

WORLD OF FUN



Using stories in the Primary Classroom

Stories such as those in Cambridge Exams Publishing's *Storyfun* can be used to 'Reach and Teach' Primary aged learners with Dyslexia.

How easy is it for the children in your classes to read in English?

» Now, think about the children in your classes with the underlying learning difference, **dyslexia**. How do reading challenges impact other aspects of their English language development? What tools do you have in your repertoire to meet the specific needs of these learners?

In the words of IATEFL Past President, Carol Read, we need to 'reach and teach' *all* of the children in our classes. This is especially the case for primary ELT as dyslexia may only become apparent when a child is trying to learn another language. Research indicates that approximately 10% of children have dyslexic type learning differences, which means that in a class of 30, there's a possibility you have at least three children with dyslexia.

30 → 10% → 3

What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a genetic learning difference which impacts the development of literacy and language related skills. This includes phonological processing, rapid naming, working memory, processing speed and the automatic development of reading sub skills.

Why is reading in English challenging?

If a child's mother tongue is a 'transparent' language and is written the way it is spoken, reading and writing

may not pose significant challenges, or s/he may have learnt to overcome or even mask these. However, consider English with its multitude of exceptions and irregularities which need to be learnt by heart. As a non-transparent language, reading in English is particularly challenging, intensified further if the child's mother tongue has a different script.

Awareness of sound and letter / word relationships are key to reading in English, where sounds can be denoted by different letters and letter combinations and a single letter can represent different sounds. This makes learning the alphabet and sounding out letters difficult for children with dyslexia and they can also be overwhelmed by books with too many pictures and small text. Black print on a white background also makes the text feel as though it is jumping around the page for children with dyslexia.

Selecting engaging illustrated texts to include children with dyslexia and using systematic approaches which combine aspects of **whole language** and **phonics**, reaches and teaches and enables our learners to develop their reading skills in English.

How can we select dyslexia-friendly illustrated story books?

Illustrated texts crafted with the needs of children with dyslexia at the forefront such as CUP's *Storyfun* series (suitable preparation for the Cambridge English: Young Learner tests) are increasingly available as awareness is raised among educators.

Use these guidelines when choosing illustrated texts for your learners:

- layout design is clean, uncomplicated and uncluttered making the narrative easy to follow
- typographic structure (line length, line spacing and type size) is well chosen
- fonts are clear, particularly within speech bubbles
- pages have pastel backgrounds, consistent font sizes and styles
- large and consistent paragraph line spaces make text less dense
- text is well spaced and easier to read
- full colour art work but without an overload of images on one page

How can you use the Storyfun handouts to reach and teach your learners?

Tell children to find the specially prepared story texts at: worldoffun.cambridge.org. Ask them to read and listen to the texts before the lesson, either on screen or printed out in colour. This will help them start the lesson on a level playing field with the rest of the class. You may find it useful to print a small set of these stories and laminate them for future use in class. Use some of the ideas below to support children with dyslexia during a shared reading framework.

How can we use illustrated texts to reach and teach learners with dyslexia?



Pablo teaches a group of 10-year-old children who are preparing for the *Flyers* test in Mexico. His CLIL-based coursebook includes a unit of work around plant germination. He decides to extend the language and content using an illustrated story about magic beans which grow into a giant plant!

Think about the specific needs of children with dyslexia. What could you do **BEFORE**, **DURING** and **AFTER** shared reading to increase support? Compare your ideas with Pablo's lesson:

BEFORE

Context setting

- Put some beans in a cloth bag and ask children to feel and guess what's inside.
- Reveal the beans, pass them around, elicit *what we do with them, where we find them, etc.*



Rationale: Clear contextualisation is crucial to prepare children with dyslexia for the story language and enable them to make meaningful connections.

Introduce story-related lexis with flashcards

- Use photographs of *seed, water, leaves, bean* as flashcards and slowly reveal (e.g. back of one flashcard covering another and gradually sliding up). Children guess.
- Stick each flashcard on the board and have the children say the items one by one after you.
- Remove from the board one by one, say and pass around as a chain.
- Bring all flashcards back to the board and have children close their eyes and remove one at a time, elicit *What's missing?*
- Bring the cards back again and do a 'disappearing board' drill where you gradually remove more and more flashcards and encourage children to recall.
- Show the word cards for each item on pastel coloured paper, say each one and have volunteers come up to label the flashcards.

Rationale: Fun and physical, multi-sensory opportunities for children to encounter story lexis before reading aids visual memorisation, often a key challenge for children with dyslexia. Slow reveal of visuals, rather than 'quick flash' techniques reduce feelings of being overwhelmed. Photographs, rather than sketches on a white/smart board as well as pastel coloured cards increase clarity.

Make connections

- Use six colour photographs to represent the germination process, children put them in order in pairs / mini groups.
- Ask volunteers to arrange the order on the board.
- Model and drill each line in rounds using 'lap, clap, snap, snap'.
- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 <i>Plant the seed</i> | 4 <i>Look at the leaves</i> |
| 2 <i>Give it some water</i> | 5 <i>There's a bean</i> |
| 3 <i>Watch it grow</i> | 6 <i>We're ready to eat!</i> |



- Allocate numbers 1–6. Those with number 1 draw picture 1 on mini whiteboards or A4 paper. Those with number 2 draw picture 2 and so on.
- Say the chant again and children hold up their pictures when they hear their line. Repeat a few times.
- Show the cover of the illustrated text and ask children to guess in pairs what happens to the plant on the front and back cover.
- Elicit predictions as a whole class and say ‘let’s read and find out!’

Rationale: Making links to previously encountered concepts and language activates content knowledge and provides a mental frame. Effective drilling and drawing provides additional multi-sensory support. Use of the front and back covers develop ‘concepts of print’ in accessible ways and motivates children to participate.

DURING

Involvement Techniques

- Hold the illustrated text so it is facing the children and ensure they can all see.
- Use the illustrations to elicit the key vocabulary. Ask children to point to these items in the story text.
- Ask children to guess what happens next at key points in the narrative and say *Let’s find out!*
- Encourage children to join in with repetitive refrains by repeating in the characters’ voices with feeling / emotions and point to the text / speech as you introduce these ‘*And the Giant said ...*’
- Enable children to make personalised responses throughout.

Rationale: Systematically progressing from prediction to gist reading, further prediction and getting to know the characters are key for children with dyslexia, rather than working on single word meaning in isolation / reading for detailed comprehension, which is fatiguing. Illustrations unlock meaning and support recognition of whole words in the text. Repetition of key characters’ lines enables children to speak with support and lays foundations for more independent reading of the text afterwards. Pointing to the words enables children to see how these words are spoken.

AFTER

Activities with story text

- Teacher reads key pages from the illustrated text again. Children listen and rearrange picture cards in the correct order from left to right.

- Colour code simple sentences on cards, e.g. verbs in blue, nouns in red *Plant the seed* and children make sentences with the cards and notice what the colours represent.
- Children make a ‘sentence maker’ as a craft activity using the character names and what they did / said. They work in pairs to manipulate the movable parts and tell the story.

Rationale: Provides opportunities for the children to retell the illustrated text story in multi-sensory ways. The visuals and listening to the teacher read again while matching helps children with dyslexia understand the words/sounds structure more easily. The visuals aid memorability and the use of colours help the children generate patterns in an accessible manner.

Phonics

Children make mouth movements and say the onsets and rhymes (e.g. word ‘mat’ = onset ‘m’ + rhyme ‘at’) of key story vocabulary three times until they make the word:

<i>b, b, b</i>	<i>ean, ean, ean</i>
<i>b, b, b</i>	<i>ean, ean, ean</i>
<i>b, ean /</i>	
<i>b, ean /</i>	
<i>b, ean /</i>	
<i>b, ean /</i>	
<i>b, ean / bean!</i>	

Demonstrate as a whole class, then children work in pairs, taking turns to say the onsets and rhymes.

- Move to writing letters from the key story words in the air, on their partner’s back with their ‘finger pencil’, in the sand tray, using foam letters and play dough. Children combine the letters to make individual words.

Rationale: Training in letter-sound recognition is essential for children with dyslexia. These engaging activities enable them to identify, manipulate and distinguish the sound structure of words. Progressing from larger to smaller, moving from whole words to syllables and individual sounds provides robust scaffolding.

In summary

Dyslexia should not be seen as a disability or referred to as such, but instead is a difference in the way children acquire new language and develop their literacy skills. Primary children with dyslexia *can* learn to read successfully in English but in order to ‘reach and teach’ them, we need a variety of principled approaches which benefit **all** the children in our classes. ■

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