



Steps of Storytelling

A guide by tonies® and Dr Jamie Lingwood



With many young children having recently missed out on education due to lockdowns and school closures, many teachers and parents are understandably concerned about the impact that this has had on children's speech and language development.

A report published by the Education Endowment Foundation found that 96% of primary school teachers had significant concerns about reception age children's language development, and 56% of parents had concerns about Key Stage 1 children's language development.

Our own research has found that 43% of parents say their children's ability to read and write has been adversely impacted due to the pandemic, with 37% saying that their children's vocabulary has suffered too. A huge 66% of parents have stated that the lack of social interaction due to the lockdowns has meant their children's language development has been negatively affected.

One of the ways in which teachers and parents can support and foster young children's language development is through children's storytelling, which encourages them to use and develop their spoken language and imagination.

With children at the heart of everything we do, tonies® wants to use audio storytelling to bring new ways of learning in order to foster children's literacy skills, stimulate their imagination, expand their worldview and support them in their cognitive development. We've worked with children's language researcher, Dr Jamie Lingwood, to develop our Steps of Storytelling guide, outlining some of the key storytelling milestones for young children, showing just how these skills develop over time and how parents can support their child's development.

Ages 3-4

From the age of three, children's storytelling descriptions may include a series of short labels or limited descriptions of a character, an event, or topic, for example, 'the man sleeping'.



These labels and descriptions may be repetitive and occur more than once, as they may struggle to imagine or describe additional parts of the story.

Additionally, from the age of four, children may start to use colour and number-related words in their descriptions, although this still might be at quite a basic level.

At this young age, reading to your child and listening to stories with them can have a big impact on their language development. It has been shown that children who read regularly with an adult in the preschool years learn language faster, enter school with a larger vocabulary and become more successful readers in school.

It is never too early to start reading to and listening to stories with your child – as well as the impact it has on language, a shared activity like reading is a fantastic way of developing a loving bond with them.

Age 5

From the age of 5, children may start to retell stories by describing a logical sequence of events, character reactions and plans.



They may begin to use sentences that are more well-formed than younger children, such as 'the girl ate some cookies and then she went to bed'. However, they may still have some difficulties with grammar and may overgeneralise at times, applying a common grammatical rule in the wrong situation, such as 'the lion goed home', 'I runned to the shop'.

When responding to their attempts, you can model the correct way if they have made any mistakes. You might take something they say and recast it to sound correct and more adultlike. For example, if they say: 'The little girl bought a chocolate bar,' you can respond: 'Yes, the little girl bought a chocolate bar.' This is a gentle and helpful way of slowly trying to teach them those more complex examples.

At this age, talking together with your child can be highly beneficial for their language development. Talking can introduce a huge range of different types of words to them. Notice what they pay attention to or describe when telling you a story or in conversation and ask them more about it – this is a great way to extend their use of language even further.

Ages 6-7

From the age of 6, children may describe a series of time-related statements around a central topic with a theme or moral.



Children may also start to convey character descriptions, thoughts and feelings or relationships between key characters, using more complex sentence structures (for example, 'although she was rich, she was unhappy').

Parents can continue to develop their children's use of language at this age by creating an environment where they are exposed to complex and diverse language. Enabling them to hear a variety of words and more complex sentences can have a real positive impact on language development.

At this age, children can become a little reluctant to read together with their parents or independently, particularly if they are becoming increasingly keen on gadgets with screens or other games. To encourage reading, be guided by what they are interested in and let them choose the book. If they like animals, why not look for books that feature their favourite animal.

Audio players, such as the Toniebox, can also be hugely helpful in helping reluctant readers, exposing them to a variety of words as part of their daily routine. Even repeating the same Tonie over and over can help them to understand the story more and to remember new vocabulary. Making this a fixed part of their day, such as before bedtime, can also be a great way to bond with your child and relax them.

tonies® is committed to helping children learn through the power and magic of storytelling, with our storytelling devices help to engage young minds. For more information or to purchase, visit tonies.com.