

USING FAIRY TALES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

This article explores the effectiveness of using fairy tales as a pedagogical tool in teaching English to young learners. It discusses how fairy tales can enhance language acquisition, stimulate imagination, and promote cultural understanding among children. The narrative structure, rich vocabulary, and moral lessons embedded in fairy tales make them an engaging resource for educators. The article also highlights various activities and strategies that teachers can implement to incorporate fairy tales into their English language curriculum, thus fostering a love for reading and learning in young students.

Key words: *Fairy tales, English language teaching, Young learners, Language acquisition, Imagination, Cultural understanding, Pedagogical tool, Narrative structure*

INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales are powerful tools for teaching English to young learners. Their age-appropriate plots, repetitive language, clear characters and moral lessons create a motivating context for meaningful language input and output. When used thoughtfully, fairy tales support vocabulary acquisition, phonological awareness, narrative competence, pragmatic skills and intercultural sensitivity, while also fostering creativity, critical thinking and social-emotional development. Familiar structure and predictability: Recurrent motifs, formulas (Once upon a time... happily ever after) and repeated sequences make stories easier to process and remember. Rich, contextualized language: Collocations, descriptive adjectives, verbs of motion and reporting verbs appear naturally in context, aiding incidental vocabulary learning. Visual and multimodal affordances: Illustrations, gestures and dramatization provide comprehensible input that supports comprehension even with limited language proficiency. Emotional and social engagement: Strong characters and moral dilemmas stimulate discussion, role-play and perspective-taking—key to communicative development. Cross-curricular potential: Tales link to art, music, drama and values education, making lessons holistic and memorable. Listening comprehension: understanding main ideas and sequence of events. Speaking: retelling, role-play,

asking/answering questions, using target phrases. Vocabulary and grammar: acquisition of high-frequency lexical sets (family, verbs of movement, adjectives) and structural patterns (past simple, sequence words). Pronunciation: stress patterns, key phonemes through chants and repetition. Literacy: story sequencing, simple reading and emergent writing (labels, captions). Pragmatics and culture: speech acts, politeness forms, cultural variants of tales and themes. Choose tales appropriate for age and proficiency; prefer shorter, repetitive tales for beginners (e.g., The Three Little Pigs, Goldilocks) and slightly longer or adaptation-rich tales for older primary learners. Simplify language while preserving core narrative and cultural elements. Use graded retellings or story scripts. Consider culturally sensitive choices; adapt or select multicultural tales to reflect learners' backgrounds and to avoid stereotypes. Use picture books, sequenced flashcards, puppets, and audio recordings to diversify input channels. Activate schemata: show images, elicit background knowledge, sing a related song or chant. Pre-teach 6–8 key vocabulary items using visuals, TPR (total physical response) and quick matching games. Teacher reads the story expressively, using pictures, gestures and pauses for prediction. Use multimodal input: recorded narration, animated short, or puppet show. Encourage children to join in repeated refrains. Simple true/false, sequence cards, picture ordering, or “What happens next?” prompts. Use choral response, thumbs-up/down or quick mini-quizzes for young learners. Practice and interaction (15–25 minutes). Role-play and dramatization: assign parts, use masks/props, rehearse dialogues. TPR and action-based tasks for verbs and commands (e.g., “build”, “run”, “hide”). Collaborative storyboard: groups create panels, add speech bubbles and present. Production and extension (10–20 minutes) Retell in pairs or small groups, supported by picture prompts. Creative writing/drawing: alternative endings, letter to a character, or a comic strip. Cross-curricular project: art (making puppets), music (compose a theme song), or science link (materials for the three houses). Use formative, performance-based assessment: checklists for vocabulary use, fluency and participation. Portfolios with drawings, recordings of retellings, and short written pieces show progress over time.

Differentiation and inclusion

Provide multiple levels of support: picture cues, sentence starters, simplified retell scripts for beginners; challenge tasks (rewrite, compare variants) for advanced learners. Use peer-pairing and cooperative tasks to scaffold less confident children. Adjust physical activities and time-on-task for learners with attention or mobility needs.

Classroom management and engagement tips

Keep routines predictable: songs, storytelling circle, and transitions reduce anxiety and increase participation. Use clear, simple instructions and visual routines.

Rotate roles in dramatization so each child participates (narrator, character, prop manager).

Technology and resources

Digital storybooks and interactive apps allow replaying, highlighting vocabulary and recording retells. Short animated story clips provide multimodal input but should be followed by active tasks to avoid passive viewing. Use audio recorders for assessment-children can listen to their own retellings and self-correct.

Potential pitfalls and solutions

- ✓ Over-simplification risks loss of cultural richness—maintain authentic elements and discuss cultural differences.
- ✓ Excessive teacher talk-maximize student output by using guided discovery, pair work and performance tasks.
- ✓ Passive consumption-ensure every story is followed by active, communicative tasks.

Sample mini-lesson (30–40 minutes): The Three Little Pigs

- ✓ Pre-teach: pig, wolf, house, blow, straw, stick, brick (TPR + cards).
- ✓ Listen: teacher tells story with large pictures; students repeat refrain “Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin.”
- ✓ Comprehension: sequence picture cards.
- ✓ Practice: students act as pigs and wolf; practice target verbs.
- ✓ Production: groups design a new house material and present why it’s strong; simple written caption.
- ✓ Assessment: checklist for use of target words and participation.





Studies in SLA and early literacy show that contextualized, meaningful input combined with active use enhances retention, phonological development and narrative skills. Story-based instruction supports emergent literacy and vocabulary growth more effectively than isolated drills when paired with rich engagement and production opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Fairy tales offer a versatile, motivating framework for teaching English to young learners. When stories are carefully selected, scaffolded and followed by communicative, multimodal activities, they foster language development, creativity and socio-emotional learning. Teachers should balance simplification with cultural authenticity, maximize learner output, differentiate tasks and integrate assessment to ensure sustained progress.

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