



Children as Storytellers Sample Workshop for Under 5s

Title

The Gingerbread Man

Aim

This workshop aims to help parents and/or children to play with and around the story of 'The Gingerbread Man'. It suggests activities, which can be done with children alongside a story thus motivating the children to engage in the activity and give breadth and depth to their experience of the story. Ultimately the children will be more motivated to retell the story and to discover more stories.

Method

Tell the Gingerbread Man story and make dough or gingerbread biscuits.

The choice of this would depend on access to an oven or hob (the biscuits need an oven but making dough just needs the use of a hob ring briefly.) Tables of the appropriate height are also required, as are little rolling pins and Gingerbread Man cutters.

The advantage of dough is that it can be played around with more and then taken home, but obviously biscuits smell great and can be eaten!

In the retelling the story is told with puppets, masks, hats and some dramatic movement is encouraged.

The room

Before beginning a workshop of any kind I believe strongly that the environment, or room, which you use needs careful consideration. When storytelling, acoustics need to be considered, so although that big hall on offer would seem to provide lots of space, your voice may rapidly disappear up into the rafters.

When working with younger children I like to use a room that is in proportion to them so that the space can be made homely and secure thus increasing the chance of them feeling safe enough to join in with the activities and of course the storytelling. If the workshop is to be one of a series this whole issue is aided by using the same room for each session.

If the room is rather bleak and drab, or equally if it is full of stuff and rather 'busy on the eye' it is worth spending time thinking about the atmosphere which you'd like to create in the room. Nancy Mellon talks about the concept of 'story space' when encouraging people to consider the environment for telling stories. Plain, colourful cloths or nets can be draped or hung around the room in no time. Claire and I never set foot out of the door now without a selection of our 'Nanette Newmans'.

Throwing a cloth over a chair can make 'the storytellers chair', and lighting a candle instead of blazing strip lighting can make for a more conducive surroundings. A rug on the floor can make it more comfortable and give the room a cosier feel.

Workshop programme

Beginning

I like to begin with a song that will settle the children and draw everyone together such as Ally Bally Bee. If the group meet regularly this would be a great way to mark the beginning of the group each week.

Introductions

The first step would be to find out everyone's name. The size of the group would dictate how complicated an exercise you might do, but ideally it should involve everyone, adults too. The following is a sample of an exercise, which I often use working on a 'circle time' basis.

I would ask the children and parents to sit in a circle on the floor together and would introduce a toy, perhaps a small teddy to the group. I would ask the children to take turns holding the bear and tell it their name before passing it to the next person in the circle. If the group wasn't too big I might also ask them to also tell the bear their favourite food since there is a theme of eating in the story.

This exercise immediately sets the expectation that each child has something valuable to contribute and I would encourage each child to do so by giving them 'soft' eye contact, and a welcoming smile. After their contribution I would thank them by name. It also creates a group culture of taking-turns and of one person talking whilst the others listen.

I would wish to make it clear that the child is telling the bear their name since children can often connect more easily with a third object rather than a strange adult. If a child is reluctant to tell their name I would encourage them by saying that the bear had told them its name in the hope that it could find out each child's name. If the child is still reluctant I would suggest that they whisper their name to the bear. If they still refuse then I would ask that the parent with them tell the bear their name.

The story

Before we can expect children to tell stories I think we must lead by example and tell to the children. This sets up a ceildh culture where you give out your gift of a story and then the others feel they want to reciprocate and give back.

I would begin with the first part of 'The Gingerbread Man' story, up to the part where the family decide to do some baking. Then I ask the children if they would also like to make a Gingerbread Man and begin making either dough or baking the biscuits.

Whilst the children are doing this with the help of their parents, I talk to them about the ingredients and encourage their participation as much as possible in the mixing, sieving,

measuring etc. Sometimes I find that the adults have to be encouraged to let the children join in and not have it all done for them.

Items such as currants (for eyes and buttons), cherries (for mouth) or other additions to dough, e.g. sequins can be provided for decoration. At this point it can be fun to sing some baking songs and rhymes which the children may already know, e.g. Do you know the Muffin Man?, Pat-a cake Pat-a-cake, Sing a Song of Sixpence, Five Currant Buns in a Baker's Shop, Simple Simon...

I also ask the children for their suggestions to recite.

It may seem obvious and tired to churn out these old rhymes that the children already know but the children don't seem to tire of them and again it is reassuring to hear the familiar pulse and words within these rhymes.

While the biscuits are baking, or while the children continue to play with the dough, the story can continue to be told.

Next you may want to ask the group to move away from the table and have them sit in a semi circular group on the floor with the storyteller's chair at the front. Then you can retell the story.

If the children have made dough men they find it fun if you use their dough men or biscuits, in turns, as a prop Gingerbread Man in the story. You can use different props to involve the children, e.g. a hat for the little girl/boy and ask, "Who would like to wear this hat and be the little girl/boy from the family". That child might also enjoy coming to sit or stand beside the storyteller at the front.

Similarly I use a cow glove puppet, a dog mask, a mouse finger puppet and a fox hat, and invite all these children to my side. However if they don't wish to move from their place, I make it clear that to stay put is also fine. I use a variety of props hoping that different items will appeal to different children.

The second telling of the story can be more participative. When 'in role' the child may wish to repeat after me some lines in the story, or a more confident child may be encouraged to 'ad lib' by saying, "And what do you think the fox said next?"

Guidance

Whilst telling the story I would use some points in the story for the children to add in suggestions. Such a point in this story comes when the family is discussing how the biscuit will taste. The children enjoy coming up with words and then hearing them used in the story. This gives them an opportunity for language development as well as experiencing a feeling of being special by your word being used in the story.

Once a word has been suggested I would ask the whole group to repeat this word by saying "Oh the little boy said 'I think the biscuit will be tasty'. Can you say tasty?"

The next character would say 'tasty' and the next adjective, e.g 'yummy'. Thus the whole group participates in the story. Other opportunities like this can be found in stories but some caution needs to be considered so that the overall flow of the story is not lost.

This is a great story for the children to all join in together with some movement as they can make running motions with their arms or running on the spot during the rhyme – "Run, run as fast as you can, You can't catch me I'm the Gingerbread Man."

If this workshop can be done as one of a series then of course the development in children's self confidence is greater but can be remarkable. Each workshop could look at a different medium alongside stories e.g. visual art, percussion, dance.

The Gingerbread Man

Once there was a family who lived on a farm. The Mum, Dad, daughter and son all worked very hard during the week and then at the weekend they looked forward to doing something together. One Saturday the daughter asked if they could do some baking. "Yes," said the Dad, "that's a great idea, why don't we make a Gingerbread Man?"

They found a big bowl and mixed together flour, sugar, egg, butter and a pinch of ginger, then they rolled it out on a board and shaped the mixture into a Gingerbread Man shape.

Then they decorated the man with currants for his eyes and the buttons on his coat and a piece of cherry for his mouth. When it was ready the mum put the Gingerbread Man onto a baking tray and placed him in a hot oven. The family soon began to smell a wonderful scent and began to discuss what the Gingerbread Man would taste like.

"Oh," said the little girl, "I think he will taste delicious."

Next the boy said, "I think he will taste delicious and yummy!"

"I think he will taste delicious and yummy and crunchy," said the Dad.

"Well I'm sure he will taste delicious and yummy and crunchy and sweet," said the Mum.

Meantime the Gingerbread Man was listening to all this hungry talk from the oven and he did not like it one little bit! So when the buzzer finally rang to say that the cooking was done, and the Gingerbread Man was placed on top of the oven to cool he suddenly realized, "Hey I have arms and legs and I don't plan to be eaten."

So he slid down from the stove top and ran out of the house chanting:

"Run, run as fast as you can,
You can't catch me I'm the Gingerbread Man."

The little girl chased after him but as he crossed the farmyard he met the farm dog. "Hello," said the collie dog, "you look good enough to eat."

"Oh no you don't," said the Gingerbread Man, "I've run away from that family and I'll run away from you too!"

So he ran shouting:

"Run, run as fast as you can,
You can't catch me I'm the Gingerbread Man!"

And on he ran with the little girl and the dog following him.

He ran into a field and there he met a cow. "Hello," said the cow, "you look good enough to eat."

"Oh no you don't," said the Gingerbread Man, "I've run away from the family and the dog and now I'll run away from you too!"

So he ran shouting:

"Run, run as fast as you can,
You can't catch me I'm the Gingerbread Man!"

Next he found himself in a beautiful meadow, full of flowers, and there in the long grass he met a little field mouse. The mouse said "Hello, Gingerbread Man! You look good enough to eat!"

"Oh no you don't!" said the Gingerbread Man, "I've run away from the family and the dog and the cow and I'll run away from you too!"

So he ran shouting:

"Run, run as fast as you can,
You can't catch me I'm the Gingerbread Man!"

He was followed by the girl, the dog, the cow and the mouse.

On and on he ran until he reached a broad, deep river. "Oh dear," said the Gingerbread Man, "I am a biscuit and I'm afraid that if I go into the water I will melt into a pile of crumbs!"

He looked behind him and could see a pointy nose, beady dark eyes, and a bushy tail!!! What do you think it was?

Yes! A fox! But the fox said "Hello Gingerbread Man, can I help you? You look all out of breath!"

"Oh at last," said the Gingerbread Man, "someone who is friendly and wants to help me! I am being chased and I need to cross this river."

"Well I could carry you across the river if you like," said the helpful fox. "Jump up onto my back."

"Oh thank you," said the Gingerbread Man. He jumped up on the fox's back and the fox began to swim through the river. The water splashed and splished onto the Gingerbread Man. "Aaah! I'm getting wet," he cried.

"Jump up onto my neck," said the fox, "you will surely be dry there."

So the Gingerbread Man leapt up onto the fox's neck. But he still got wet and complained to the fox.

"Jump up onto my head," said the fox, "you will surely be dry there."

So the Gingerbread Man jumped up onto the fox's head, but he still got wet.

"Jump onto my nose," said the fox, "you will surely be dry there."

So the Gingerbread Man leapt onto the fox's nose, and as soon as he landed the fox flicked the Gingerbread Man high into the air. As he came back down the fox opened his jaws wide revealing his sharp teeth. The Gingerbread Man dropped into the fox's mouth and was eaten in one gulp.

The poor Gingerbread Man should have remembered that he was a biscuit and biscuits are for eating!

Some Food Rhymes

Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake, Baker's man,
Make me a cake as fast as you can.
Pat it and prick it and mark it with 'B'
And put it in the oven for baby and me!

Sing a song of sixpence, a pocketful of rye,
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie.
When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,
Wasn't that a dainty dish to set before the King.

The King was in the counting house counting out his money,
The Queen was in the parlour eating bread and honey.
The maid was in the garden hanging out her clothes,
When along came a blackbird and pecked off her nose.

What a commotion, Jenny Wren
Came and put it back again.

Five currant buns in the Baker's shop.
Round and fat with sugar on the top.
Along came (..... child's name) with a penny one day,
Bought a currant bun and took it away.

Four currant buns in baker's shop, etc

Do you know the muffin man, the muffin man, the muffin man?
Do you know the muffin man who comes from down your way?

Yes I know the muffin man, the muffin man, the muffin man,
Yes I know the muffin man who comes from down your way.

All traditional

Ruth Kirkpatrick and Claire McNicol

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