

Simple Texts for Primary Pupils

In the same way that they encounter and work with a variety of texts in their Literacy work, it is important that children are also given opportunities to meet different foreign language texts and to develop enjoyment and confidence when faced with these extended pieces of written language.

CHOOSING TEXTS

Exciting and interesting texts can include both fiction and non-fiction. As well as using **books, songs, poems**, look for ideas in **magazines, comics, video** and **DVD**, and the **Internet**. Especially useful would be:

- **traditional tales or stories**, which should be familiar to most pupils
- texts which link well to a **theme or topic** that the children are studying,
- texts which have been **created or adapted** especially to fit in with a topic or to develop a particular language point.

Select texts with care!! Even well known stories can use a variety of language structures, tenses and vocabulary which can make them unsuitable for primary pupils. In general, look for texts that include:

- **repetition of key structures** so the children can join in,
- **illustrations and presentation** that help the children to make sense of the text and allow them to pass comment,
- **a storyline and illustrations** that suit the age and maturity of the pupils and doesn't make them feel that they are reading something intended for babies,
- a **limited amount of new vocabulary** and language structures so the children can remember and use some, rather than simply understanding it,
- a **level of language** that suits the age of the pupils so, even if they don't get every word, the children can understand the basic message,
- a **level of language** that suits the age of the pupils so that you don't have to spend hours adapting it!

Once you have a suitable text in mind, a little preparatory work is always time well spent. It is important to consider the following:

BEFORE YOU START

What knowledge will the children need to have before they encounter the text?

- Have the children already met the text genre that you are using?

If the children have already encountered a **recipe**, an **advertisement**, a **timetable** or a **weather forecast** in English, they can easily recognise them in the foreign language and can usefully discuss those features that allowed them to identify the text genre even if they don't understand every word.

- Will I need to pre-teach any language?

In some cases, particularly if you are using a familiar story, you can launch straight in using pictures, mime and gesture to help you get the meaning across. Usually, however, you will have to do some lead up work and this means identifying the key language you might need to teach in advance. For example, if you were using the story of **Goldilocks**, the key vocabulary could be feelings, size, furniture, rooms, the family etc. If you were using a **recipe** the key vocabulary could be ingredients or action words.

- How can I pre-teach language?

Flashcard pictures:

The simplest and most obvious way to teach a model of pronunciation but do try to vary the activities so that it doesn't get boring!

- Try saying the words in different voices (loud, quiet, angry, sleepy etc.)
- Put the pictures up around the room and ask the children to point or run to the correct one.
- Give miniature sets of picture cards out to the children and ask them to hold up their card when they hear the word.
- Beat the teacher! You hold up a card and say the word. The children repeat the word if it matches the picture but keep quiet if it doesn't.

Physical Games:

- The four corners game.** You'll need a large space for this one. Put a picture/word in each corner of the room and ask the children to choose a corner. You turn over a card from your matching set, call out the word and all the children who chose that corner are out. The rest return to the centre for another game while the ones who are out have to carry out a forfeit related to the vocabulary you are learning.
- Fruit Salad.** The children sit in a circle (make sure there are no spare chairs or spaces) and you go round the circle giving each child a 'name' e.g. if you were teaching the family you could say 'You are mum, you are dad, you are grandpa etc.' You need to have at least 3 or 4 children in each 'name' group. When you call you a name, the children with that label have to change seats. You must try to get a seat too and the child left without a seat calls out the next label. When someone calls out the label 'family', everyone changes place!

READING THE TEXT FOR THE FIRST TIME

What knowledge will the children gain?

- Is asking the children the meanings of words and phrases always the best approach?

There are many other reasons for working with texts other than understanding individual words and phrases.

- To experience the language spoken at pace.
- To listen for the basic message.
- To respond to key features.
- To develop concentration skills.
- To experience listening to and reading text which is more difficult than they can produce themselves.
- To read aloud in order to develop fluency, and to provide a context for phoneme/grapheme correspondence.

Perhaps, most importantly, it allows children to be exposed to the foreign language. Do allow the children to feel involved with the text and explain to them *how* they should be involved. The children can listen only, listen and follow the text, follow the text and join in with repetitive words or phrases, or listen and respond to key words or phonemes with gestures or mime. You might like to try some of the following activities.

Sounds:

When the children hear a key word or phoneme they:

- wave a hand or stand up,
- swap seats,
- take a piece of multilink (plastic cubes that **the children use in numeracy**) and then **count them at the end**,
- pass a toy or other object around and see how far it has got by the end.

Sentence completion:

Encourage children to complete some of the repeated sentences as you are reading e.g. In **Mr. Grumpy's Outing** you could use '*Et le ... monte dans le bateau*', or in **The Very Hungry Caterpillar**, '*Mercoledì mangiò tre prugne, ma...*' Gradually reduce the amount you say each time the sentence appears.

Memory games:

Lists can provide great opportunities for memory games e.g. animals in **Mr. Grumpy's Outing**, family in **The Little Elephant**, sizes in **Goldilocks**, characters in **The Enormous Turnip** or ingredients in a **recipe**. Invite the children to try and remember what was next on the list before you turn the page or show the picture. If you need to cover or hide parts of the text, Post-it notes are really handy!

TAKING IT FURTHER

What opportunities will there be for follow up work to develop the children's knowledge and understanding?

You can now extend the ideas you have used so far to take the children beyond the language of the text, into longer phrases and sentences, showing them how language structures work and how to reuse language creatively in other contexts.

Matching picture to text:

- a. Provide the pupils with a set of picture cards and a set of corresponding cards containing two or three sentences, and ask them to match the two sets.
- b. You could use the same cards to play pelmanism or pairs and ask the children to read out the text this time.
- c. Two sets can also be used to play 'Portholes'. You make two strips of card back to back. On one side you have the pictures and on the other the text. Make holes, with a punch, through both sides next to each picture. The children work in pairs and one chooses one of the texts to read out. The other has to find the corresponding picture and pushes a pencil through the 'porthole' to show their choice.

Listen and Do:

- a. The children hear details from a text and are asked to draw a picture to match. You could use the texts and the finished pictures for a wall display.
- b. You write up some sentences, in random order, from the text each one in a different colour. Give each pair of children a set of multilink cubes (used for numeracy in most Primary schools – ask your teacher!) with the same colours as you have used to write the sentences. As you read the text, invite the children to join their cubes together in the same order as they hear the sentences.

Sequencing:

Provide the children with the written text, with or without pictures, and ask them to put the strips in the correct order

You could also do this activity on the computer using 'cut and paste'.

Drama:

Children can mime actions as they hear the story. If you were reading **Dear Zoo** the children could mime each animal. They might also like to make the noise of the different animals in the foreign language

<http://www.eleceng.adelaide.edu.au/Personal/dabbott/animal.html>

If you were reading a weather forecast, the children could try using the language from the text plus other language they know to create a TV weather broadcast.

The children can take on the role of individual characters in the story for example in **I Want my Banana** each child is given a role and has to suggest a food for the monkey to try.

Other possible texts

Snow White
 The Emperor's New Clothes
 Hansel and Gretel
 Three Little Pigs
 The Huge Bag of Worries
 My Friend the Whale/ The Mixed up Chameleon
 The Bad Tempered Ladybird/ Willy the Champ/ Owl Babies

LINKS TO THE NEW NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Aims

The national curriculum for languages aims to ensure that all pupils:

- understand and respond to spoken and written language from **a variety of authentic sources**

Pupils should be taught to:

- **listen attentively to spoken language** and show understanding by **joining in and responding**
- **explore the patterns and sounds of language** through songs and rhymes and link the spelling, sound and meaning of words
- speak in sentences, **using familiar vocabulary**, phrases and basic language structures
- develop accurate pronunciation and intonation so that others understand when they are **reading aloud** or using **familiar words and phrases**
- **read carefully** and show understanding of words, phrases and simple writing
- **appreciate stories, songs, poems and rhymes** in the language