

Exciting aids to develop ENGLISH SKILLS

How excited are the students in your class when you tell them you are going to read them a story? Quietness reigns and the children 'soak up' literacy information in a fun way that belies the fact that they are learning literacy skills.

Games, songs, poems and action rhymes, partner and group work, and motivating learning aids make learning English fun without the feeling of 'working'. Coerce crafty family members or friends into helping you make some of these learning aids to motivate the children in your class. They are suitable primarily for Foundation and Year 1 children.



Phonic phones

The benefits of phonic phones are numerous. Phonic phones amplify sound and help students hear what they sound like when they read, so they can focus on blending, proper sound use and pronunciation. Phonic phones also help students focus their attention on the act of producing sound for reading—children gain confidence and develop fluency as they practice reading aloud, and, as an added bonus, the classroom is quieter because the children have to whisper into the phones.

Phonic phones can be purchased commercially from the Candi foundation, through Educators Outlet; or as Whisper phones or Toobaloo Auditory Feedback Phones through Amazon. They cost between \$9 and \$13 each. Alternatively, make your own phonic phone, using two PVC elbow joints and a piece of 7.5-cm PVC pipe fitted together. As well as being used by individual children, if the PVC fittings used are loose enough, one end can be turned so students can practise with a partner.

Grammar characters

Make up characters for important aspects of grammar, such as capital letters or full stops, to aid the students' memory of their uses (and make grammar fun!). With the children, make up a story about them.

Instructions for making some grammar characters can be found on page 39 of *Language: Text structure and organisation – Foundation* (RIC–6357). You might also be inspired by Captain Capital Letter and Princess Finish Full Stop dolls at <<http://tinyurl.com/ppybtg6>>. Perhaps you have some grandparents who are clever with a sewing machine who can help!

Alternatively, you might like to write all the capital letters of the alphabet and a number of full stops, question marks or exclamation marks on large craft sticks for selected children to hold in the correct place of guided story writing.

'Draw a letter' game

Practise blending and word-making with this simple game that uses craft sticks.

Write each letter of the alphabet on the tip of a craft stick. On the letters that are vowels, colour the back tip of the craft stick red. Place all of the craft sticks letter end down in a mug, cup or tin.

This game is best played with four or less players. The first student selects one red-tipped craft stick and two non-coloured (consonant) sticks and attempts to make a word. One point is awarded for each word made. The winner is the student to reach a predetermined number of words first.



Puppets and story character dolls

Oral language is the foundation of all English learning. Without oral language, listening comprehension, expressive language, vocabulary, phonological knowledge, grammatical knowledge, social language, language for learning and communication cannot develop.

Develop those really important oral language skills by providing a book (or a number of books) of simple felt finger puppets which can be used with a small group of three or four children. You will need coloured felt, craft glue, googly eyes, scraps of materials such as felt and wool, and paper and a pencil to make each book. Enlist the children to help add individuality to the characters. Instructions for finger puppets like these in a book can be found at <<http://tinyurl.com/ndnjmlo>>.

Sesame Street™-style puppets with large mouths that open and close can be used by both the teacher and the students to segment words into individual sounds, or to identify syllables. For each sound uttered or for each syllable, the mouth of the puppet opens and closes.

Topsy Turvy, flip over or upside down dolls are a wonderful way to encourage oral language or story retelling. Flip over dolls are mostly based on storybook (or other) characters incorporated into one figure. As the children play with them and retell the story, they can 'flip' the doll over to reveal another character which they can then talk about. The following websites give additional details about flip over dolls:

- <<http://tinyurl.com/oc823bl>>
- <<http://tinyurl.com/qgb36lu>>

Of course, if you are crafty or handy with a sewing machine, or know someone who is, you can try making some yourself!



Writing and technology

Connect writing and technology, and encourage students to think about and add more details to their stories, by using a framework of 'drop-down menus'.

Provide A3 sheets of paper on which a framework of four rows and four columns has been constructed. Ask students to record one important event in each of the top four boxes. They then select one or two of the events, and, in the 'drop-down menu' box underneath each event chosen, they draw more details about each.

The students can further refine each event by drawing additional details in each successive box underneath.

Teachers may wish to divide the framework into three columns to use for the beginning, middle and ending of a story with each successive box adding more information.

This technique takes practice, so teachers may begin by using a framework of three or four columns by two rows only.



'Spinner' game

Reinforce letter recognition and sound knowledge using a spinner on which previously-learned letters and sounds have been printed. As the paperclip lands on a letter sound, the child has to think of a word that begins (or ends) with the sound represented by that letter. Played as a game with a number of students, the first to reach a predetermined number of correct points wins.