

Helicopter Stories at Canon Barnett Primary School

"Pretend' often confuses the adult, but it is the child's real and serious world, the stage upon which any identity is possible and secret thoughts can be safely revealed."

Vivian Gussin-Paley, *The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter* (1991)



Why Helicopter Stories?

Research has consistently shown that story-telling is a powerful tool for learning. As well as developing communication and language skills, stories further our personal, social and emotional development by helping us to make sense of the world and to make links between ourselves and others. Before becoming readers and writers, telling stories helps us to learn about language patterns, narrative structures and rich vocabulary, and most importantly, sparks and nurtures our imagination so that when we are able to write, we can express the unique stories and ideas we have swirling around in our heads!

Helicopter Stories are used in our Early Years setting at Canon Barnett to facilitate and encourage all these marvellous skills. This approach turns children into storytellers and actors, as they re-enact their own unique stories in whole group sessions. This document gives an overview of how our Helicopter Story sessions work, and includes a small selection of stories which aim to show the impact Helicopter Stories have made in our Nursery and Reception classes.

How do Helicopter Stories work?

Part One - Introduction: At this point, we are teaching children the structure and rules of Helicopter Stories; we are not yet ready to scribe their own stories. After agreeing our Golden Rules for Helicopter Stories, the teacher reads a pre-written story and children take turns to act out each role in that story.

Part Two - Group Scribe: Children tell their stories to an adult in front of the whole group. The adult scribes the child's story word for word, reads it back to them and then the story is acted out there and then by the class.

Part Three - Private Scribe: During the course of the day, children can choose to tell an adult their story. The adult scribes the story word for word and reads it back to the child. The day continues as normal, and stories are re-enacted later that day in a Helicopter Stories session.



Part Four - Re-enacting the private scribe: In a dedicated Helicopter Stories session, act out the stories children have contributed throughout the day.



The impact of Helicopter Stories in our Early Years

Anecdotal evidence shared between Early Years staff has shown a highly positive impact on children since we introduced Helicopter Stories. Here are some examples of the children's stories gathered from both reception and nursery children.

Communication and Language

Listening to children telling us their stories allows us a deeper insight into children's knowledge about language and their understanding of story

structures, in a way that might not be evident in everyday talk. See for example Child A's story.

Child A's Story - Nursery

Once upon a time there was a T-Rex. Once upon a time there was 10 people. The people scared of the T-Rex and the people running and the people get in the house then they hiding on the bed and then the T-Rex opens the door then he get inside. He go upstairs then he's finally in the room then he looked, where's the people? He found it behind the bed. The T-rex made the people on fire.

The End

Literacy - Reading

There are very often 'stories within stories' when children share their ideas with us. Inspiration frequently comes from traditional tales, books we have read in class and stories children may have heard outside of school. The Reception children had been learning about William Shakespeare and reading Early Years adaptations of King Lear and The Taming of the Shrew. Some chose to base their Helicopter Stories on these old Shakespearean tales.

In the Nursery, traditional and fairy tales fired the children's imaginations.

Child C's Story - Reception

Once upon a time there was King Lear eating lots of cake then King Lear's three daughters came. One named Cordelia, one named Ben and one named Sue. King Lear was very angry at Ben. Then Ben runned and jumped to Italy! Then he liked all those pizzas and then King Lear and his two daughters came to Italy also. They they enjoyed lots of pizzas.

The End.

Child D's Story - Nursery

The three pigs and the wolf said "I'm to blow the house down" and the mum said "don't to blow anyone". The house of stick then the house made of straw fall down and the big bad wolf didn't come again and that was the end.

Child E's Story - Nursery

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Cinderella that lived with a nice mother and the big dragon came too and blow the house down and then another dragon came, a skeleton and they all went back to their house.

The End.

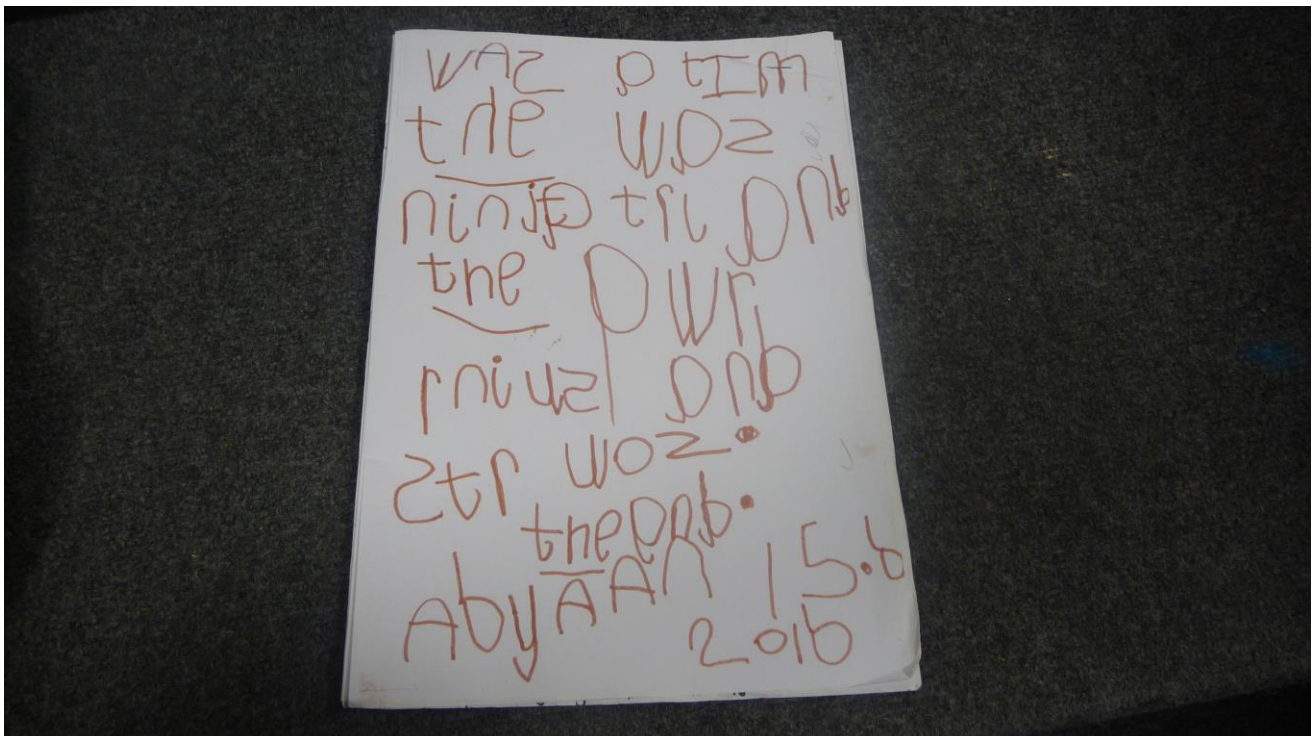
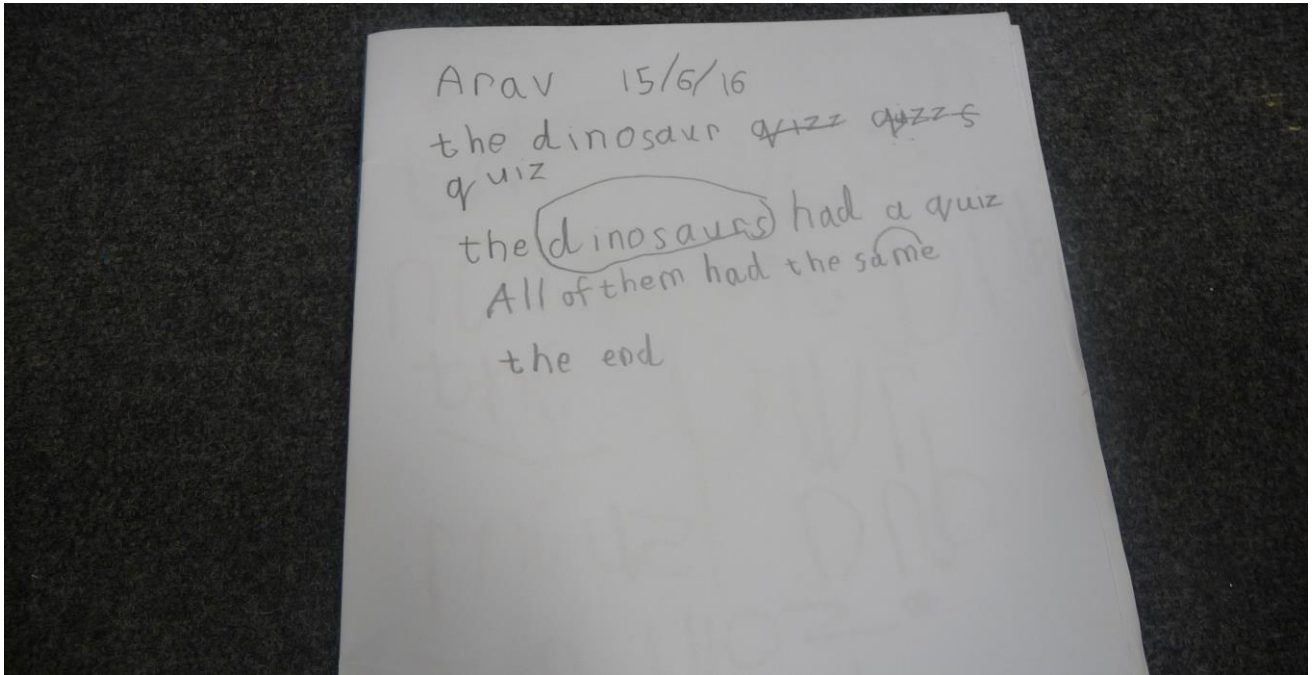
Literacy - Writing

We know how important it is in the Early Years for children to see adults writing, however in this digital age the opportunities for purposeful writing as an adult seem few and far between. The beauty of Helicopter Stories is that children are constantly exposed to seeing adults writing in a truly meaningful way - what could be more purposeful than writing down the very words that children are saying so that their ideas can be realised on the Helicopter stage? One of the great surprises about introducing Helicopter Stories was just how keen children are to write down their stories. If they do not want to wait for an adult, they just get on with the job themselves!

Reception - boys writing their own stories



Reception - examples of stories written independently by boys during their choosing time



Nursery children writing their own stories and reading them back to an adult

