Andrew Wright’s Creating Stories with Children
Book review
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Introduction

The book “Creating stories with children” should be one of primary resource books not just for teachers who teach English as a foreign language, but for all people that work with children. It gives directions on key aspects of language teaching, supplies examples and models, as well as actual classroom materials and methods. The activities in the book are explained clearly and simply, with aims and age range.

The author of the book, Andrew Wright, is an author, illustrator, teacher trainer and storyteller. He has written many books for teachers, such as “Games for Language Learning”, “1000+ Pictures for Teachers to Copy”, “Five-minute Activities”, and the companion book to this one, “Storytelling with Children”, also in the series. He has also written Spellbinder, a series of six books for children at three levels. He has worked in many countries as a teacher trainer, constantly focusing on the use of constructive and pleasant activities in the classroom. Recently, he has worked with a lot of students as a storyteller and story-maker.

In the book, he considers that it’s necessary for children to make stories as well as to hear and respond to stories told by teachers, parents, or others. The author explains that when children create stories, they take their experience and make it important for themselves. And when a child makes a story in a foreign language, the language becomes his own.

The first book from this series, “Storytelling with Children”, contains activities and advice on helping children to respond actively to the story. This book takes them even further, helping them to create their own stories. It also illustrates how to assist pupils to make up their own tales. It supports originality, self-confidence, fluency and accuracy in spoken and written English. In short, the book introduces creative writing skills by presenting children how to organize stories.

“Creating stories with children” is divided into eight chapters, which follow each other in a logical pattern. The first chapter is Story warmers, and it presents many ways how to motivate children on creating and telling stories. There are also selections on descriptive language, text constructions, Retelling, The craft of storytelling, Beginnings and endings,
*Filling in and filling out, Starting with one thing* as well as *Sorting and sequencing*. Pupils are encouraged to publish and show their stories through a section *Making books* at the end of this book.

Except the simple, but well written text, the book is full of great illustrations, drawn by the author himself. The book also includes photocopiable worksheets and easy-to-draw pictures.

**Book organization**

Story warmers is the first chapter in the book. In this chapter, the author presents nineteen activities that can help the children to get them into a story making mood. The activities are sorted in five groups: *Relaxation, Group dynamics, Trust, Mime and acting* and *Language*. It’s not an easy job to classify all the activities in just one group, because several of them overlap two or more of these areas. Many of the activities can also be used as a general warm-up activity, even if the teacher is not planning to do a story making activity after. Most of the activities can even be used as warm-ups even in some other classes such as art, music, science, physical education, mathematics...

The author’s first suggestion is not to let children think there is only one way to make a story. The suggestions in the part of the book called *The craft of story-making* are not meant to be the techniques which must be followed. He insists that the teacher should let the children try out by themselves, experience all the ways to create a tale, and see which of them are the most useful for him. This chapter is divided into four sections on different aspects of story making: *Particularizing, Bubbling and clustering, Desires and difficulties,* and *Planning and sequencing*.

When talking about particularizing, the author points out that it’s easier to generalize about some experience, than to particularize, but the particular details in a description or a dialogue are the things that make a story come alive. He gives an example on a single sentence:

*The man has a dog.*

*The little man has a very big dog.*

*The thin, little man has a very big, gray dog.*

The author even gives a graphical example, which the teacher can easily sketch on the blackboard for his pupils.

In the activities in the next chapter, children retell a story they have read or heard. They retell it exactly or with changes. The author points out several advantages of retelling for language teaching:
- it is repetition with a purpose
- it demands a sustained oral or written flow of coherent language
- it allows for personal adaptation and response to audience and context
- it is a natural activity for even very young children
- it is easy for the teacher to organize
- it gives children confidence in their ability to tell stories
- it acts as a bridge between responding to stories and creating their own

This chapter is a little more theoretical than the others. The author deals with many issues that trouble the everyday teacher. Except lining up the reasons why retelling is good for language studies, he also gives ideas how to retell with children with limited language. A special part of this chapter is dedicated to retelling with more or less accuracy. He gives an example of prompting retelling with questions: Can you remember the story? Who is in the story? How does the story begin? It is important that all of the questions begin with who, where, when, what, why...

Other subtitles in this chapter are Retelling with changes, where he writes about personal reasons for changing the story, different points of view in the story, different settings, changes ideas, feelings and values, expanding or reducing the story, combining two stories, parallel stories; and Organizing oral retelling is the subtitle with ideas how to organize the whole class in a retelling exercise. There are exercises like pairs with the same story, pairs with different stories, triads with different parts, two classes and two stories...

At the end of this theoretical chapter, there are a couple of practical ideas on how to organize a part of a class or a whole class on retelling. The ideas are fresh and innovative, and they are equipped with directives on what level of knowledge the pupils need to have, how long the activity will last, what the teacher should prepare before the class, the variations that can take place...

The chapter Beginnings and endings concentrates on activities where children are given a part of a story, the beginning, the ending or the middle of the story, and have to use their imagination to complete it, either orally, or in writing. Their job is to continue the story, to complete it, or to pass it on...

The chapter is completely practical, because it consists of nine class scenarios. Most of the scenarios are for the pre-intermediate level of English knowledge, and the time it takes to realize the activity is from 15 to 40 minutes. All the ideas are inventive and original, and there is a lot of space left for the teacher to improvise in his own classroom.

When talking about Filling in and filling out, the pupils have a series of parts of information which cue their story-making. The bits of information can be anything: a single word or a longer texts to copy; pictures drawn by children or from magazines; abstract pictures; maps;
music; non-verbal sounds; object to feel...- anything!
The series can be random or structured. The sequence of information helps the children to construct their stories in an ordered way. It can be presented as each bit of information in order to explain what it represents. If the bits of information are presented with no particular idea of a sequence, the child is in charge of creating one for himself.

In the activities *Sorting and sequencing*, pupils have several parts of information in no particular order. Their job is to use some or all of the information to make their own stories. The bits may come from the teacher, from the child, and it can be presented through any sense.

The point of activities in the group *Starting with one thing* is to start off with a single stimulus, which can be an interesting picture, a child's drawing, a music composition, a sentence, a word, an object... The advantage of starting with one thing is that the pupil can really concentrate on it and search out its special details and its special associations for him.

The author points out that the technique of bubbling and clustering discussed in the second chapter can be very helpful for stirring up associations, memories, connections, and related words or phrases linked to the first stimulus.

In the chapter *Making books*, the author writes about two ways of making stories and books: creating the story and then the book and creating the book an then the story. He also explains that a conventional book helps children to make their stories more widely available and more professional looking. On the other hand, creatively and unconventionally designed books are not just used to put stories in, but to inspire the stories themselves by their special character.

This chapter is probably the most interesting in the book, since it has some interesting artistic ideas on making a creative publication. There are a lot of illustrations and easy to follow guides on how to make conventional books, how to fold the book's sheets, how to side staple a book, or how to tie a book. A special part of this chapter is dedicated to tips on designing the title of the book and the cover.

There's also a part about making unconventional books, like zigzag books, flap books, scroll books for old legends, letter books, mobius strip for everlasting stories, pop-up books, shape books...

The ideas stretch from conventional everyday solutions for publishing a story, to artistic, unusual, alternative, funny ideas. Some of the books made like this can even be interpreted more like a game, then a book.

At the end of the book, there is an extra chapter called Further reading. It contains a brief list of 43 books and other publications that might be interesting to teacher-readers. All the items on the list are similar to the book topic, and next to every title is a short description of
that publication.

Conclusion

Considering everything written in this analysis, it may be said that the book “Creating stories with children” could be very useful for those teach English as a foreign language, as well as for all people that work with children. It gives good ideas on how to motivate children to work, supplies easy-to-follow examples and models, as well as actual classroom materials and methods. There are plenty of activities in the book from those old fashioned and conventional, all the way to those that are unusual, atypical, uncommon, funny...

The organization of the book is clear and easy to follow. Everything is well explained and there are a lot of illustrations that help the reader to understand the text. The chapters are logically divided, and follow each other in a rational order. Every chapter has a theoretical introduction, a couple of guidance introductions on how to read the chapter, and a couple of class scenarios that the reader can easily put in action with his own pupils.

Regarding a class scenario by itself, the usual structure is easily visible. The first thing that is pointed out is the level of the language knowledge that the students need to do the exercise. Considering this, there are three levels given in this book: beginners, elementary, and pre-intermediate. Of course, under every activity, the author gives examples on how the teacher can change the activity, so it can be adjusted to other levels. Next to the level of the activity, it is always written what language the pupils will need to know, and what they will practice using this exercise (Fluency in speaking, retelling, questions, intensive reading, writing...). Very important to the teacher’s planning of the activity is how long the activity will last, and what needs to be prepared. The author gives this information as well as what he should do in class, what the variations could be to this activity, and even a couple of comments at the end.

The author explains that when a child creates a story, he takes his experience and makes it important for himself, but when he makes a story in a foreign language, the language becomes his own. The first book from this series, “Storytelling with Children”, contains activities and advice on helping children to respond actively to the story. This book takes them even further, helping them to create their own stories. It also illustrates how to assist pupils to make up their own tales. It supports originality, self-confidence, fluency and accuracy in spoken and written English. In short, the book introduces creative writing skills by presenting children how to organize stories.
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