

Why is storytelling important to children?

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Why stories are important

Learning to read is important, we all know that. Research shows that people without good literacy skills do worse in education and are more likely to be unemployed or even suffer from health and relationship problems.

But there's evidence to suggest that the benefits of being read to frequently as a child go way beyond just literacy skills. Former CBeebies presenter and dad Alex Winters went on a mission to find out just what's so important about stories.

How stories shape our world

The stories we hear as children shape our view of the world.

Most small children live their lives in quite a limited environment. Reading stories to children can show them far-flung places, extraordinary people and eye-opening situations to expand and enrich their world.

It can also be a great way of helping them deal with real life situations that they need help to deal with. Researchers have found that the brain activity that occurs when we read fiction is very similar to experiencing that situation in real life, so reading about a situation helps children work out how to solve it in reality.

Making children into nicer people?

It gets even more surprising when you look at the effects of reading fiction to children on their social behaviour.

Scientists have found that children who have fiction read to them regularly find it easier to understand other people – they show more empathy and have better developed theory of mind (the ability to understand that other people have different thoughts and feelings to us, which is essential for understanding and predicting other people's thoughts and behaviour).



Why we need to ask questions

The benefits children get from having stories read to them are hugely increased when parents talk and ask questions about the story as well.

Simply asking them if they can remember what happened in the story or checking if they know what some of the more complicated words mean can really extend their understanding and vocabulary. More complex 'inference' questions like, 'why do you think this character did that?' helps children to think about and understand other people's motivations.



Thinking outside the books

In this video, storytelling expert Alex Charalambous from the literacy charity Springboard has some clever ideas to get stories into your child's life without necessarily having to pick up a book.

If you're rushing around looking after small children, it can be hard to find the time to sit down and read to them every day. Parents also might not feel comfortable reading aloud to their children no matter how much they'd like to, through lack of confidence, or worries about their own literacy skills. Stories don't have to just live in books though. Traditions of storytelling go back through human existence a long time before books were even invented.



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