of their development. The following example illustrates this point.

The traditional English story of *The Little Red Hen*, when introduced in a Japanese primary textbook, is entitled *The Little White Hen*. The little hen is a different colour! This particular story also exemplifies how the ending of a story may be adapted to match the values and beliefs of a different culture. In the original version, the hen enjoys the rewards of her hard work by eating all the bread herself. In contrast, the

Japanese version concludes with everyone smiling, sitting together peacefully, sharing and eating the bread. The intention is to emphasise the spirit of harmony and cooperation, values and beliefs that the Japanese regard very highly. By making a comparison between two different versions of the same story, we can prompt learners to discuss the underlying messages which are often deeply embedded in our culture.

### Critical awareness

**Why do foxes and wolves tend to be depicted as a nuisance? Use a companion text such as *Big Bad Wolf is Good* by Simon Puttock to provide a contrasting viewpoint.**



The value of stories is attested to by teachers and researchers alike. However, language teachers often regard them as a tool to promote a child's linguistic development and tend to overlook the educational potential which stories can offer. The activities presented here are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, nor are they particularly innovative since many teachers must have used similar ones in their classrooms. However, I believe the novelty of my approach lies in the attempt to show how the five orientations I describe could be employed to broaden and increase the educational value of a story. **ETP**

Hutchins, P *Rosie's Walk* Scholastic Inc 1968

Trivizas, E *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig* Mammoth 1993

Puttock, S *Big Bad Wolf is Good* Guillian Children's Books 2001



Masuko Miyahara teaches English at Musashino University in Tokyo, Japan. She holds an MA/TESOL from the Institute of Education, University of London, UK, and her current interests lie in the area of learner autonomy and the use of literature in language learning.

MasukoM@aol.com