

Welcome to *Teaching early reading in  
Africa*



# Contents

---

Introduction	4
How will you learn on this course?	4
Your study notebook	5
Working with others	5
Course badge	6
Who created this course?	6
References	7
Acknowledgements	8

# Introduction

---

Welcome to the course *Teaching early reading in Africa*. Over the next few weeks you will be introduced to active teaching approaches that you can use to teach early reading. You can study on your own or with a group of colleagues, and can practise new approaches in your classroom in a structured and supported way.

This course is for you if you are a teacher, student teacher or school volunteer – or if you just have an interest in how children learn to read.

We hope that this course will open up possibilities for teaching and give you the confidence to experiment with new approaches. The ideas and tools that it provides will enable you to become more expert in the field of early reading.

We are asking all participants to complete a pre-course survey to help us understand who is taking part in this course, your motivations and your expectations. Thank you for completing this.

## How will you learn on this course?

---

In *Teaching early reading in Africa* you will:

- explore early literacy, with an emphasis on active approaches to teaching and learning reading
- consider how to make the best use of your classroom, and how to use and develop resources
- be introduced to some specific approaches to teaching reading
- explore the African Storybook website and select stories relevant to your context
- be directed to open educational resources (OER) developed as part of the TESSA programme, which explain some of the teaching approaches being suggested.

During the course you will be introduced to a number of tools and resources that you can download and use in your classroom. There will also be optional readings and links that you can use to deepen your knowledge and understanding of a particular topic.

*Teaching early reading in Africa* is 'learner-centred' in its approach (Schweisfurth, 2013). Therefore, the course:

- builds on your existing knowledge and challenging you to learn more
- provides activities aimed at motivating you and your teacher colleagues
- takes account of the different starting points you might have
- emphasises the importance of dialogue to support thinking and learning
- draws on examples relevant to your everyday life and to your role as a teacher
- promotes the learning of a range of skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity
- makes space for personal reflection and responses
- encourages you to work together and discuss the activities.

---

# Your study notebook

---

You are asked to keep a study notebook for this course in which you can make notes on:

- ideas that may come to you when you are either studying or in the workplace, or at any other time
- your responses to particular activities
- notes about articles that you read as you go along
- notes about discussions you have had with others
- questions that occur to you while you are studying
- reflections on what you think or feel about your learning.

Your study notebook is personal to you and it should be useful to you. You may want to share parts of it with a friend or colleague. There are no rules for keeping a study notebook: some days you may write a great deal, and at other times only a little. However, you are advised to write notes in such a way that you can understand them later. This is because we see this course as a starting point for your professional development.

There are lots of practical ideas for you to try with your classes, and we hope you will keep practising the techniques that you learn. In this way, you will have a reference to the things you have learnt, even when you are away from a computer.

You can keep your notebook in a format that appeals to you and is easy for you to maintain – it could be an ordinary paper notebook or on a desktop or mobile device.

---

## Working with others

---

This course can be studied by individuals working alone. However, it is a practice-focused course and many of the activities will suggest that you talk to a colleague or a group of colleagues about an idea or an issue. Learning is a social process; by presenting your ideas to others and listening to them in return, your learning will be enhanced and enriched. In fact, a very good way to maximise the opportunities of this course would be for a group of you in the same institution to work together on the tasks and activities.

There will be a number of opportunities for you to respond to text, video or images. You will be able to see our responses to activities by clicking on the 'Reveal discussion' button. They are not supposed to be a 'right answer' – instead, they are an opportunity for you to reflect on a possible response to the questions posed.

Some of the activities in this course involve teaching a lesson or working with children. If you are studying in the school holidays or don't have access to a class, you should make a plan for a lesson that you will teach when you have the opportunity. Alternatively, you could do or discuss the activity with other adults, or with your own or your neighbour's children.

### Activity: How will you study?

(We recommend you spend about 20 minutes on this activity)

On your own or with a group of colleagues, plan how you are going to work on this course.

- When will you study?
- Will you be able to work as a group, or individually, meeting regularly to compare notes?
- Will you keep a conventional or an electronic notebook?
- What do you hope to get out of the course?

Being proactive in this way means that you are more likely to meet your study goals.

## Course badge

The course is divided into six sections. We anticipate that each section involves four to six hours of study. In order to achieve the 'badge' for the course, you will need to:

- visit each page of the course
- complete the activities at the end of Sections 3 and 6, which involve uploading your response to an activity to the internet.

In order to achieve the badge you will need to be connected to the internet. However, you can download the content onto a laptop, tablet or smartphone and study offline if your internet access is unreliable.

This course has quizzes. These are not part of the assessment, but are instead designed to be formative and to promote discussion between you and your colleagues. There are no pass grades and you have two attempts at each question.

## Who created this course?

**TESSA** is a network of Teacher Educators, at the heart of which is a bank of Open Educational Resources (OER) available on [the TESSA website](#). The OER cover the primary school curriculum and show teachers how to put theories about active learning into practice. Learning outcomes are for the teacher, meaning that the OER can support teachers and teacher educators.

**African Storybook** is an initiative of Saide, a South African NGO involved in open education projects across sub-Saharan Africa. The initiative responds to the challenge of a shortage of books in African languages with digital innovation that provides open access to locally created children's picture storybooks in more than 100 of the languages spoken in Africa. [The African Storybook website](#) is a growing collection of more than 4000 storybooks that can be read, adapted, translated, downloaded and printed. The website also offers publishing tools for users to create and publish their own storybooks.

## Assumptions we have made in writing this course

Teaching early reading is demanding, and extremely important. Being able to read fluently will enable children to access all aspects of the school curriculum and give them the best possible chance in life. In order to write this course we have had to make a number of assumptions:

- That you will be teaching children to read in their first language, but that in the first five years at primary school they will make the transition to learning in English. You will therefore be encouraged to draw on the home language but also to introduce spoken English and English words where appropriate.
- That the term ‘storybook’ (which we will be using frequently) can refer to fiction and non-fiction. Young children can learn a great deal from accounts of daily routines and factual information.
- That although many of you may have experience of teaching early reading, you are new to online learning. We have tried to provide support where necessary.

You should now go to Section 1 of the course, ‘What do you need to know to teach early reading?’.

## References

African Storybook, <http://www.africanstorybook.org/> (accessed 15 March 2018).

Barrett, A., Ali, S., Clegg, J., Hinostroza, J.E., Lowe, J., Nickel, J., Novelli, M., Oduro, G., Pillay, M., Tikly L. and Yu, G. (2007) *Initiatives to Improve the Quality of Teaching and Learning: A Review of Recent Literature*, background paper for the EFA GMR 2008, UNESCO [online]. Available at:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001555/155504e.pdf> (accessed 7 June 2018).

Barsalou, L.W. (2008) ‘Grounded cognition’, *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 59, pp. 617–45 [online]. Available at:

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev.psych.59.103006.093639> (accessed 15 March 2018).

Chambers, A. (2011) *Tell Me: Children, Reading, and Talk with the Reading Environment*, Woodchester, UK: The Thimble Press.

Cummins, J. (1991) ‘Interdependence of first- and second-language proficiency in bilingual children’, in Bialystok, E. (ed.) *Language Processing in Bilingual Children*, pp. 70–89, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press [online]. Available at:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511620652.006> (accessed 20 March 2018).

Gimenez, P., Bugescu, N., Black, J.M., Hancock, R., Pugh K., Nagamine, M., Kutner, E., Mazaika, P., Hendren, R., McCandliss, B.D. and Hoeft, F. (2014) ‘Neuroimaging correlates of handwriting quality as children learn to read and write’, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol. 8, p. 155 [online]. Available at:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3958698/> (accessed 15 March 2018).

Goddard Blyth, S. (2000) ‘Early learning in the balance: priming the first ABC’, *Support for Learning*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 154–8.

Kioko, A.N., Ndung’u, R.W., Njoroge, M.C. and Mutiga, J. (2014) ‘Mother tongue and education in Africa: publicising the reality’, *Multilingual Education*, vol. 4, no. 18, pp. 1–11

[online]. Available at:

<https://multilingual-education.springeropen.com/track/pdf/10.1186/s13616-014-0018-x?site=multilingual-education.springeropen.com> (accessed 15 March 2018).

Moon, B. and Umar, A. (2013) 'Reorientating the agenda around teacher education and development', in Moon, B. (ed.) *Teacher Education and the Challenge of Development: A Global Analysis*, pp. 227–38, Abingdon: Routledge.

OpenLearn (2017) *Language as a medium for teaching and learning* (online). Available at <http://www.open.edu/openlearn/education/educational-technology-and-practice/educational-practice/language-medium-teaching-and-learning/content-section-1> (accessed 7 June 2018).

Ouane, A. and Glanz, C. (eds) (2011) *Optimising Learning, Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor A Review and Analysis of Theory and Practice in Mother-Tongue and Bilingual Education in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning/ Tunisia: Association for the Development of Education in Africa [online]. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002126/212602e.pdf> (accessed 15 March 2018).

Schweisfurth, M. (2013) *Learner-centred Education in International Perspective: Whose Pedagogy for Whose Development?*, Abingdon: Routledge.

Schweisfurth, M. (2015) 'Learner-centred pedagogy: towards a post-2015 agenda for teaching and learning', *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 40, pp. 259–66.

TESSA, <http://www.tessafrica.net/> (accessed 15 March 2018).

Unicef (2016) *The Impact of Language Policy and Practice on Children's Learning: Evidence from Eastern and Southern Africa*, Unicef [online]. Available at: [https://www.unicef.org/esaro/UNICEF\(2016\)LanguageandLearning-FullReport\(Single-View\).pdf](https://www.unicef.org/esaro/UNICEF(2016)LanguageandLearning-FullReport(Single-View).pdf) (accessed 20 March 2018).

World Vision International (n.d.) 'Unlock literacy teacher training video modules', World Vision International [online]. Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/education-and-life-skills/unlock-literacy-teacher-training-video-modules> (accessed 20 March 2018).

World Vision International [YouTube user] (2017a) 'Module four: Phonemic awareness: what classroom activities can promote phonemic awareness?', YouTube, 3 April [online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9babWRRyFdo> (accessed 20 March 2018).

World Vision International [YouTube user] (2017b) 'Module three: Formative assessment: how do I use formative assessment effectively in the classroom?', YouTube, 3 April [online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2gULw7TUZE> (accessed 20 March 2018).

---

## Acknowledgements

*Teaching early reading in Africa* was developed by a team of five educators (specialists in early reading and online learning, with support from others). It was financed by a donation from The David and Elaine Potter Foundation. We are based at The Open University in the UK and at Saide in South Africa. The course draws heavily on the ideas and approaches presented in the [TESSA OER](#) and the [African Storybook](#) initiative.



Except for third party materials and otherwise stated (see [terms and conditions](#)), this content is made available under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 Licence](#). Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following sources:

#### Section 1

*Figure 1.1*: courtesy of Egerton Primary School, Kenya; *Figures 1.5, 1.6 and 1.7*: Book Aid International – this file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic Licence](#); *Activity 1.6 optional reading: Optimising Learning Education and Publishing in Africa: The Language Factor*, courtesy of UNESCO; *Activity 1.6 optional reading: Kioko, A.N. (2014) 'Mother tongue and education in Africa: publicising the reality', Multilingual Education*, vol. 4, no. 18 – this file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution Licence](#); *Activity 1.6 optional activity: Multilingualism in the classroom*, TESS-India project/The Open University, used under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>.

#### Section 2

*Figures 2.2 and 2.3*: courtesy of Egerton Primary School, Kenya; *Figures 2.4 and 2.5*: Book Aid International – this file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic Licence](#).

#### Section 3

*Figure 3.1 and course banner: African Storybook* – used under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>; *Figure 3.2: Injangwe Yanjye Irihe?/Where is my cat?* (authors: Clare Verbeek, Themhani Dladla and Zanele Buthelezi; adaptation: Martin Arabaruta, Tara Ocansey and John Mugabo; illustrator: Bronwen Heath; language: Kinyarwanda English; level: first sentences), © School of Education and Development (Centre for Adult Education) University of Kwazulu-Natal 2007, Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 3.0; source <http://www.africanstorybook.org/>, original source <http://cae.ukzn.ac.za/resources/seedbooks.aspx>; *Figure 3.3*: Book Aid International – this file is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic Licence](#); *Figure 3.4: Look at the animals* (author: Jenny Katz; illustrator: Sandy Campbell; language: English; level: first words), © African Reading Matters 2003, Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 3.0; source <http://www.africanstorybook.org/>, original source <http://www.read.org.za/>; *Games to support readiness for reading: Sally Goddard Blythe (2000) 'Early learning in the balance: priming the first ABC', Support for Learning*, vol. 15, no. 4, John Wiley and Sons; *Figure 3.6*: courtesy of Egerton Primary School, Kenya; *Using pair work*: TESS-India project/The Open University, used under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>.

#### Section 4

*Phonemic awareness video*: © World Vision International.

#### Section 5

*Optional reading*: Chambers, A. (2011) *Tell Me: Children, Reading and Talk with The Reading Environment*, The Thimble Press – the book includes a list of the different sorts of questions that you can ask children about books; *Figure 5.1*: © African Storybook Initiative 2014, used under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## Section 6

Figure 6.2: © African Storybook Initiative, used under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

## Additional resources

*Getting started on the ASb website: Omwana Omwagalwa* (authors: Ritah Katetemera and Mulongo Bukhey; translation: Annet Ssebagala and Ritah Katetemera; illustration: Brian Wambi), courtesy of Saide, used under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>; *Translating a storybook on the ASb website*: courtesy of Saide, used under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>; *Stages of reading development chart*: images from *Chicken and Millipede* and *I enjoy doing storybooks* © African Storybook Initiative, used under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>; image of girl: publisher unknown.

Every effort has been made to contact copyright owners. If any have been inadvertently overlooked, the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

What do you need to know to teach  
early reading?



---

# Contents

---

Introduction	4
Foundational literacy	4
How do children learn to read?	6
Our approach to learning and teaching early reading	10
A question of language	12
Looking at effective teachers of reading	14
Where do reading activities fit into the weekly timetable?	16
Reflecting on your learning so far	18
Moving forward	19

# Introduction

---



Figure 1.1: Teachers working together on professional development activities

In this section you will:

- reflect on how children learn to read
- think about how effective literacy teachers can support children's reading.

You will think about your own experiences as a child, and how you can support reading development. The course's approach to teaching children how to learn to read begins here.

## Foundational literacy

---

Early reading is part of 'foundational literacy'. We see literacy as being about much more than learning to read and write. Being literate enables someone to be an active participant in the social and economic life of the community in which they live. Literacy is at the heart of human wellbeing.

**Reflection point:** What does being literate mean to you? Why is it so important?

This course is based on these principles of foundational literacy:

- 1 Literacy is meaningful and purposeful.
- 2 Literacy learning rests on a foundation of oral language.
- 3 The many elements of reading and writing are interdependent.
- 4 Literacy learning is a recursive process, requiring the active participation of well-motivated children.
- 5 Teachers need to be readers and writers themselves so they can model for children literate ways of behaving and participating in literate communities.
- 6 Children's first experiences of literacy learning should be in a language with which they are completely familiar.
- 7 Effective literacy learning depends on the availability and skilled use of appropriate resources, which may include digital technologies as well as attractive reading texts and simple writing materials.
- 8 Reading and writing are complex; teachers need many different strategies to ensure the success of all children.

### Activity 1.1: Reflections on being an adult reader and writer

(We recommend you spend about 15 minutes on this activity)

Re-read the eight principles listed above and choose one that you think is the most important. Reflect on what the statement means to you as an adult reader and writer.

Figure 1.2 is an example from one of the course's writing team – for them, reading and writing has a professional role as well supporting social and personal development.

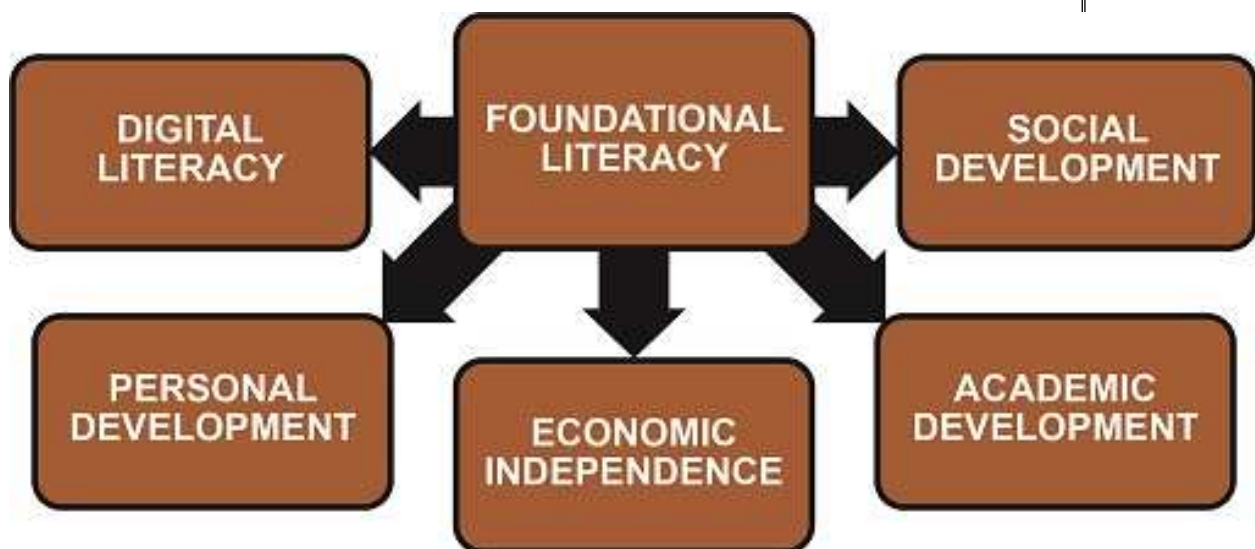


Figure 1.2: An example of what foundational literacy means

In your study notebook, find a way of recording your reflections of being a reader and writer. If you wish, share your thoughts with a colleague.

Central to being literate is being able to read fluently with understanding. This course will help you to become a more effective teacher of early literacy by showing you a number of active learning approaches and showing you how to create and access resources that will support children's early reading.

# How do children learn to read?

You are a skilled and confident reader. You are reading this academic study unit, and it is likely that you read every day for work and for enjoyment in books, newspapers, magazines, and of course online. But how did you learn to do all this?

## Activity 1.2: Experiences of learning to read

(We recommend you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Read the comments in Figure 1.3 that African teachers have shared with us about learning to read. As you read their memories, think about the following questions:

- who helped them read?
- what they read?
- where they read?
- why they read?



I learned to read from my grandfather. He made me memorise five words every day from the dictionary. Then one day, when he wouldn't give me some money, I said to him 'You are a miser!' He was annoyed, but he also laughed.

My older sister taught me to read. She drew words in the dirt with a stick, and explained them to me.

My mother told me stories and sometimes she would write them out for me in a recycled exercise book. She would draw funny pictures to go with her stories, about animals and about our traditions. She encouraged me to make my own little picture books from recycled paper and magazines.

Every night my father would read out a Bible passage and then ask us to explain it. The words were very difficult, so my sister would secretly take the Bible earlier in the day and read the passage to me and explain it. He was always very pleased with us!

In my home and village there were no reading materials. So when I went to school it was the first time I saw writing and books. My teacher was my inspiration. She read stories to us and she made big reading books from chart paper so that everyone could see the words.

I learned to read in school, on the chalkboard only, because there were no books. The first word I learned to read was 'Father'. I was so excited, I ran home and shouted the word at my own father!

My sister taught me to read at home, before I started school. She used her own school books to do this. I was a big child for my age, and she worried that I would be teased by other children if I could not read.

My grandmother taught me to read my first words. We were in the market and I saw a hat, and on this hat there was embroidery that said: South Africa. I asked my grandmother what was on the hat. I remember this so well, because it was the moment I understood that those funny shapes (letters) were words. After this, every time I went to the market with my grandmother I looked for words on food packets and signs, and I asked her to read them to me.

I did not learn to read until I was an adult. The teacher in my school used one reading textbook and I never really understood it. We did exercises from the textbook. It was very boring and nothing I could relate to. The words and signs I saw around me in the street, in newspapers and in the cinema were much more interesting. I learned to read from life, not from school.

Figure 1.3: African teachers' experiences about learning to read

What are your memories of the who, the what, the where and the when of early reading? Choose one that is most similar to your own experience of learning to read and record in your notebook.

### Discussion

**Who?** Did it surprise you to see how many different people were mentioned as being key people in helping these individuals learn to read? One person remembered an inspirational teacher. Others talked about members of their family who had taught and encouraged them. Sometimes this was their mother or father, but also older siblings or a grandparent. People of different ages can help children learn to read. As teachers we are a vital part of this process.

**What?** Learning to read can draw on a range of resources. This includes books but is not limited to only school textbooks – listening to stories, learning words from memory and reading words in the market are just some of the ways mentioned in these accounts that can help children to read.

**Where?** Learning to read can take place in a classroom but also at home, in the street or village. A library may be a special place that encourages a love of reading. Children may begin to read in one place, but they will learn more easily if they are encouraged to read at home and in school and in their community.

**Why?** Children can start to learn to read out of curiosity, for example seeing an older sibling reading. There are also examples in these accounts of older brothers or sisters wanting their younger siblings to do well at school. In some of the accounts, reading is an important part of family life.

It is important as teachers to think about reading not just as a skill for children to learn but as a process that involves people and things around us. It is a unique part of our own history: how we learned to read helps to make us who we are.

### Activity 1.3: Your memories of learning to read

(We recommend that you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Think for a moment about your own experiences as an early reader when you were a young child.

- How do you remember learning to read?
- Where did you learn to read – in school, at home or in another place, or a mixture of these?
- What do you remember reading?
- Was there someone who helped you learn to read?
- What factors do you think made it possible for you to learn to read? Or were there factors that prevented you from learning to read?

Create a chart in your study notebook like the one in Figure 1.4. Write your name in the middle of the chart. Then write your answers to the following questions:

- Who helped you learn to read?
- What did you read for the first time?
- Where did you read it?
- Why did you read it?
- Did you read it more than once?
- Have you read it since?

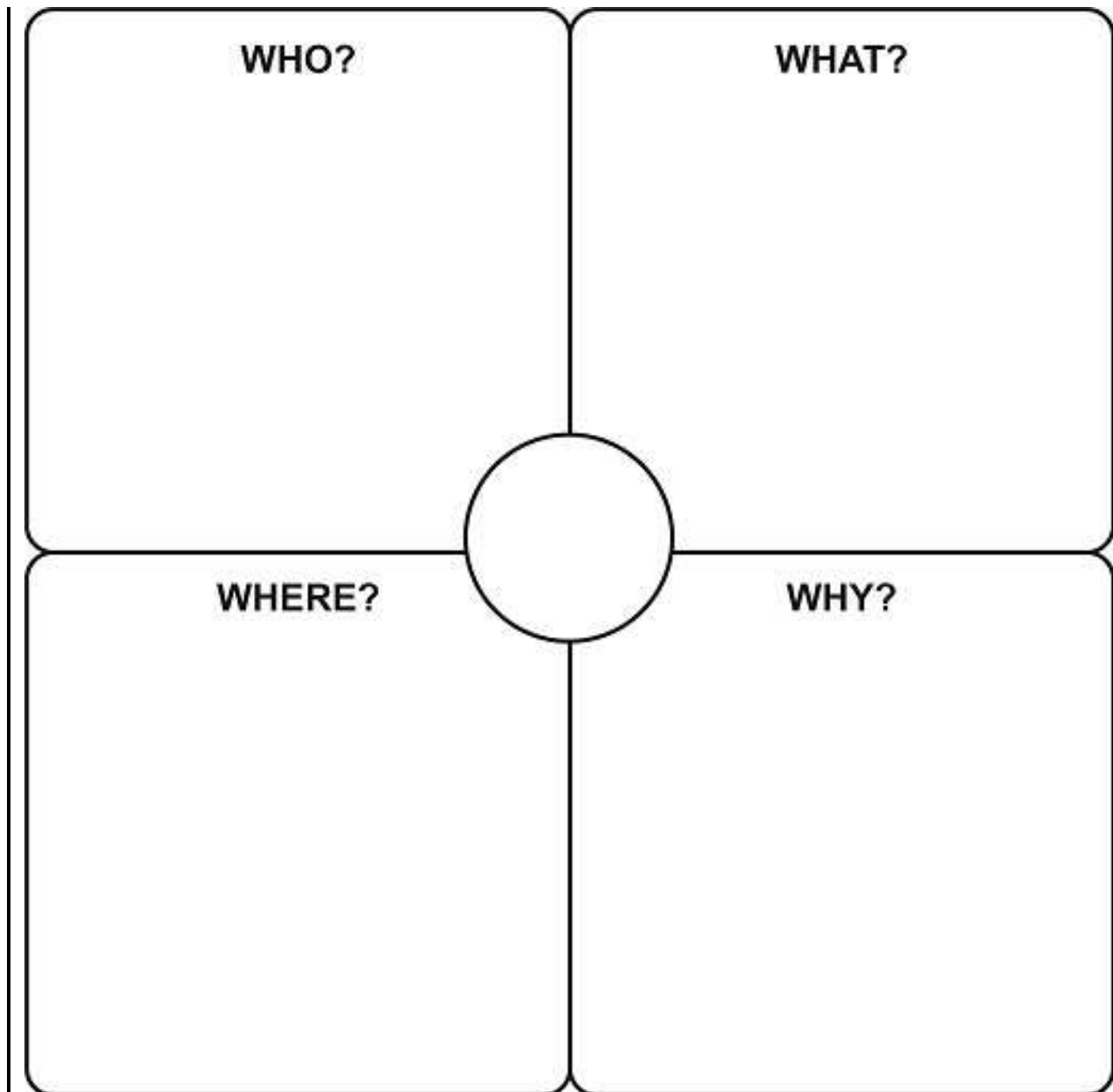


Figure 1.4: A chart to record your memories of learning to read

Share your memories with a colleague and discuss what were the similarities and differences between your memories of learning to read.

#### Discussion

As you can see, there are many pathways to reading – there is no single way to learn how to do it. There are also many reasons to read, for pleasure, for information and for a range of different purposes. Often, our most important reading experiences happen at home and with family members, before we start school.

Now look at Figure 1.4 from the perspective of the young children who are in your classroom. Instead of your own name in the middle of the chart, add the name of one of the children in your class. As the teacher of early reading, you are the 'Who' in this chart, but there may be other people who will also play a significant part in this child learning to read. The 'Where' is your school, but home or church may also be an important place in this child's 'reading journey'. The 'Why' of reading will be individual

to each child. Later in this course you will focus on 'What' to read when we look at different resources.

School reading can be very different to reading that is done at home and in the community. As a teacher, it is your job to draw on all the resources available to the child to help them to see the value and enjoyment in learning to read, and not just something that they do at school. In this way you will be contributing to their personal development, and wellbeing.

## Our approach to learning and teaching early reading



Figure 1.5: A child reading a book

Our approach to learning and teaching reading is a balanced approach. This means that we believe that being able to read means:

- understanding that print carries meaning
- knowledge of letters and sounds to recognise letters and words
- comprehension of what's been read.

This requires:

- children who want to read
- children who are able to make connections
- teachers who have a range of different approaches and methods to help children to master different aspects of reading.

Research has shown us that there are two equally important strategies in learning to read:

- ‘bottom-up’ skills where children use their knowledge of letters and sounds to read or decode whole words (but without necessarily understanding what the words mean)
- ‘top-down’ strategies where children use their personal and cultural knowledge, their prior reading knowledge, and the overall meaning of the text they are reading, to predict words and sentences.

Some children respond well to one approach more than the other; however, all children benefit from a combination of the two, which is known as a ‘balanced’ approach.

Activities that develop basic concepts about position and shape, or that build motivation, are important processes that are essential for literacy. Research shows that children who do not acquire these skills in the early stages of becoming literate are likely to struggle to progress (Boursalou, 2008). In order to develop successfully, children need opportunities to develop their fine motor coordination and balance through activities such as painting, drawing, working with clay, throwing and catching, or skipping with a rope. These activities may at first seem unrelated to reading and writing, but they are important aspects of cognitive development for literacy. Neuroscience shows how cognition – or thinking – involves a person’s physical, emotional and environmental states, multi-sensory experience, and imagination all at the same time (Gimenez et al., 2014).

Also, activities that develop basic concepts about position and shape, or that build motivation, are important processes that are essential for literacy. Research shows that children who do not acquire these skills in the early stages of becoming literate are likely to struggle to progress (Boursalou, 2008).

### Activity 1.4: Reflecting on learning strategies

(We recommend you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Write brief notes on these questions and discuss them with a colleague:

- Think about two children who you have taught to read. What worked best for them – a ‘bottom-up’ or a ‘top-down’ approach?
- Why did one approach or the other seem to work best for the particular child?
- In your classroom, do you spend more time on one approach or the other in your own teaching? What are your reasons for this?
- Outside of literacy lessons, are there other subjects where you use ‘top-down’ or ‘bottom-up’ approaches?
- Reflect on one of the ideas introduced in this section that you would like to try out in your classroom. How will you do this?

#### Discussion

All children learn to read in different ways. You may have found that some children find it easy to read or decode individual words, while others need the context of the word within the sentence to fully understand the meaning.

The implication of a balanced view of reading is that reading activities should not be confined to particular lessons, and that teachers should use a variety of approaches. Numeracy, life skills, creative arts and physical education all provide opportunities to support reading.

In the rest of this course you will consider:

- how to create a literacy learning environment
- what teachers can do to help prepare children to learn to read (pre-reading activities)
- specific methods for teaching reading
- how to make best use of stories and books
- how to assess reading and plan how to move children forward.

Each section is underpinned by a balanced approach to teaching early literacy and the belief that children need to be actively engaged in the learning process.

## A question of language

By the time they leave primary school, many African children are being taught in English. In recent years, however, it has been suggested that children should be taught to read and write in their home language, making the transition to English in around Grade 4. There is convincing evidence that children who can read in their home language progress much faster in English, and are more likely to be successful in later years of schooling (Kioko et al., 2014).

When children learn to read and write in their own language, they learn more quickly. This is because they are already competent speakers of their home or first language. They can use their first language knowledge to predict or make 'educated' guesses of the meanings of a new language. In this way children are more likely to become natural writers and readers, just as they are natural speakers. This means that it is easier for teachers to design active lessons that link learning in school to children's home life.

Teachers are also more flexible and creative when they can use their first or home languages with their children. Research has shown that teachers who use only the school's medium of instruction are less active and creative in their teaching (Barrett et al., 2007).

There is much evidence that flexible language use allows teachers and children to maximise understanding and participation (for example, see the OpenLearn course [Language as a medium for teaching and learning](#)).

Learning other languages is easier when literacy is first firmly established in the most familiar language (Cummins, 2001; Unicef, 2016). Academic research also documents the advantages for the brain and education when children learn to read in their most familiar language (Ouane & Glanz, 2011).

### Activity 1.5: Reflecting on 'A question of language'

(We recommend you spend about 10 minutes on this activity)

Record three things in your study notebook that you either found interesting or that was new information to you.

Read Case Study 1.1 about the importance of the home language in supporting children's early reading, and then try the activity that follows it. We suggest you try this with a colleague, if possible.

### Case Study 1.1: Home language in early reading

Mr Shabukali's son, Matson, has just started school in Lusaka. Mr Shabukali is concerned that Matson is being taught to read in their home language of Nyanja – he had expected that Matson would learn to read English. He has gone to the school to meet the headteacher.

**Headteacher:** Hello, Mr Shabukali. What can I do for you?

**Mr Shabukali:** Well ... Matson started school five weeks ago and I am very concerned to find that he is learning to read in Nyanja. I want him to learn English. He should be being taught to read English!

**Headteacher:** I see, Mr Shabukali. Can you just explain to me why you are so concerned that he should learn to read and write English now?

**Mr Shabukali:** Well everyone knows that to do well in education, you have to be good at English. Practically all the secondary schools teach in English; all the colleges and universities are in English. I want him to get a good job. He needs to start learning English as soon as possible – it's ridiculous to teach him to read in Nyanja and then expect him to start all over again. He will be miles behind the children who have learnt to read in English.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 1.6: Home language or English?

(We recommend you spend about 15 minutes on this activity)

Having read the case study, imagine you are the headteacher. Write a short paragraph explaining to Mr Shabukali why you are teaching Matson to read in Nyanja. Draw on your own experience, your response to Activity 1.5 and the notes you made in your study notebook.

**Optional readings:** If you are interested in learning more about the importance of home language learning there are two studies you can read.

You can download [a major UNESCO study on the issue](#). Pages 22–3 have an executive summary that is easy to digest. The conclusion and recommendations (p. 214) might also be of interest.

[A Multilingual Education article](#) that documents success stories from Africa in which mother tongue education has brought educational and economic benefits.

**Optional activity:** You may also want to download and read an OER on a multilingual classroom from the TESS-India project.

## Looking at effective teachers of reading



Figure 1.6: A teacher and children in class

Now read Case Study 1.2 and try the activity that follows it.

### Case Study 1.2: Observing good literacy teaching

The Grade 1 teacher Juba was talking at the end of the day with a colleague Tabitha.

- Juba:** I'm so pleased with what happened today at school.
- Tabitha:** What were you doing?
- Juba:** The children had been looking forward to Tia's grandmother, Grace, coming into school to tell a story. She told us a story called 'Boxes on the Bus'. She brought a big cardboard box in with her.



The story was about all the different people who get on the bus. Each person is carrying a box. Sometimes the box is big and sometimes it is small. There is something in each box. Grandmother Grace asked the children to join in when she said 'And in the box was a ...'.

She asked the children to guess what was in each box on the bus. Sometimes it was something very small, like a button, and sometimes it was something very big, like a goat. Each time someone got on the bus with a box, Grandmother Grace asked a child to come to the front to think of an action. Praise pinched her fingers together to make a button and Innocent made up an action for the goat by 'walking' four fingers up his arm.

After she had told the story once, I asked the children to help Grandmother Grace tell her story. She chose two children at a time to come and do the actions with her and to repeat each part of the story after her.

**Tabitha:** What did Tia think of having her grandmother come to school?

**Juba:** That was one of the best parts for me. Tia is usually so quiet and sits at the back, and doesn't join in. But today she was smiling and doing all the actions. She sat at the front and said proudly to her friend, 'That's my Grandma'.

**Tabitha:** What are you going to do tomorrow about the bus story?

**Juba:** I'm going to ask the children to tell me the story of 'Boxes on the Bus'. Then we are going to make a big book of the story, with words and pictures. Also, I've also found another story about a journey on a boat to read to the children next week.

**Tabitha:** You could bring in an empty box like Grandmother Grace and ask children to make up a new story.

**Juba:** Good idea! We could do 'Boxes on the Boat' with different objects and animals.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 1.7: Observing good literacy teaching

(We recommend that you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

Teaching literacy effectively requires a considerable range of skills. Having read the case study, write down:

- all the things that the teachers do to support literacy
- what the children actually did in the lesson.

Can you identify which parts of the lesson you already do? The children's active participation in the lesson provides informal assessment opportunities for the teacher. Record in your study notebook one area of assessment that the teachers could choose to focus on.

#### Discussion

Both the children and teacher learned a lot in this lesson.

The teacher:

- talks to a colleague to reflect on her experience and share ideas for improving the lesson
- invites someone from the community into the class to help her
- creates the opportunity for children to talk and share ideas
- encourages the children to think of and use physical actions to match the words they had chosen
- encourages children to think of new words that they could act out
- uses resources (proposing another story and planning to bring in a box)
- chooses a context for the activity that is familiar to children
- selects an activity that combines top-down and bottom-up approaches to reading
- informally assesses the children throughout the lesson.

The children:

- are all included
- listen carefully to each other
- think of different words
- make up actions to match their word
- use rhythm and rhyme
- talk with each other
- enjoy the lesson
- are actively engaged in their learning
- can make links with prior home experiences of storytelling.

This culturally relevant activity enabled all children to be actively involved and engaged, and we can imagine how much the children would have enjoyed this type of reading activity.

**Reflection point:** Think about your own teaching. How often do you do any of the things that teacher Juba did? What are you teaching next week? Which of these strategies could you use?

Case Study 1.2 illustrates some things that teachers can do to support early literacy. The prospect of being responsible for teaching a large class of young children to read can be very daunting. But if you talk it through with colleagues break it down into simple steps, it becomes more manageable.

## Where do reading activities fit into the weekly timetable?

Teaching early reading to young children requires activities that allow the children to:

- play an active part

- use their bodies and voices
- draw on everyday experiences to help make connections between words and letters.

Short activities repeated throughout a week can help young children by reinforcing what they have been learning. This is something that you read about in Case Study 1.2, as Juba was planning to build on her lesson the following day.

On your timetable there will be specific times dedicated to reading. However, reading activities don't need to be limited to literacy times – subjects such as numeracy or life skills could provide opportunities for literacy development. For example, if children are learning about personal hygiene in life skills, you could emphasise the words for the different parts of the body. Alternatively, you could use a counting story to practise numbers to 10.

### Activity 1.8: Planning for early reading

(We recommend that you spend 30 minutes on this activity)



Figure 1.7: A child reading a book

Have a look at your weekly planning for next week, see if you can find any stories that you could use in other subjects during the week.

As part of your planning, it helps to have a timetable of lessons and activities to make sure that children develop the different skills necessary for early reading. This planning should be done with other foundation teachers at your school so that you can share

ideas and resources. If your class is taught by other teachers as well, make sure you work together to plan reading activities, whatever the subject.

Here is an example of a daily timetable for foundation teacher Doreen. At this level, every day follows the same pattern.

Working with a partner, add more detail to this plan, making sure that the day includes a variety of reading-based activities. For example, you could include specific songs, stories and resources you might use, or games you might play. Make a note of the resources you would need.

If you have your own class, you could do the exercise using your own daily or weekly timetable instead.

### Discussion

Your planning can start at a very general level – for example, what you want the children to achieve by the end of each term – and then you can work on the details for each month in a term, and each week in a month.

Alternatively, you could plan from the details of a weekly timetable, and then build up to monthly and term planning. Some people work best thinking of the ‘big picture’ and then working down to the details; other people like to start with the details and then work up to the bigger outcomes.

Each week it is sensible to develop the habit of carrying out an audit of the language and literacy activities completed that week. This will ensure that you maintain a good variety of activities, over time.

## Reflecting on your learning so far

### Activity 1.9: Reflecting on your learning so far

(We recommend that you spend 10 minutes on this activity)

Read each of the statements below and, as quickly as you can, answer whether they are true or false. If you are not certain, read through this week’s course materials again to find more information. After you have done this, you may wish to talk through your answers with colleagues.

1 Fine motor skills are essential to young children’s reading development.

- True
- False

#### Answer

**True:** When young children use tools such as writing materials, it activates areas of the brain related to the development of literacy. Activities that encourage fine motor coordination and balance – such as painting, drawing, working with clay, throwing and catching, or skipping with a rope – may seem unrelated to reading and writing, but are important aspects of cognitive development for literacy.

2 Regardless of a child’s first language, they should always speak English at home.

- True
- False

---

Answer

**False:** Children become better readers in the long term if they learn to read in their home language. It is helpful if family members can encourage them with English as they move up the school.

---

3 Literacy happens everywhere and should be taught in every lesson.

- True
- False

---

Answer

**True:** All subjects provide opportunities to practice reading and writing.

---

4 A balanced approach to reading includes phonics and comprehension, or meaning-making skills.

- True
- False

---

Answer

**True:** A balanced approach gives all children the opportunity to learn.

---

5 It is teachers, not family members, who should teach children to read.

- True
- False

---

Answer

**False:** The reality is that children learn to read in many different ways. Practising reading with family members is very helpful for young readers.

---

## Moving forward

---

In this section we have explained how the *Teaching early reading in Africa* course works and encouraged you to think about how to organise your learning. You have had the opportunity to reflect on the fact that literacy in general and reading in particular don't only take place in school, and to consider what learning to read might be like from the perspective of a child. You have begun to think about what effective teachers of literacy need to be able to do.

In the next section, the focus is on how to create a stimulating, print-rich learning environment for your children and how to access resources to help you be an effective teacher of reading.

Now move on to Section 2, 'Creating a language-rich learning environment'.



## Creating a language-rich learning environment



# Contents

---

Introduction	4
What is a print-rich learning environment?	4
What resources do you need to support early literacy and reading?	7
Storybooks as resources	8
African Storybook	10
Using storybooks	11
Moving forward	13



# Introduction

---

In this section you will:

- learn how to create a print-rich and language-rich environment
- get ideas for creating and finding early reading resources, including using the African Storybook website
- plan how to build regular reading activities into your week.

In Section 1 you thought about the different ways that children learn to read. You looked at the different aspects of literacy and identified a range of things that effective teachers of literacy need to do to support early reading development.

In this section you will look at examples of language-rich learning environments and prepare your own classroom environment to best support early reading. You will use a weekly plan to help you to include different literacy activities within the week. You will also explore the African Storybook website and find free picture storybooks to use in your classroom.

There are seven activities in this section and you will need access to the internet in order to explore the ASb website and complete the quiz. The emphasis is on creating resources and developing an attractive space where children can learn to read. At the end of Section 3 you will be asked to post a photograph online of a resource you have made, or something in your classroom such as a word wall, children's work or a reading corner.

## What is a print-rich learning environment?

---

A supportive learning environment encourages all children to learn. The children need to:

- feel that they can make mistakes and take risks without being punished
- feel that their ideas and feelings are valued
- be encouraged to talk, listen and actively participate
- be allowed to be noisy as well as quiet
- have chances to learn with their minds (thinking), bodies (moving) and hearts (feelings).

Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show you some different types of material that make up a print-rich environment. Remember that displays should be regularly changed by the teacher; new curriculum topics are good opportunities to do this.

As well as helping children to feel safe and comfortable, your classroom can be a resource to support their reading. It needs to be 'print-rich'.

One of the most important aspects of teaching literacy is to create a learning environment that interests children and supports them in developing different literacy skills. A print-rich or language-rich learning environment has as many examples of language in written form as possible. Aside from books, the examples could be simple – food packaging, pictures from old magazines or children's comics – or, if you have the resources, posters and pictures. Could you ask the children to help you make or gather resources?

### Activity 2.1: Print-rich classrooms

(We recommend that you spend about 20 minutes on this activity)

Look carefully at the different learning environments in Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3. Write your answers to the questions below in your study notebook.



Figure 2.1: Classroom 1



Figure 2.2: Classroom 2



Figure 2.3: Classroom 3

- 1 What examples of 'a print-rich learning environment' do you see in the other classrooms?
- 2 Identify two examples of print material in the photographs that you already have in your classroom. Alternatively, identify two examples that give ideas for your classroom.
- 3 Which classroom(s) need(s) greater development in creating a print-rich environment? What one thing could you suggest the teacher introduces?

Record your responses in your study notebook. Look at your own classroom and think about whether a visitor would describe it as a language and print-rich learning environment.

### Activity 2.2: Auditing your classroom

(We recommend that you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

#### Part 1

Answer the questions in this quiz.

#### Part 2

Arrange to meet with your colleagues to visit each other's classrooms. Choose three new resources from this table of ideas for making your classroom as language- and print-rich as possible. You will need to complete this before attempting Activity 2.3.

**Optional activity:** ['A language-rich classroom'](#), an OER from the TESS-India website, has several ideas that will help you to create a print-rich and language-rich classroom. How could you adapt these activities for your context?

## What resources do you need to support early literacy and reading?

From Section 1 (e.g Case Study 1.2) you know that a resource may be a thing or a person, for example:

- things to use (such as magazines or storybooks)
- people who could help (such as storytellers – people who can talk about their interesting or unusual jobs or hobbies to children)
- things to make (such as a word wall or alphabet chart).

In Activity 2.2, you explored different types of resources that could be included in a print-rich environment. In Activity 2.3, think practically about how you can find or make each resource.

### Activity 2.3: Creating resources

(We recommend that you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Where will you get resources for a print-rich environment? Try to discuss these ideas for resources with a colleague, including how you could work together to find or make them. You should open or print this table template (or draw a copy of it in your study notebook) and complete it.

## Storybooks as resources



Figure 2.4: A child reading a book

Storybooks can be in the form of picture books (where the reader makes up the story) word-books (one word to one picture), simple graded readers, and 'decodable' readers, which are specifically created to teach early reading through simple, repeated words and sentence forms. Storybooks can also be creative, with interesting and enjoyable pictures and stories. Storybooks also follow a structure that supports children, making them want to turn the page to find out 'what happens next'.

## Activity 2.4: Thinking about storybooks

(We recommend that you spend about 20 minutes on this activity)

Make a list in your study notebook of the first books you remember reading yourself or that someone read to you – in school, at home or in another place, such as church. Even if you do not remember the titles of the books, try to remember what they were about.

- What are the main features of the books you remember when you were an early reader?
- Why did you like them?
- Why do you think you can still remember them?

### Discussion

These features may include, for instance:

- pictures that tell a story without words or with only a few words
- pictures that match the words exactly
- familiar situations such as family life, farming or shopping
- humour
- complex language you followed along as someone read to you
- moral or religious messages
- explanations of how things happen or why things are as they are
- traditions or history
- short sentences and simple vocabulary
- large print
- rhyming words
- letters of the alphabet.

When children read storybooks, they:

- learn how to handle books with care
- understand the power of stories and reading
- gain confidence as readers
- learn about their traditions
- develop understanding of dilemmas and problems
- learn word and sentence patterns they can apply to other reading
- learn to use images to interpret words
- learn vocabulary and collocations
- learn to recognise familiar and high-frequency words and phrases that occur regularly in reading – learning just 13 of the most frequently used words enables children to read 25% of any text.

(**Note:** A **collocation** is two or more words that often go together and sound ‘right’. For example, we say ‘a fast train’, not a ‘quick train’; we say a ‘quick meal’, not a ‘fast meal’. **High-frequency words** occur most frequently in books; for example, ‘and’, ‘can’, ‘put’ and ‘it’. Some high-frequency words do not follow the usual phonic rules and so they can be

hard to read in the early stages. You may call these words tricky or sight words. They are words that children need to learn by sight; for example, 'the', 'look' and 'to'.)

## African Storybook

[African Storybook](http://www.africanstorybook.org) (ASb) is an initiative of Saide, a South African NGO involved in open education projects across sub-Saharan Africa. The idea of ASb developed over a period of 15 years in Reading Associations across Africa. It grew out of discussions between Judith Baker (a literacy activist from Boston, USA) and Dorcas Wepukhulu (who was a Kenyan teacher in Turkana, at the time). Judith and Dorcas were driven by the observing, 'How can you learn to read without books? It's like trying to learn soccer without a ball.' ASb addresses the shortage of reading material in African languages by enabling African educators and language communities to create and publish their own books through its website with free storybooks and book publishing tools.



The rest of this section will take you through visiting the ASb website and finding a storybook title. (You will also register on the site, so that you are ready for Sections 5 and 6 of this course. It is free to register, but you will need data and good high-speed connectivity to be able to visit the website.)

### Activity 2.5: Becoming familiar with the ASb website

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

- 1 [Explore the ASb website.](#)
- 2 Answer the questions in this quiz.

### Activity 2.6: Finding stories for early reading development

(We recommend you spend 60 minutes on this activity)

If possible, this is a good activity to do with a partner. You may also want to look at the downloadable resources for registering on the ASb website, for using the website and for translating stories.

Go to [the ASb website](#) and find three or more stories in your language, at least one at Level 1 and at least one at Level 2. Download them on to your own computer.

If you can't find stories in your language, choose English ones and translate them into your language using the website.

If you found a story in your language but not at the right level, adapt the story using the website.

You will be using storybooks that you have found on the ASb website throughout the rest of the course. So before you begin Section 3, spend some time finding and downloading stories that you can read later.

## Using storybooks



Figure 2.5: A child reading a book

In Section 5 of this course you will focus on how you can develop children's literacy and early reading skills through storybooks. In this section we are going to look at making use of stories in the classroom. Having completed Activity 2.6, you may wish to download other stories you particularly like to use with your classes.

Research has shown that children need to read at least 42 storybooks in a year to reinforce their developing literacy skills. Your storybook collection could include books, stories you have written down or freely available stories like those on the ASb.

When reviewing your collection of storybooks, think about whether they include these features (different storybooks will emphasise or include different features):

- a creative and rich use of language
- opportunities for children to join in



- familiar situations, places and events
- exciting narratives and interesting characters
- drama, conflict and resolutions, journeys or transformations
- interesting dialogue or humour
- a strong link between words and pictures
- repeating words and phrases, with variations
- repeating sentence patterns, changing only one or two words each time
- interesting images (photographs, pictures or drawings) for the children to talk about
- short in length if the storybook is for children to read on their own.

### Activity 2.7: Using stories to support children's early literacy development

(We recommend you spend 10 minutes on this activity)

Stories can be retold and extended in many ways. In your study notebook, write down the different ways you use stories to support children's early literacy development.

#### Discussion

You can help children to:

- tell the story in their own words
- act out the story
- improvise dialogues between characters
- draw or paint the scenes
- tell their own versions of the story
- create alternative endings for the story
- perform the story for the school or for the community
- complete writing activities, such as story maps, lists or book-making.

Many teachers make their own storybooks by writing out stories on chart paper or old cardboard. Teachers also invite people from the local community into the classroom to tell stories rooted in the local culture. In the next activity you will explore resources that provides examples of teachers who did these activities.

### Activity 2.8: Resources to help you make good use of stories in the classroom

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

The TESSA website has resources for teachers with classroom activities to support reading and literacy, as well as a set of 'key resources' that explain some of the active teaching approaches that you can use.

Spend some time exploring the [literacy materials](#) and the [key resources](#). All the resources are 'open educational resources' (OER), which means that they are free and can be copied and adapted.

Share some of the activities you find with a colleague. They will be useful to you later on in the course when you are planning reading activities.

---

## Moving forward

---

In this section you have learned about the importance of creating a language- and print-rich classroom environment. You have thought about how your classroom can support children's literacy skills by providing meaningful texts for children. This section has stressed the importance of collecting resources that will motivate children to learn. You have thought about the types of resources you can introduce into the classroom and how you could make them, or ask children to make them as part of the curriculum. You have had the chance to become familiar with the ASb website – a rich collection of stories in many different languages, for different levels of reader.

The rest of this course will focus on teaching and assessing early reading, and on how to make your teaching active and relevant to children's lives using the tools that you have been introduced to so far. We start in Section 3, 'Preparing to learn and teach early reading'.

# Preparing to learn and teach early reading



---

## Contents

---

Introduction	4
Developing comprehension and thinking skills through questioning	5
Questioning in the classroom	7
Children's everyday lives as a resource for reading	11
Using pictures to support early reading skills	12
Using physical movement to support early reading	16
Songs and action rhymes for reading	19
Planning a classroom activity	20
Assessment	21
Moving forward	22

# Introduction



Figure 3.1: Reading time

This section presents ideas and resources that can be used to help children develop their early reading skills through:

- asking and answering questions
- thinking about daily routines
- looking at pictures and responding to them
- physical movement
- songs and rhymes.

Throughout, the emphasis is on speaking and listening.

You will:

- consider how asking children questions can develop thinking skills
- explore how to develop children's speaking and listening skills through using pictures
- understand the contribution that physical movement makes to early literacy.

As children move into learning how to read, it is important that they are given a range of opportunities to talk with you and with each other. Speaking and listening underpins the successful development of their early literacy skills.

Children enjoy and learn through play and they also learn through experimentation, exploration, and trial and error. Songs and rhymes based on the children's own everyday experiences (such as shopping, or travelling to the market) are useful, because they draw on shared experiences while supporting early literacy skills.

Through active participation, such as asking and answering questions, children will also develop thinking skills. Instead of listening to the teacher and memorising answers,

children are required to verbalise their thoughts aloud. In reading lessons, children need to talk about the story, predict what happens next and answer questions.

The more enjoyment and enthusiasm for reading you can generate among the children, the more your class is likely to want to learn to read – you are a reading role model for your classes. In Section 1, you reflected on your own experience as a reader and writer, and how you use literacy in your daily life. As a teacher, it is important that your children see you reading and writing, and that you become a role model for them.

In this section we focus on how the four specific strategies to support children's early reading development:

- everyday routines and activities
- using pictures to develop speaking and listening
- using physical movement to support early reading
- songs and action rhymes for reading.

We start by learning more about comprehension and developing thinking skills.

## Developing comprehension and thinking skills through questioning

Young children need the security and memory-building that comes from repeated activities, stories, games and songs – all of which support the development of early literacy skills.

But they also need their minds to be constantly challenged. When children are learning to read, asking questions helps them to make meaning or comprehend what's been read.

The purpose of reading is to understand what's been read. Young children do this by listening to the teacher read and joining in with familiar words and phrases. They can then answer questions about what's happened or what they think might happen next, such as 'Who knocked on the farmer's door?' or 'What animal do you think has eaten all the maize?'. As children learn to read independently, they can ask and answer each other's questions, as well as answering the teacher's.

Even very young children can benefit from being asked questions in every lesson, and there are lots of ways of doing this. You can ask questions that encourage young children to think and talk about their lives and ideas. You can also ask questions after you have told or read a story – asking questions encourages children to develop their comprehension skills, a key skill for reading.

Comprehension questions can mainly be divided into two types: closed and open-ended.

### Closed questions

Closed questions can test children's knowledge, memory or understanding of what's been read. Examples include:

- How many legs does the rat have? (Answer: four)
- What was the name of the main character in the story? (Answer: Bongani)

Closed questions are useful because they:

- have just one answer or a small number of possible answers
- develop children’s confidence that they may know the correct answer
- can indicate to the teacher how much each child understands – this is especially important when children move from learning in their home language to learning in English
- can sometimes show a teacher what a child doesn’t know, so a teacher can plan to do extra teaching
- can be asked to individuals, pairs or groups, or for a whole class to chorus the answer.

## Open questions

Open questions encourage thinking, imaginative and reasoning skills. Examples include:

- What would it be like to be the frog in the story? (Possible answers: I would have to hop to school! I wouldn’t need any shoes! I could jump over the school gate.)
- What do you think Bongani is doing in this picture?

Open questions are useful because they:

- have many possible answers
- allow children to be imaginative with their answers and use their personal or cultural knowledge to answer
- encourage a wide use of vocabulary
- encourage children to give reasons for their answers ( using the word ‘because’) and think about causes and effects
- ask children to return to what they’ve read to provide reasons for their answers
- can be a challenge to very able children
- are a good opportunity for children to work together in pairs or small groups to think of their answers.

### Activity 3.1: Thinking about questions

(We recommend you spend 60 minutes on this activity)

The table below shows some closed and open questions that a teacher might ask young children in a reading lesson. Notice the different ways that closed and open questions are phrased, and how the open questions lead to longer answers. These types of questions give children an opportunity to think more deeply.

In your study notebook, fill in possible answers to each open question (that a 5–6-year-old might give). Then add a question and answer of your own.

**Table 3.1: Examples of closed and open-ended questions**

Closed questions	Open questions
Is that a lion or a cat?	What’s the difference between a lion and a cat?



<i>Answer:</i> It's a cat	<i>Possible answers:</i> A lion is a dangerous animal and a cat is not. A lion is a bigger type of cat. I like cats but I don't like lions.
Is it raining?	How do you know it is raining?
<i>Answer:</i> Yes, it's raining.	
What is the boy in the picture doing?	What do you think will happen next?
<i>Answer:</i> He is running to school.	
Where is the girl hiding?	Why is the girl hiding?
<i>Answer:</i> She is hiding behind a tree.	

## Questioning in the classroom

In Case Study 3.1, Patrick uses a picture storybook to get his class thinking by asking different kinds of questions. As you read the case study, think about how you can use these ideas in your teaching.

### Case Study 3.1: Using questioning in the classroom

Patrick teaches at a school not far from Kigali. Unlike any other countries in Africa, almost everyone in Rwanda speaks one language: Kinyarwanda. He is a qualified and experienced primary teacher, although he has not taken any early childhood education qualifications, which have only just been introduced into pre-service courses at teacher training colleges. Teaching at pre-primary level is something that has only recently become widespread in Rwanda and schools lack resources for early childhood development (ECD).

Patrick has also recently come across the ASb website and wants to try and use a storybook in his class in order to extend the children's thinking and speaking skills. He chooses the storybook [Where is My Cat?](#), because it has very simple pictures with a repeating pattern in the text. It is also full of questions and opportunities for children to express their own ideas. It is available in both Kinyarwanda and English, and Patrick thinks he can use it in many ways to develop his children's early reading skills.

Having downloaded and printed a copy of the book, Patrick brings all the children to a sitting space at the front of the class. He wants every child to be involved and brings them close to him so that they can all see the book and he can glance around and catch every child's attention. All of his children are very excited.

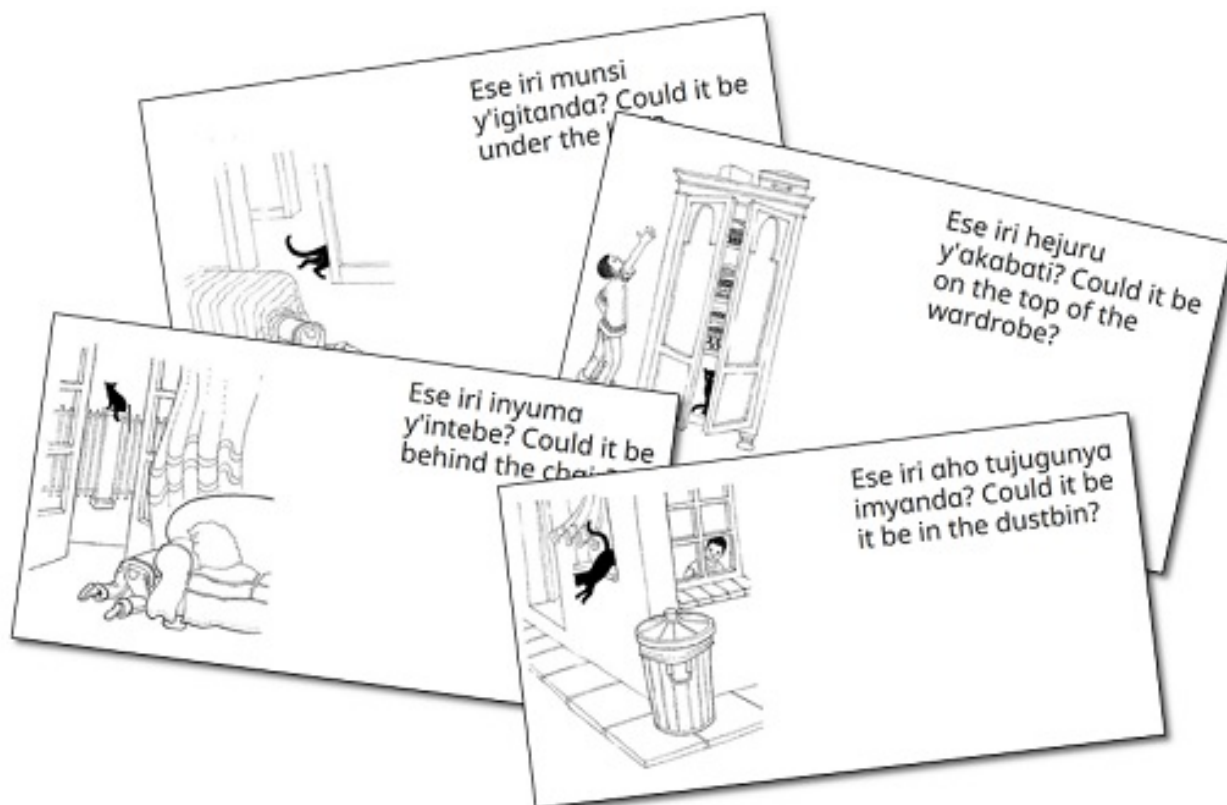


Figure 3.2: Four pages from *Where is My Cat?*

Patrick decides to introduce the book by showing only the title page, which has no writing. He sits on a chair, shows the first picture and asks a closed question: 'What animal is this?' All of the children can answer that it is a cat. He asks another closed question: 'What colour is the cat?' Nearly all of the children are happy to chorus that it is a black cat. He asks some more closed questions: 'Can you see the eyes?' 'Can you see the legs?' All of the children are able to answer.

Then Patrick decides to ask an open question: 'What do you think this story is about?' He expects lots of hands up, but no one wants to answer. There is silence. He realises that there are lots of possible answers to this open question, and no child wants to get it wrong!

He decides to ask the children to hold hands with one neighbouring child: this is their talking partner. He tells the children they can talk over the question with their talking partner. He again asks: 'What is this book about? What is the cat doing and what happens to him or her? Talk it over with your partner. I will raise my hand when I want you to stop talking.'

All the children begin talking to their partner about what the book can be about. Patrick moves around the pairs listening in to their conversations. When he thinks that all pairs have had a good chat, he raises his hand to stop the talking and asks the children to raise their paired hands if they have thought of an answer.

Patrick is delighted! Now nearly all the pairs of hands are raised. Even children who normally never put up their hand are happy to do so with a partner. The children have thought of lots of possible answers:

- 'The cat is hungry and wants some food.'
- 'The cat is lost and is looking for his home.'

- 'The cat is lonely and wants a friend.'
- 'The cat is a mummy who has lost her kittens.'

Some children even think the book will be about lots of animals of different colours. The children have thought of these imaginative ideas by working in pairs and Patrick is very pleased with how much thinking and speaking has taken place in his classroom. The storybook has really captured their interest: the children are now very curious to find out what the story is really about ...

In future weeks, Patrick is able to read the whole book to the children. Because it has repetitive text, the children begin to know it by heart and are able to:

- answer the closed questions on every page (such as 'Is the cat under the bed?' 'NO!')
- think of a name for the cat and imagine where it is going in between each picture
- draw and cut out a cardboard cat and furniture to use as props as they retell the story.

Eventually Patrick is able to use this storybook to introduce reading skills. (See Section 4 for different approaches to teaching reading.)

*This case study is also available to download.*

Patrick's reading lesson was very successful. By asking both closed and open questions, he was able to encourage the children to think about the story, and could identify which children had understood the question.

### Activity 3.2: Reflecting on the case study

(We recommend you spend 10 minutes on this activity)

Read Case Study 3.1 again with a colleague and write down in your study notebook the different strategies that Patrick used to encourage active participation. Some initial suggestions are that he:

- gives the children time to think
- creates talk partners
- chooses an interesting story.

#### Discussion

Patrick is a very effective and skilled reading teacher. He also knows his children well and is confident in letting them talk to each other. He employs many strategies – how many of these did you have on your list? The different strategies that Patrick used to support the children's early reading skills included:

- developing comprehension skills
- sharing ideas about the story with their friends
- practising reading the repetitive words
- enjoying listening to the story
- joining in with Patrick as he reads.

You may have written down more ideas. Find some time to discuss these strategies with a colleague, and then choose one to try out in a reading lesson next week. (With simple books like this, if you are not able to print them then perhaps you could copy them on to large pieces of paper to share with the class?)

In the next activity you'll return to the storybooks you looked at in the last section of the course.

### Activity 3.3: Asking questions

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

In Section 2 you downloaded three stories from the African Storybook website. Re-open these stories, skim-read them and choose your favourite one.

You are now going to write six questions about the story that you could ask the children in your class. You can fill in this template and print it out or you can write your questions in your study notebook. Think about using both closed and open-ended questions, returning to Patrick's story in Case Study 3.1 if you need to.

# Children's everyday lives as a resource for reading



Figure 3.3: Three children at a table

How can the everyday activities that children are already familiar with be incorporated into your teaching?

### Activity 3.4: Everyday experiences

(You are recommended to spend 15 minutes on this activity)

What everyday experiences can children already talk about before they come to school? How can these experiences be used to support early reading?

On your own, or with a colleague, think of at least three examples. Note your answers in your study notebook and compare them to the discussion below.

#### Discussion

Young children will already be able to talk about many aspects of their home lives, including friends, family, food, playing, animals, weather, toys, emotions and traditional tales.

Teachers can use these experiences to stimulate speaking and listening activities in the classroom that can support early reading. Choosing storybooks based on these familiar experiences, for example, makes connections between the words, letters and sounds found in books. It also helps children to appreciate that stories in books reflect their own lives – this can be very motivating.

Children can also be encouraged to retell the small stories of their lives, for example, telling the story of their journey to school or a trip to the market.

You can choose books and stories that you know will be meaningful to the children in your classes. Return to [the ASb website](#) and select a story that you know your children will relate to. Find time in the week to read it to them and notice their reactions. Did they enjoy the story? Did you enjoy reading it and talking about it? Encourage them to learn the story and share it at home. Do they have family routines they could tell you about?

How did you select a storybook? You may have looked at the words first and thought about the story, or you may have chosen the storybook because the pictures were engaging and interesting. Next, you are going to learn more about the importance of pictures for early reading development.

## Using pictures to support early reading skills

---

Having selected a storybook you think your children will enjoy, reflect on the decisions you took to make your selection.



Figure 3.4: Pictures with no text

Children who are ready to learn to read will begin to explore the relationships between objects, pictures, sounds, letters and written words.

When we are adults, we take for granted how important the combination of words and pictures is to help us make sense of things. We read newspapers with photographs, we see illustrations on signs, we notice images and labels on posters, and we recognise

logos on food labels. You may know children in your classes who are able to recognise long before they can decode letters and sounds in books.



Figure 3.5: The McDonald's and CAF logos, and an Aids ribbon

A good way to help children grasp the relationship between images and words on a page is through the use of pictures and picture books. Some children will have enjoyed sharing picture books from an early age at home, but others will have had limited access to any books. As their teacher, you need to think of different ways to give every child the opportunity to enjoy the experience of picture books. Pictures are a very important part of telling a story, and for early readers the pictures are useful in helping to remember the sequence of the story and 'what comes next'.

You may already use pictures in your lessons – drawing three simple pictures on the blackboard, for example, to show the beginning, middle and end of a simple trip to the market. Children are then encouraged to retell the story in simple sentences: 'I went with my brother to market. We bought maize and coffee beans. Mama was happy.' This simple starting idea can be extended and made more interesting:

- The children could work in small groups to act out their story, adding details and characters that they meet along the way. Their excitement and enthusiasm for these stories can be greatly increased by adding sounds to the story: footsteps, knocking on a door or speaking in different voices for each character in the story.
- You could also read a local traditional tale aloud and ask the children to draw pictures to match the story as you read. They can then share their pictures with each other, make up their own stories and perform them.
- Create picture cards from a favourite story – you can download pictures and print them out, find pictures in magazines or newspapers, or draw them. A storybook like [Look at the Animals](#) has some easy pictures to copy. Hand out the picture cards and ask the children to hold up their picture when you tell their part of the story.

Discuss these ideas with colleagues and choose one to try out in your classroom next week.

### Activity 3.5: Using familiar themes to support early reading

(We recommend that you spend 60 minutes on this activity)

Choose a story you know well that features animals, or choose one from ASb. For example, [A Little Girl](#) – a storybook that has been translated from isiZulu into English – tells the story of a girl who travels through the forest to visit her grandfather. Along the way, she meets a careless goat that warns her about a meeting of the animals in the forest.



## Part 1

Write down in your study notebook the reasons why animals are a good starting point for encouraging early reading development. Compare your answers with the discussion below.

### Discussion

Animals are fun because children are already familiar with a variety of animals and the sounds they make, and children enjoy drawing. Many traditional tales feature animals.

## Part 2

Choose one of the following picture story themes that you could use with young children: family, food, home, clothing, village, people's jobs, vehicles, household objects or games.

Now answer the following questions in your study notebook:

- How could you use them in a story?
- What actions or sounds could you add? (Ask the children for their ideas.) Make four picture cards for your chosen theme and make notes of how you could use the cards with your class. Alternatively, you could download examples from the ASb website, such as [Look at the Animals](#).
- Write your own story, which you will read to your children. Write one simple sentence for each of your four picture cards. Add detail about the characters, the setting and the plot.

If you get the chance, try these activities out with your class and note down how the children respond. Talk to a colleague about how the activity went.

Now read Case Study 3.2 and try the activity that follows it.

### Case Study 3.2: Salome's new class

Salome has just finished her diploma training, where she specialised in early childhood education, and she has been posted to a school in northern Ghana. She thinks that there will not be many resources in the classroom, so she takes with her a set of laminated picture cards she made at her college. These pictures can be arranged in different ways to tell stories, especially stories she has learnt from her own grandparents, which she notes down in her notebook.

Salome speaks some Dagbani, one of the 11 official languages in Ghana, though it is not her own first language, so she knows that she will have to translate the stories and games. On her first day in her new school she has a large class of children, and she uses just three or four of the laminated picture cards to teach the children in Dagbani. Her teaching focuses on the vocabulary of local animals and the noises they make. The children really enjoy hearing the noises and Salome encourages them to make the noises along with her.

She goes through the names of the animals again, and the second time, when it gets to the animal noises she waits for the children to see if they can remember the noise and join in. This time she tells the story *Look at the Animals* and the children join in with the noises. The children have enjoyed the story and they have participated by making the

sounds. As she told the story the first time, Salome said the name of each animal. The next time she reads it, she points at the picture of the animal and the children say the animal's name and make its noise.

Salome also decides on a new activity. She divides the class into small groups of three or four, and each group moves to a different part of the room. She then whispers to each group the name of a (new) animal and gives them a prepared card with the animal name and picture. She gives each group a couple of minutes to decide what noise their animal makes. She has chosen some familiar animals, such as a snake, elephant, cat, monkey, hippo, dog, lion, goat or chicken, and the group makes their noise.

Salome uses the animal words and pictures to retell the story *Look at the Animals*. She gives groups of children three pictures each so that they can begin to make their own short spoken stories.

She will make time to tell the story again later in the week and hopes the children will be able to remember some of the noises. The following week, when they go through it again, she will ask the children what the noise is for each animal. After that she will put the word for each animal on the board in Dagbani and ask the children to make the noise when she points to the word.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 3.6: Using picture resources

(We recommend that you spend 20 minutes on this activity)

With a colleague, identify what Salome does to support:

- vocabulary development
- picture/text connections
- reading for enjoyment
- home language learning
- participation
- inclusion.

Record your ideas in your study notebook.

## Using physical movement to support early reading

Children like to play games. Many of the games they play – especially those with songs, rhymes or actions – help them to practise early reading skills.

Learning songs and joining in are important foundations for the development of children's early literacy skills. These experiences provide the building blocks for early reading development and encourage active participation.

In order to become effective readers, children first need to be ready to read. Factors that influence children's readiness to read include:

- having an interest in becoming a reader
- listening carefully for meaning and follow and imitate sounds.practising fine motor control in hands and fingers
- developing spatial awareness and whole body coordination.

## Games to support readiness for reading

Examples of games that support early reading readiness include the following:

- Listening and speaking skills:
  - learning rhyming songs by heart (hearing and predicting rhyming words is a predictor of reading ability)
  - clapping a rhythm, listening for syllables
  - singing rhyming songs
  - listening to an joining in with simple stories
  - matching to words
  - using cardboard boxes, etc. for imaginative play.
- Fine motor skills:
  - hand/eye coordination
  - finger rhymes
  - table games with paper, scissors and glue
  - outside play with stones, water and cutlery.
- Spatial awareness – whole body coordination:
  - throwing a ball around a group during a rhyme
  - making large actions to a rhyme or song
  - running, jumping, dancing games.
- Classroom cooperation:
  - clapping games in pairs and hearing syllables
  - 'follow my leader'-type games to support recall of information
  - circle games, such as passing a toy around a group.

All of these games support children's readiness for reading. Sally Goddard Blythe (2000) argues that even though learning takes place in the brain, it is a child's motor skills that evidence the developing maturity of the body and brain relationship, expressed through movement, balance and posture. Reading is an oculo-motor skill: being able to track words on a page is connected to the motion of the eye. She argues that a child who is better coordinated has fewer learning problems. Incorporating physical movement and promoting coordination in lessons through games will support children as they begin to develop their early reading skills.

(You may like to read Sally Goddard Blythe's article in full.)



Figure 3.6: A teacher leads an activity game

Now read Case Study 3.3 and try the activity that follows.

### Case Study 3.3: Songs and action rhymes

Innocent is an experienced early primary school teacher in Tanzania who has recently begun mentoring two new teachers, Sarah and Cornelia, in the new pre-primary unit that has opened at his school. He lives in Mbeya and his first language is Bemba, although he also speaks both English and KiSwahili. Innocent knows that, as new teachers, Sarah and Cornelia do not have a lot of confidence in working with pre-primary children.

He decides to focus on simple local games – especially the kind of games that have songs or rhymes attached to them – as a way to encourage both teachers and children to make the transition from speaking and listening to reading and writing. He knows that games are a good way of making learning fun and that the ability to hear and predict rhymes will develop children's reading and writing skills.

One game involves getting all the children to stand up and to each find a little space for themselves (as they will need to do some bending over) and to then follow the actions of the teacher as she sings. As she names each part of the body, she touches it. So she taps her head with one hand, then she taps her shoulders with both hands, then her knees and then her toes with both hands and each time she sings the word.

Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes,  
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes,

Two eyes, two ears, one mouth and one nose.  
Head, shoulders, knees and toes, knees and toes.

The children really enjoy playing this game and singing this song because it:

- focuses their attention and practises vocabulary
- contains rhyme and repetition
- helps physical coordination by practising bending, stretching and two-hand coordination
- helps children to remember ones and twos and matching pairs (ears, eyes, knees and shoulders).

Sarah and Cornelia follow up this song with others they know in Bemba and KiSwahili.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 3.7: Professional staff development

(We recommend you spend 60 minutes on this activity)

How could you explain to a colleague why an activity like the one in Case Study 3.3 would be useful in supporting early readers? Look back over the last few pages and summarise your ideas about physical movement can support early reading in your study notebook.

Ask your Principal if you can host a 'readiness for early reading' staff meeting:

- Briefly explain what you have learnt about getting ready to read and the benefits of action rhymes and songs.
- Use the meeting to teach each other new songs.
- Make a collection of good action songs for early learners and make them into a big book for the staffroom.
- If you can access the internet, search for 'Action rhymes for young African children' for new ideas to try with your class.

As well as helping develop co-ordination and vocabulary, songs can help children develop phonological awareness.

## Songs and action rhymes for reading

Children come into your classrooms listening and hearing sounds in their environment. This is called phonological awareness.

You can help children to develop this awareness by taking them on a listening walk – into the yard, for example, and asking them to listen out for sounds. What can they hear? You may have cattle in the field next door or community leaders meeting outside the school fence. Maybe there's a road nearby, or children playing.

Asking children to 'tune in' to the different sounds and then – very importantly – asking them to point to where the sound is coming from is a crucial skill in learning to read. Being

able to hear different sounds in the environment is the step before being able to break down sounds in words into their smaller parts. It's also rather fun to go outside on a listening walk. Alternatively, this can be done in the classroom with objects that make sounds, such as a rattle made of bottle tops.

Learning songs and joining in are important foundations for children's early reading development. Songs and rhymes build children's internalisation of rhyming strings. The ability to hear and predict rhymes is a predictor of reading ability. Choose songs and rhymes with words that you break down into sounds before building them back up again. Activities like this help children to feel confident in playing with letters and sounds, and supports their understanding of how words are put together.

For example, choose a song or rhyme about a cat. At some point in the rhyme, say 'CAT'. Then break it down into its three sounds, '/C/A/T/', and then build it back up again to say 'CAT'. The children can try and say the word all at the same time – this makes it fun and engaging. Try this with other simple words before moving onto words like 'DUCK'. This is a word with four letters ('D', 'U', 'C', 'K') but only three sounds ('/D/U/CK/'). At this early stage, you want children to learn about the sounds within words. Fun songs and rhymes are a good way to do this.

**Reflection point:** How many games do you already use in your classroom? How would you explain to a parent who thinks their child is just playing that games like these play an important role in preparing your son or daughter for reading and writing?

### Activity 3.8: Using songs and rhymes

(We recommend that you spend 20 minutes on this activity)

Download and/or read a section of [a TESSA OER on using songs and rhymes](#). Share this with your colleagues. Ask them to discuss the case studies and activities in pairs, and then share two reflections or thoughts with the wider group. (Anyone who has a smartphone will be able to access this resource on that.)

## Planning a classroom activity

In this final activity, you are asked to plan a classroom activity to help children get ready to read. You can plan an activity that uses pictures and questions, or songs, rhymes and games.

If possible, incorporate pair work in to your activity. This is an easy way to get children talking, even if you have a large class. You may find [this TESS-India key resource on pair work](#) helpful as you think about how to organise the activity in your class. Work with a colleague and critique each other's plans.

### Activity 3.9: Plan a classroom-based reading activity

(We recommend that you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

Look back through the section. You could base your activity on a picture or object that you bring into the class, or a new song or rhyme that you have learnt.

Think about how you could use closed and open questions to promote thinking, or actions to help develop co-ordination skills. Your activity might be short, so think about how you could develop it into a whole lesson, perhaps linked to a topic that you are teaching at present.

If you have the opportunity, try your activity with a class and evaluate it by answering the following questions in your study notebook.

- Did the children enjoy the activity?
- Did this activity help children to develop their early reading skills? If so, which aspects? For example, vocabulary development, speaking and listening skills, spatial awareness, fine motor skills?
- Did all the children take part in the activity?
- What would you do differently next time?

## Assessment

In the following activity you will share a resource, idea or activity that you have developed while studying Sections 1–3 of this course.

### Activity 3.10: Assessment

(We recommend that you spend 60 minutes on this activity)

You will complete this activity by uploading content to *Teaching early reading in Africa's* course website.

#### Part 1: Reviewing stories

Find a Level 1 or 2 storybook on [the ASb website](#) in a language that you read. Go to the area on the course website for this part of Activity 3.10, click on the 'New blog post' button and do at least one of the following:

- Give the title, language and level of the story you have chosen.
- Write a short review of the storybook – what you liked or did not like about the story, and how you would use it with children. You might also suggest how you could adapt it.
- Rate the story.

#### Part 2: Creating a print-rich environment

Take a photograph of a print display in your classroom or of a resource that you have made. Go to the area on the course website for this part of Activity 3.10, click on the 'New blog post' button and upload the photograph. You should also comment on at least one other person's post.

---

## Moving forward

---

In this section you have further developed your content/subject knowledge for early reading. You have learned about the types of questions that support reading comprehension. You have also learned about the importance of active participation in lessons, and about how songs and rhymes are useful strategies to promote engagement. You have learned the importance of effective questioning and appreciate the difference between open and closed questions, and when to apply them in literacy activities. Activity 3.9 has given you the opportunity to share your learning so far.

In the next section you will learn more about specific methods for reading and how children require a range of learning activities to support them in learning to read, including the role and importance of their home language which you began to think about earlier in Section 1.





# Methods for teaching reading



# Contents

---

Introduction	4
Three different methods	4
Method 1: Sounds, letters and syllables	4
Method 2: Look-and-say	7
Method 3: Language experience approach	10
Bringing it all together	12
Moving forward	14

# Introduction

---

In this section you will:

- explore methods for teaching early reading
- talk about and create tasks for children using different reading methods
- find that the methods can be combined and that one method may work better for some children than for others.

In this section you are going to look in detail at three methods for teaching reading and writing. The assumption is that this teaching will take place in the home language and in a print-rich environment, and will involve active learning approaches in order to help children become successful and confident readers.

No single method discussed below is the 'right' one. People learn to read in different ways, so one method may work with one child but not with another. If the method you are using is not working with a particular child, try another. In most of your teaching you will need to draw on all the methods in order to give your children the best possible chance to become independent readers.

The most effective teachers of reading, read themselves and talk about what they are reading with enthusiasm. Children get to see for themselves the enjoyment that reading can bring.

## Three different methods

---

### Method 1: Sounds, letters and syllables

The phonics method is based on the relationship between individual letters and sounds. Children learn to match letters and sounds, such as 'c-a-t, cat' (English) or 'u-b-a-b-a, ubaba' ('father' in isiZulu). This method is sometimes called 'the bottom-up-approach' because it starts with small units and builds towards a bigger picture of reading. It involves children becoming aware of the sounds that letters or pairs of letters make (phonics) and appreciating how these fit together to make sounds within words (phonemic awareness).

This method is important because it enables young children to 'sound out' written words that they don't recognise – even if they don't understand the meaning of the word. As a teacher you need to know which sounds are represented by the letters in the language you are teaching. These combinations are not the same in all languages. The phonics method requires a child to learn what sounds are represented by individual letters (such as 'a' and 'b') and combinations of letters (such as 'th' or 'ngq') in order to read words. Teachers usually begin by teaching single sounds and simple words.

This approach can be useful – and fun – when it is embedded in rhyming. Hearing and predicting rhyming words and syllables is a strong predictor of reading ability.

For instance, if a child sees that certain words sound similar and have similar spellings, she or he does not have to sound each one out:

sad, mad, bad, glad dad, had  
end, lend, send, spend, friend  
bona, lona, zona, wona (isiZulu)

Groups of words like this are called 'word families'. Once the children have discovered a word family, you can write it on chart paper and put it on the wall. As time goes on, you can add to the word families on your wall.

Many African languages have long words that are made up from syllables, such as 'Siyahamba' – some can be almost like sentences. Children can learn to clap out the syllables of any language to help them distinguish the individual sounds and hear how the word is put together. Words of many syllables often occur in African languages. Children can learn to recognise and read syllables, and then put them together to make words.

Word families and words with repeated sounds and syllables are often found in songs, chants, rhymes and riddles familiar to children. The rhythms and up-and-down tones in songs and chants can help children to remember words, and to read them more easily when they are written down.

Now read Case Study 4.1 and answer the questions that follow in Activity 4.1.

### Case Study 4.1: Mrs Mogale's English class

Mrs Mogale is teaching Grade 1 in a school in the urban township of Soweto. English has been chosen as the medium instruction because the class is made up of children from many different home language groups. Most of the children have some familiarity with English from advertising boards, packaging and television. However, it is still an additional language to most of them.

Mrs Mogale teaches them a rhyme. She read the poem aloud once and then asked two children to come to the front and act the parts. Once the children were familiar with the rhythm of the rhyme, she writes it on the board:

A fat cat sat on the mat.  
The fat cat saw a rat.  
The fat cat jumped for the rat.  
The rat ran away.

She uses the letters, sounds and syllables approach to help them read the first few words.

Pointing to the 'c', she asks what sound it makes. Working with one child who raises their hand, she asks them to sound out the rest of the word: 'C-a-t, cat'. Then she moves on to the next word, asking one child to sound it out and say it: 'F-a-t, fat'. She then asks if anyone can tell her what the next word says. A child volunteers: 'Sat'. She then points to 'mat' and 'rat', and different children read the words. She asks the class what is the same about these words, writing them in a column on the board, one under the other. Children respond that they all end with '-at'.

She points to the word 'saw' and helps them to sound it out ('s-aw'), and asks someone to mime its meaning. She points to the word 'jumped' and claps its sounds ('j-u-m-p-ed'), and asks someone to mime its meaning.

Mrs Mogale then reads the rhyme with the whole class, in chorus. They do this a few times. Now she asks two children to dramatise the rhyme while a volunteer recites it.

One plays the part of the cat, the other the rat. In this way the able readers get the chance to read it on their own. She allows several pairs of children to do this.

Mrs Mogale has placed letter cards in packets. Some of the letters are single letters ('b', 'c', 'f', 'h', 'm', 'p', 'r', 's'), and one card has 'at' on it. She asks the children to work in pairs. They take it in turns to draw out a letter and put it in front of 'at'. The person drawing out the letter reads the word and then puts the letter back. The other partner has a turn. When they have been playing this game for 5 minutes, she lets one pair show the class how they do it.

After the lesson, she makes a wall chart for the word family of 'at'.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 4.1: Thinking about using the letters and sounds approach

(We recommend that you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

Having read Case Study 4.1, talk to a colleague or a friend about the following questions. Write your ideas in your study notebook.

- 1 Why did Mrs Mogale use the letters, sounds and syllables approach to help her class to read the rhyme?
- 2 How did she use the similarities between some of the word-sounds to help the children sound out the word more quickly?
- 3 Are there similar word families in your language?
- 4 Could you use this idea in your class?
- 5 Did the children in Mrs Mogale's class learn with bodies as well as minds? How do you think this helped them?
- 6 How did Mrs Mogale make her classroom more print-rich during this lesson?

Plan a lesson like Mrs Mogale's and try it out in your class, or with a group of neighbours' children, colleagues or friends.

## Phonemic awareness

In Case Study 4.1 Mrs Mogale helped the children in her class to decode the words in the rhyme by sounding out the letters – 'c-a-t', 'f-a-t', and so on. She also helped them to understand the meaning behind the rhyme by asking them to dramatise it. The activity that she gave them helped the children to hear the rhyming sound 'at' in all the words in that family.

In all of these activities she is helping the children to understand that words are made up of basic speech sounds, and to play with these sounds. This is called 'phonemic awareness'. When children can hear and understand these sounds they know when spoken words rhyme, and they know when words begin or end with the same sound. For example, they may learn 'away', 'play', 'stay' and 'stray' – and be able to recognise '–ay'. Once they are familiar with initial strings such as 'st', 'str' or 'pl', they can begin to put them together and decode new words.

The following video, which was created by World Vision International (2017b), looks at phonemic awareness:

Phonemic awareness is very important for learning to read, but it is not enough. Children also have to recognise the letters of the alphabet (alphabetic knowledge), and the sounds that those letters represent (phonics). Mrs Mogale gave the children opportunities to recognise the letters and sounds by giving them letters to make new words ending with ‘-at’. By doing this, the children understood the relationship between spoken sounds and the letters of written language. This helps children to read and write words.

So phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge and phonetic knowledge (knowledge of individual sounds) are all necessary for children to become literate – but they are not sufficient. The main goal is reading with understanding. Other methods such as ‘look and say’ and ‘learning experience’ are ways of helping children to make meaning of words.

**Reflection point:** Think of any chanting rhymes in your language that could help develop awareness of rhymes and letter strings. How could you use these in your class?

## Method 2: Look-and-say

The look-and-say method of teaching reading links whole words with their meanings without breaking them down into sounds first.

The meaning of the word and how it can be used in different contexts is very important. Children need to remember the shape and look of the word so that they recognise it when they see it again – in other words, it relies on a child’s visual memory.

If the teacher only uses this method, the child may become lost if they do not recognise the words. Because of this, effective teachers combine the phonics method and the look-and say method when teaching reading.

The look-and-say method is very useful for the many words whose spellings do not match their sounds, such as ‘the’, ‘said’ or ‘when’ in English. When you are teaching a language that has a more regular sound-symbol correspondence, it is easier to match letters to sounds. Sounds and letters in most African languages are linked in a more regular way, which makes it easier for children to learn to read using phonics.

Read Case Study 4.2 and answer the questions that follow in Activity 4.2.

### Case Study 4.2: Mrs Mapuru uses the look-and-say method

Mrs Mapuru is teaching Grade 2 in a school situated in a rural area. Her children have had more than a year learning to read in their mother tongue and are now learning English and building reading skills in English.

She has collected pictures of fruits and pasted them on to cards. Each card has the English name of the fruit under the picture. She has also made about 15 sets of four cards, each of which has only the name of a fruit with no picture.



Figure 4.1: Some picture cards

She holds the picture cards up one by one and makes sure that the children know the names of the different fruits: **banana**, **apple**, **pear**, **peach**, **mango**, etc. She then shuffles the cards and holds them up in a different order, letting the children chorus the names of the fruits. She repeats the name and spells out the words: 'Mango, m-a-n-g-o, mango.' She does this a few times, encouraging the class to say it with her.

Mrs Mapuru then uses a set of cards without pictures and lets children put up their hands and try to read the words. She does not break down the names of the fruits into sounds; children have to read words as a whole. She goes back to the picture words once or twice and then tries the cards without pictures again. Then she sticks the cards with pictures and words on her English word wall.

She divides the class into pairs. Each pair has a set of four cards. They try to read them, turning them over one by one and reading them to each other. They try to read them without looking at the word wall first, but if they are stuck they can get help by looking at the wall. Pairs can exchange their sets of cards with another pair once they can read them well without looking at the word wall.



After this, Mrs Mapuru can ask the children about different kinds of fruits: 'What other kinds of fruits do you know?', 'What colour is a banana?', 'How do you eat a banana, do you eat it with the cover on or do you need to peel it?', and so on. She can let them talk in pairs about the fruits that they know and the ones they like the best. Then they can report back to the class about their favourite fruits, using a sentence she gives them: 'I like to eat (bananas).' As they say their sentence, they hold up the word.

Later, she reads a story about fruit to the children and builds a lesson around it. You can read about that in Section 5.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 4.2: Thinking about 'look-and-say'

(We recommend that you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Having read Case Study 4.2, talk to a colleague or a friend about the following questions. If you have no partner, write your ideas in your study notebook.

- 1 How is the teacher using the look-and-say method?
- 2 How does Mrs Mapuru use this method to help the children to read words describing fruit?
- 3 How does she make sure that each child is actively involved in the lesson?
- 4 How does she make sure that the children understand the meaning of the words they read?
- 5 How do you think Mrs Mapuru made her picture cards? Where could she have found pictures to cut out? Could she or her children have drawn the pictures of fruit? Can you think of other ways she could have collected the pictures?
- 6 Where could Mrs Mapuru have found cardboard to stick the pictures onto? Are there boxes in your area that you can collect and cut up for flash cards and charts?
- 7 What other kinds of objects could you use to teach a lesson similar to Mrs Mapuru's?

In English, there are many small but very common and important words, such as 'the', 'of', 'for', 'to', 'said', 'when', 'is', 'are', 'was' and 'were'.

Which of these words can easily be sounded out? You will see that only a few of them can. It is also impossible to draw pictures of these words. Most of these are therefore best learned in the context of a poem or a story as part of a look-and-say approach. You need to teach them to your children using the look-and-say method and have them written in a special place on your word wall. This will help the children to 'write' them in their visual memories, where they won't be forgotten.

### Activity 4.3: Look-and-say words

(We recommend you spend about 15 minutes on this activity)

Think of 'look-and-say' words in English that would be suitable for your word wall. Make a chart for your word wall if your children are learning English.

Think about the children's home language. Does it have common words that are difficult to sound out, which children need to know by sight? Make a list of them on a chart for your word wall.

**Optional activity:** You could help the children you teach by becoming familiar with the letters that make up words, asking them to look for words within a word. How many words can you make from 'mango', for example? Can you think of some word in English or in your home language that you could use?

## Method 3: Language experience approach

The language experience approach focuses on children's experience and enables them to read about their own lives, in their own words. Skills for reading are based on their knowledge of the language they are using and on their home and community backgrounds, the people they know and the experiences they have. Children work with whole words and sentences rather than letters and parts of words. It allows children to speak before they read and write.

The approach consists of the following four steps:

- 1 **Experience:** Children do many things at home and at school, usually with other people.
- 2 **Description:** Children talk about what has happened to them, to each other and/or to the teacher or the class.
- 3 **Transcription:** Children write about the experiences they have described. Before their writing skills have developed, they can draw or try out writing, or the teacher can write down what they want to say.
- 4 **Reading:** The children read what they have written to the whole class or to a part of the class.

Read Case Study 4.3 and answer the questions which follow.

### Case Study 4.3: Mrs Tekiso uses the language experience approach

Mrs Tekiso is teaching Grade 1 in a school situated in a rural area. The language spoken by her children is Setswana. It is the second half of the school year.

One morning, in the 'News' slot of the timetable, Mrs Tekiso asks her children to talk about what they did the day before. Each child is given a chance to talk. She then asks them to draw a picture of what they have told the class and to write a sentence under the picture.

When they have finished, each child shows their picture to their partner and reads the sentence they have written. Then two pairs exchange pictures. Each pair 'reads' the two pictures in front of them and the words written on the two pages.

Mrs Tekiso then asks the children to return the pictures to their owners. Each child comes to the front, shows their picture and 'reads' their pictures and sentences to the

class. The class applauds each child's work. Without criticising any child's picture or writing, Mrs Tekiso writes correctly, on the board, the key words that the children have written. She and the class read the words on the board together.

After the lesson, Mrs Tekiso pins the drawings up on the classroom wall. She also puts some of the new words they have used on the word wall.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 4.4: Thinking about the language experience approach

(We recommend you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Having read Case Study 4.3, talk to a colleague or a friend about the following questions. If you have no partner, write your ideas in your study notebook.

- 1 What has this case study shown you about the language experience approach? How does Mrs Tekiso use this method to help the children to read?
- 2 How does the approach ensure that each child is actively involved in the lesson?
- 3 How does the approach ensure that they understand and are interested in what they read?
- 4 How else could Mrs Tekiso enable her children to write down their story?
- 5 Can you think of how else a storybook could be used as a starting point for a lesson using the language experience approach to reading?

#### Discussion

Here are some ideas we have about ways to help young children to read about their own experiences.

The language experience approach ensures that each child is actively involved by letting them write and read about their own experience. This also means that they are interested in what they are doing and understand what they have written and read.

Instead of letting them try to write their own words, Mrs Tekiso could have gone round the class asking them which word they wanted to write. She could then have written it herself at the bottom of the page. The children would then have read the word to their partner and to the whole class.

If Mrs Tekiso had wanted to use a storybook in the language experience approach, she could have read the story to the children and asked them what they thought of it, or whether they had ever experienced something similar. For example:

- If the story is about fruit (for example, [Punishment](#)), she can ask the children about their favourite fruit. They could then draw the fruit and write its name. Alternatively, she could write the fruit's name for them. They would then have a chance to read the word.
- If the story is about somebody who made a mistake and learned a lesson (such as [Chicken and Millipede](#)), children can talk about a time when they made a mistake and learned a lesson. If the children are a bit older, they can write a sentence or two about what happened to them and read it to the class.

How would you use the language experience approach? You will have a chance to think about this in Activity 4.5.

### Activity 4.5: Using the language experience approach

(We recommend you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Plan a lesson like Mrs Tekiso's in your study notebook. If you have the chance, try it out in your class, or with a group of neighbours' children, colleagues or friends. You might want to use one of the approaches in the discussion section of Activity 4.4 instead of following Mrs Tekiso's plan exactly.

## Bringing it all together

An effective teacher will draw on all three of these methods to help children learn to read. They usually do these by finding a story that:

- will appeal to the children
- has some repeated words and rhyming words
- has words where they can use pictures (the look-and-say approach)
- has a picture of what is happening in the story (the language experience approach).

### Activity 4.6: Reflecting on your learning

(We recommend you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Spend some time browsing [the ASb website](#) and find some stories that are suitable for supporting young readers. As you read the stories, think about which approach to reading you could use: letters and sounds, look-and-say, or the language experience approach. Do some stories lend themselves more to a particular approach? Share your ideas with a colleague.

This section of *Teaching early reading in Africa* has introduced you to three methods of teaching reading and given you a chance to try them out. You are encouraged not to restrict yourself to any one of these methods, but rather to combine them as required to support young readers. (In Section 5 you will see an example of how to use the methods together.)

It is important to remember that different children may respond better to one method than another:

- Some may have a better visual memory than others.
- Some may like analysing words into separate sounds and others may not.
- Some may like to be given more specific instructions than others; they may not like the freedom that the language experience approach offers.

If certain children are struggling to learn to read, you might find that concentrating on one particular method might help them overcome their difficulties.

Figure 4.2 shows that to be a good reader, you need to have **good word reading** and **good reading for meaning**. Some children may understand more easily than others what they read, but may have difficulty sounding out words and working out what they are.

Others may be able to work out and recognise words, but have difficulty in understanding what they have read.

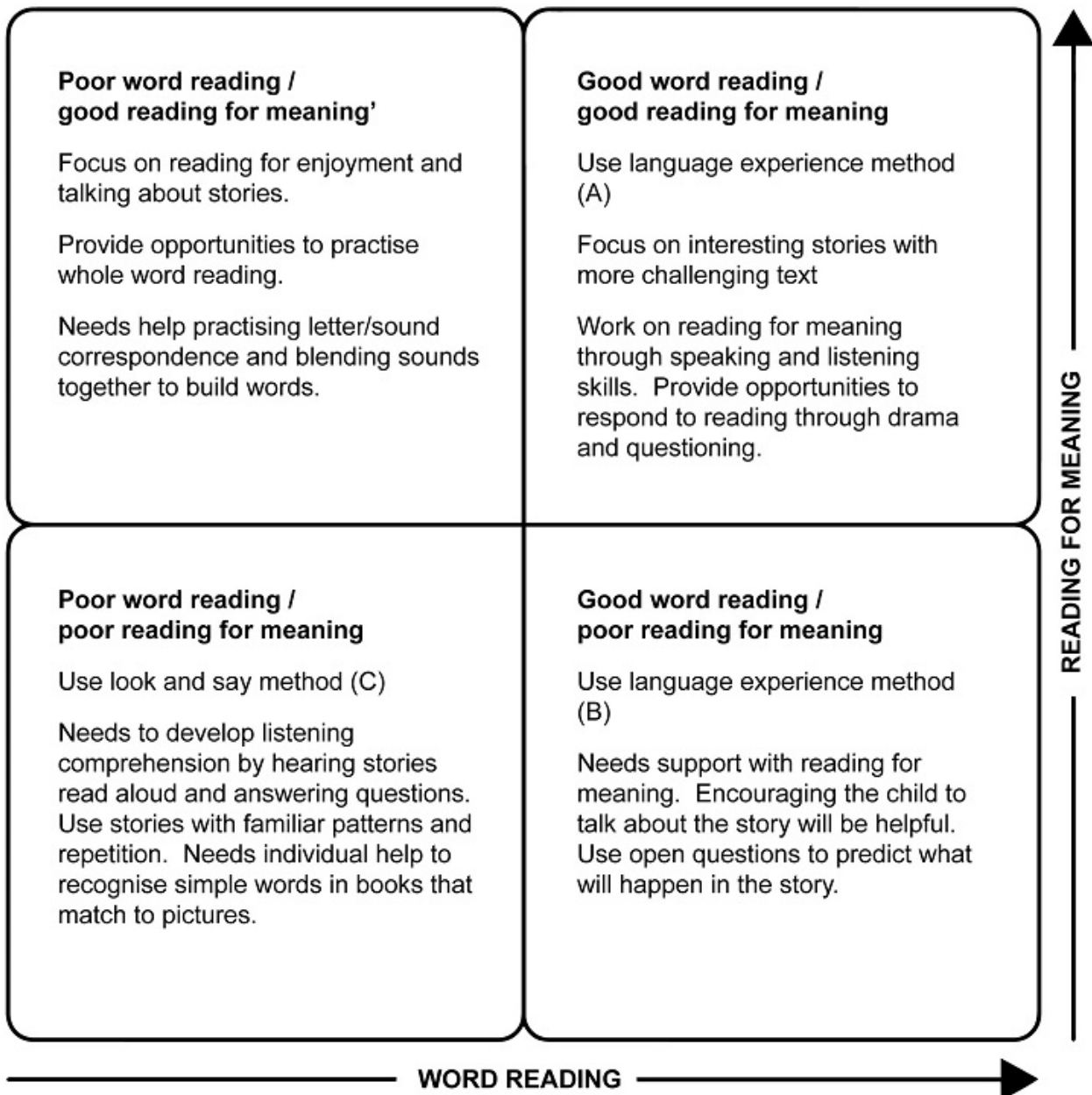


Figure 4.2: Word recognition and good comprehension

You will spend more time on Figure 4.2 in Activities 4.7 and 4.8.

**Activity 4.7: How to use the figure**  
 (We recommend you spend about 30 minutes on this activity)

Talk about Figure 4.2 with a colleague or a friend. What does it tell you about how to help children with different strengths and weaknesses?

**Discussion**

The first square (in the top left of the diagram) tells you about children who have good comprehension and poor word-recognition skills. They understand quite easily but battle to work out what certain words say. You can support them by emphasising

reading for pleasure by choosing stories that will motivate them. You can also provide extra help, by helping them to recognise the different sounds in a word.

The second square (in the top right of the diagram) tells you about children who have good comprehension and good word recognition skills. These children do not need extra help, but you should give them some more difficult and challenging stories so that they can improve still further.

The third square (in the bottom left of the diagram) tells you about children who have poor comprehension and poor word recognition skills. They are battling with all aspects of reading. They need texts that will motivate and enthuse them, and are related to their everyday lives. They will benefit from a lot of extra work with the look-and-say method.

The fourth square (in the bottom right of the diagram) tells you about children who have poor comprehension but good word recognition skills. They can tell you what the words are but don't know what the words and sentences mean. This can sometimes indicate other developmental problems which a teacher should monitor. They should benefit from writing and reading about their own lives and experiences. This will mean that what they read has meaning to them.

### Activity 4.8: Which method of word recognition and good comprehension should you use?

(We recommend you spend about 10 minutes on this activity)

Now answer the questions in this quiz.

## Moving forward

In this section, you have learned about the different methods for teaching reading and you have learned that different methods suit different children. You have learned the importance of matching reading activities to the children's experiences, so that literacy learning is meaningful and purposeful. You have read case studies to reflect on the approaches that different teachers take when teaching reading and you have considered which best match your own approach. You have learned that a child who is a good reader needs skills in word recognition and comprehension. You have considered that some children are stronger in one of these skills than the other and you have learned more about how you can support different readers in your class.

In the next section you will be learning more about how stories and storybooks can support children's literacy learning. You will also spend time thinking more about how you can increase the time spent on speaking and listening activities within the classroom.



# Using stories and storybooks





# Contents

---

Introduction	4
Using storybooks to develop speaking and listening skills	4
Using storybooks to develop thinking skills	6
Using storybooks to further develop reading skills	10
Managing your reading classroom	13
Reviewing your learning	13
Moving forward	14

# Introduction

---

Welcome to Section 5. In this section you will think about and practise different ways of using storybooks in your lessons. The activities involve planning for teaching so they will help you with your daily work as a teacher of early literacy.

In Section 3 you explored strategies for preparing children for learning to read. These included:

- strategies of listening and speaking
- developing literacy through movement
- developing comprehension skills.

For example, you explored:

- talking about pictures to develop listening and speaking
- using games, songs and rhymes for literacy and movement
- a strategy of asking questions to encourage children to think about what they read.

In Section 4 you explored three different methods to support early reading:

- letters and sounds (phonics and phonemic awareness)
- look-and-say
- learning experience.

At the end of Section 4 you worked with four quadrants that helped you to think about how you can work with different children in different ways at different times to meet their different needs.

All of these strategies and methods are important for developing literacy in a holistic way. In this section you will see how children can read and interact with stories to build their speaking and listening, thinking, and reading and writing skills. Different stories will provide different opportunities. Your job as literacy teachers is to think about and plan how we can use each story in creative and productive ways to support literacy development in young children. In this section you will use the three stories that you chose from the ASb website in Section 2.

## Activity 5.1: Reviewing your progress

(We recommend you spend 20 minutes on this activity)

Go through the notes you have made in your study notebook and reflect on what you have learnt, comparing it with the summary above. Note down three things that you will use in your teaching. If possible, discuss your ideas with a colleague.

# Using storybooks to develop speaking and

## listening skills

Storybooks can be used in many ways to support children's early reading. Children listening to their teacher read aloud a story supports listening comprehension, which is a crucial skill for developing children's text comprehension. Having listened to the teacher read aloud the story, children can be encouraged to retell the story. Retelling stories is valuable because:

- children have to listen carefully
- children need to use their memory
- it helps to develop children's vocabulary – they need to find and use words to say what they remember.

Most importantly of all, it is by listening to and retelling stories that children learn the 'narrative structures' that will help them to make sense of the world around them.

But what kind of stories are good for retelling? Ideally, they should:

- be in the children's home language, or a language that they understand and can speak well
- be enjoyable
- be easy to remember
- have a recurring sequence
- have patterns like rhyme, rhythm and repetition
- contain memorable events and characters.

If the stories are in a book, then it is also helpful to have clear, interesting pictures.

In Activity 5.2 you will think about a storybook that is good to use for children to retell the story. It will be good if you can make time to do the activity with a small group of children.

In the activity you will use one of the three stories you have found from the ASb website.

### Activity 5.2: Retelling stories

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

- 1 Choose one of the stories you have found and read it.
- 2 If you are with a group of other teachers or colleagues, talk about three important reasons why you think this is a good story for a retelling activity with children, using the criteria above.
- 3 Write down the reasons in your study notebook.
- 4 If it is not a good story for retelling, say why and choose another one.
- 5 Retell the story yourself without reading it and using your own words. Then reflect on this: was it hard or easy, and what did you gain from the experience yourself?
- 6 Now read the description below of retelling stories and do the activity with a group of children or with your colleagues pretending to be children.
  - (a) Call a child or a small group of children aside.
  - (b) Read the story in the way you would usually tell a story. That is:  
Show the children the picture on the cover.

Read the title and talk about what it tells us about the story.

Ask children predictive questions, such as 'What do you think the story is about?', or 'Who do you think is the main character of the story?'

Introduce any new words before you read. Ask the children if they know the meaning of new words, so that they can learn from each other too.

Read the story.

- (c) After you've read the story, ask the children some simple, closed questions about it.
  - (d) Ask the children to make up some questions for each other about the story.
  - (e) Retell the story yourself, and ask the children to help you with some simple prompts: 'Why did she do that ...?', or 'What happened when ...?'
  - (f) Ask if anyone would like to retell the story.
- 7 When you have finished reading and retelling the story, write a reflection in your study notebook using the following questions to guide you:
- (a) How well did the children retell the story? What was easy for them, and what was not so easy?
  - (b) What will you change or improve next time?
  - (c) Could children do this activity independently? Are there any props that they could use? Could they do it in pairs or small groups?

## Using storybooks to develop thinking skills

In Section 3, you learned about open and closed questions. Here we explore ways of how you can develop open questions to promote thinking.

You can judge whether the children in your class understand a story by listening to their answers to your questions. Asking good questions requires practice – questions should be clear and simple, and help children to think critically about what they have heard or read.

You should use questions for different levels of language ability and participation, and questions that will get children thinking and using their imagination. You can use different kinds of questions, like 'yes', 'no', 'who', 'what', 'where', 'when', 'how' and 'why' questions:

- 'Yes/no' questions are good for very young children, or for children answering in a second language. These questions are easier than 'what' and 'who' questions because there is one answer. You should not make all of your questions 'yes/no' questions.
- 'What' questions are easier than 'where' or 'when' questions, for example 'What did she see when she went outside?'
- 'How' and 'why' questions are the most difficult, especially for new speakers of a language. There is not one 'right' answer, so children would have to draw on a range of vocabulary to give an answer.

In Activity 5.3 you will select a story that is a good story for asking questions, which will make children think. You will then do the activity with a small group of children.

### Activity 5.3: Asking questions to promote thinking

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

- 1 Choose any book that you want to read with children.
- 2 Try reading the story aloud, with expression and gestures. How will you introduce the story to the children?
- 3 Before you read the story to children, download the 'optional reading' at the bottom of the page. Read through and select three questions you can ask the children.
- 4 Make a table in your study notebook like the one below.
  - (a) Write down questions you can ask during or after the story. Use open-ended questions and questions that encourage children to use their imagination.
  - (b) Write down questions you think children will ask about the story.

Name of the story:	
Questions that you can ask:	1.
	2.
	3.
	4.
	5.
	6.
Questions that children might ask:	1.
	2.
	3.

- 4 Write your questions onto question cards, highlighting new words.
- 5 Call aside a small group of children and read the story.
- 6 Have a conversation with children about the story, using the questions that you prepared. You can show children the questions on the question cards as this will help them to recognise some of the key words.
- 7 Allow the children to ask their own questions.
- 8 When you have finished the activity, reflect on how it went in your study notebook:
  - (d) Did the children enjoy the story?
  - (e) Were the children able to make meaning from the story?
  - (f) What did the children enjoy about the activity?
  - (g) What did the children not enjoy?
  - (h) How well did the children answer and ask questions about the story? What was easy for them, and what was not so easy?
  - (i) What will you change or improve next time? For example, will you change the types of question you asked or maybe the way you read the story aloud?
  - (j) What opportunities can children have to do this activity independently?

#### Discussion

Planning questions in advance will help you to make sure that you ask a variety of different types of questions. Thinking about what answers they might give and the questions they might ask will help you to prepare for a discussion after reading the story.

There are different ways that you can ask the children to respond:

- the children can raise their hands
- you can ask an individual by name
- you can ask children to discuss the answer with a partner before giving an answer.

Sometimes it is helpful to ask more than one child for an answer – and if those answers are different, ask another child to say what they think.

In your questions and answers, try to use words from the story – especially if they are new words. This will encourage children to practise using those words when they answer the questions. You can use the words cards to remind them of the words!

Remember there might be more than one correct answer to the questions. Listen carefully to what the children say, and accept their answers if they are correct. There is no right or wrong answer to a question about feelings. Let the children use their imagination to think of an answer. As you become more confident in asking questions, you could ask children to ask their own questions about the story they have read or listened to.

We took an example from the ASb website of [a story about a cat and a dog playing ball](#). We thought of these questions as examples:

Name of the story:	<i>Cat and Dog and the Ball</i>
Questions that you can ask:	1. Do the cat and dog live in a house?
	2. Is there a roof on the house?
	3. What do the cat and dog play with?
	4. What colour is the ball?
	5. Who catches the ball?
	6. Who throws the ball?
	7. Where is the ball now?
	8. Who gets the ball?
	9. Why did the elephant get the ball?
	10. How do the cat and dog feel when they cannot get the ball?
	11. How do the cat and dog feel when the elephant gets the ball?
12. What do you think the cat and dog enjoy about playing ball?	
13. Do you enjoy playing games with your friends?	
14. What do you think will happen to the ball that the cat throws into the air?	

Questions that children might ask:	1. Why did the cat throw the ball high?
	2. Why do the cat and dog live in a house?

Using pictures in books and asking questions supports children's predictive skills. For example, in *Cat and Dog and the Ball*, you can stop on the picture with the sentence 'Cat and Dog cannot get the ball'. Then ask the children, 'What do you think the cat and dog can do to get the ball?'

You do not have to only ask the questions that you prepared. You can also ask the children questions that come into your mind while you are reading, for example, questions like 'What do you think will happen next?', and 'What happened before this picture?' Make sure you give the children enough time to answer questions.

Remember that you want the children to explore the ideas, so don't be too quick to come in with your own ideas and make sure that all the children who want to share their ideas have a turn. They don't have to always agree with each other.

Put yourself on the side of the children in the discussion. Show genuine interest in the story and the questions, for example, asking 'I wonder why ...' and 'I was wondering about ...'. Good learners are always ready to ask questions and are not ashamed if they don't always have the answers.

**Optional reading:** *Tell Me: Children, Reading, and Talk with the Reading Environment*, by Aidan Chambers, published by The Thimble Press, UK, 2011. The book includes a list of the different sorts of questions that you can ask children about books.

# Using storybooks to further develop reading skills



Figure 5.1: *My Teacher*

In Section 4 you explored different methods for teaching reading. These were:

- letters and sounds (phonemic awareness and phonics)
- look-and-say
- learning experience.

If necessary, go back to Section 4 and remind yourself about those methods. In the next activity you will explore further how you can apply these methods using storybooks.

## Activity 5.4(a): Recognising the different approaches

(We recommend you spend 40 minutes on this activity)

Read Case Study 5.1 below about Ms Khumalo using stories with a group of young readers. It is quite a long case study, so it might help if you read it a couple of times. You can read *My Teacher*, the story that Ms Khumalo uses, on [the ASb website](#).

While you are reading, use the highlighting tools to identify when Ms Khumalo uses:

- letters and sounds (yellow)
- look-and-say (green)
- the learning experience method (pink).



## Case Study 5.1: New words with Ms Khumalo

Interactive content is not available in this format.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 5.4(b): Recognising the different approaches

(We recommend you spend 20 minutes on this activity)

Compare the examples of the reading approaches that you spotted with a friend or colleague. How could you use these ideas in your teaching?

Ms Khumalo's word wall is shown in Figure 5.2:



Figure 5.2: Ms Khumalo's word wall

Read the discussion below to find out how Ms Khumalo used letters and sounds, look-and-say, and the learning experience method.

### Discussion

- **Letters and sounds:** Ms Khumalo works with ten children, focusing on recognising the sound associated with 'b', picking out and sounding words in the story than begin with 'b'.
- **Look-and-say:** Ms Khumalo works with a group of 20 children and reads the story with cards that highlight key words. The emphasis is on helping children to recognise the words through linking them with the pictures.
- **Learning experience:** Throughout the session, Ms Khumalo relates the story to children's experiences and encourages them to draw pictures of the words. This will help their comprehension of the words.

## Selecting stories for a purpose

Different stories support the three methods and as you gather experience you will be able to pick out stories that are suited to each method.

In the next activity you will analyse one of the stories you found in Section 2.

### Activity 5.5: Selecting stories for a purpose

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

- 1 Choose one of the stories that you found in Section 2.
- 2 Which of the three methods from Section 4 could you use with this story?
- 3 Discuss the story and the methods with your colleagues.
- 4 In your study notebook, briefly describe an activity using the method(s) that you will do with the children. Use this structure to write your description:
  - Name of story:
  - Method:
  - What will the children learn?
  - What will the children do?
  - What will the teacher/you do?
  - Where in your lesson plan will you do this activity?

Different storybooks can be used in different ways. As you develop your confidence you will be able to choose stories that are particularly suitable for different methods.

**Optional activity:** You can use the downloadable resource 'Choosing stories for different purposes' to find stories that you can use in your class. Spend some time looking at the stories suggested and thinking about how you could use them.

## Managing your reading classroom

If you create a productive, dynamic, creative literacy environment, you will find ways to involve all the children in literacy activities all the time. This can be very difficult if there is a large number of children in one space. You can use different grouping and reading strategies to help manage large groups of children:

- **Shared reading:** You read a story to a larger group of children. You read the story for enjoyment and talk about what the children see, hear, think and feel. You follow up the reading with discussion and activities, including children reading the same story in pairs or individually.
- **Group guided reading:** Children are in small groups of between six and ten. The children read the same story together with the help of an adult. The adult helps the children in different ways to guess and read difficult words using the most appropriate method (letters and sounds, look-and-say, and language experience). They also discuss the story together.
- **Paired reading:** Children sit in pairs to read together, or take turns to read a simple storybook that they can read themselves.
- **Independent reading:** Children read short, simple books on their own, that are easy enough for them to read without help.

**Optional reading:** The downloadable resource 'Strategies for managing reading with your class' gives you more detailed information about shared reading, group/guided reading, paired reading and independent reading. [A learning resource about storytelling](#) from the TESS-India project may also be helpful.

### Activity 5.6: Strategies for using stories to support reading

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

- 1 Using the information above, re-read the case study about Ms Khumalo in Activity 5.4. Identify in the case study when Ms Khumalo uses the different strategies described above.
- 2 In your study notebook, describe how you will plan to use the different reading strategies in one of your lessons.
- 3 If possible, discuss your ideas with a colleague.

## Reviewing your learning

### Activity 5.7: Reviewing your learning

(We recommend you spend 10 minutes on this activity)

Now answer the questions in this quiz.

---

## Moving forward

---

In this section you have learned about the importance of storytelling and storyreading and how children need to hear stories on a daily basis. You have reflected on how storytelling enhances children's speaking and listening skills. You have had the opportunity to share a range of storybooks and considered how planning effective questions can support children's comprehension skills.

Section 5 has also introduced the idea of thinking skills and how using storybooks can enhance how children think about the stories they hear and the stories they tell. You have learned more about how reading and writing activities can be supported with a good-quality storybook and how children can be encouraged to make links between the stories they hear and the stories they write. This section has also introduced you to different ways of organising your classroom for reading, including shared reading, group/guided reading and independent reading time.

In the final section you will think about how to assess reading. You will be introduced to a tool that will help you decide what support young readers need, and to strategies that you can use to assess the reading of individual children in large classes.

# Assessing reading to support planning



# Contents

---

Introduction	4
Stages of reading development	4
Assessing reading in your classroom	6
Recording progress	8
Strategies to assess children's reading	13
Supporting progression	16
End-of-course assessment	17
Final words	18

# Introduction

---

In this section you will:

- look at a tool that assesses reading development
- develop strategies for assessing children's reading levels and ways of recording them
- consider different strategies for supporting children in moving to the next level.

In Section 5 you focused on using storybooks to support your work as an early reading teacher. You began to think about how different stories are helpful for different children. Some children need lots of repetition; others need to practise letters and sounds; still others find reading easy and need to be given more opportunities to extend their reading choices. In order to be able to plan an effective reading lesson, you need to be able to assess your children and work out how to help them.

This section is not about the formal, summative assessment of reading. How reading is assessed in your country will depend on the systems and processes that have been put in place, and will be different for each country.

This section is about the ongoing formative assessment that effective teacher of reading do all the time to plan their teaching. If you have a large class, you will not be able to assess individual children's reading as often as you might like to, but there is plenty that you can do that will make a difference and help you to be an effective teacher of reading.

## Stages of reading development

---

It is important that as a teacher of early reading, you are aware of how your children are progressing. We have devised a chart that shows the stages of reading development. It summarises what we see as the key steps in developing as a fluent, independent reader. The chart sets out what you might expect a child to be able to do at each stage of their development, from pre-reader to a more independent reader, providing some examples to illustrate what each stage means.

### Activity 6.1a: Looking at the stages of reading development

(We recommend that you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

Download the chart 'Stages of reading development' and carefully read each section. Discuss the chart with a colleague, and consider the following questions:

- 1 Do the six steps form a logical progression that you recognise? Could a similar chart be created for your 'home' language?
- 2 Think of a beginner reader in your class. How do you know they are at this early stage of early reading development?
- 3 Think about children you have taught, or are currently teaching, and identify one at each of these stages of reading development. Think about what you could do for each child to help them move on.



- 4 Read Case Study 6.1 below. Discuss the case study with a colleague and jointly plan how you might do something similar in your class.

### Case Study 6.1: Reading development in Anne's class

Anne teaches a Grade 2 class in Nanyuki, Kenya. She has recently attended a course on early reading and has returned to school with the chart showing stages of reading development. Anne decides to practise using the chart by choosing three children who she knows are reading at different levels. She chooses [I Like to Read](#), an eight-page storybook from Level 1 on the ASb website that has short sentences, phonically regular words and common words. She downloads the book onto her phone.

At lunchtime, Anne sits down with each child in turn and asks them to share a few pages of the book with her. She has a tick chart ready so that she can record what she learns about each child. If the child is struggling, Anne helps them.

- Lucy can read the first page well. She stumbles over 'who', but can work out 'can I read to'. She uses her knowledge of letters and sounds to read 'asleep'. She reads 'who' correctly the second time. She struggles with the word 'busy', but reads it correctly the second time. She breaks 'grandmother' and 'grandfather' into syllables.
- Brenda talks about the boy sitting on a nice chair, reading a book. Anne reads 'Who can I read to?' with her. Brenda says the baby is asleep and mama is cooking. She is looking at the pictures and not trying to read the words.
- David uses his finger to point to words. He takes his time and tries to read each word one after the other. He knows that the storybook's title is I Like to Read and can use that information to work out what it says on page 1. He struggles with 'who' but slowly works out 'can I read to'. He needs help with page 3 as he wants to read 'baby' but doesn't see a 'b', but he can read 'my' and 'is'.

After each child leaves, Anne uses the stages of reading development chart to decide the reading stage of each child. Anne feels more confident using the chart and decides to repeat the process with more children.

*This case study is also available to download.*

#### Activity 6.1b: Identifying stages of reading development (if possible, do this activity with a partner)

(We recommend that you spend 20 minutes on this activity)

Look again at Lucy, Brenda and David's progress in Case Study 6.1. Which reading stage is each child at? Give three reasons for your decision.

Pre-reader:

Provide your answer...

Beginning reader:

Provide your answer...

More independent reader:

Provide your answer...

### Discussion

The pre-reader is **Brenda**. She mostly looks at pictures, just tells the story and makes no attempt to read.

The beginning reader is **David**. He follows words with a finger, reads short words and looks at first letters.

The more independent reader is **Lucy**. She reads most regular and frequent words well, uses syllables and phonics for new words, and learns new words quickly.

**Reflection point:** Is the chart showing stages of reading development helpful to your thinking about children as readers? Why, or why not? Are there things you would add or take away from it and if so, why?

## Assessing reading in your classroom

In order to assess children's reading skills, you need to develop the habit of noticing. You need to watch, listen, ask questions and carefully observe children at work. By adopting the active approaches described in the case studies in this course, you will be able to:

- listen to children as they talk in pairs or groups
- walk around the room, watching and listening while they are working on a task
- learn a lot from the questions they ask you.

Remember that children are using their reading skills in most lessons, not just in literacy lessons.

As you develop your skills in active teaching, you will find that there are many, often unexpected, opportunities to gather information about your children. They will tell you something, solve a problem or ask a question that tells you something new about their literacy development.

However, you should also aim to deliberately assess your children in a systematic way. A good strategy is to focus on five to six children in each literacy lesson. As you plan the lesson, think about how the activities that you are designing will enable children to demonstrate one or more of the skills on the chart.

Read Case Study 6.2 and then try the activity that follows. Notice how Patrick involves all his children in the activities, but uses the opportunity to concentrate on six of them.

## Case Study 6.2: Patrick's Grade 1 class

Patrick is a newly qualified Grade 1 teacher in Kampala, Uganda. He is very keen on child-centred learning and his class are very used to working in pairs using think/pair/share.

Patrick knows that most of his children are still 'pre-readers' and he wants to find out who is developing the skills of a beginning reader. He designs a series of lessons to focus on two objectives linked to the stages of reading development chart. Patrick will make notes on three pairs of children in each lesson.

- **Focus 1:** Can children recognise some words in a patterned text?
- **Focus 2:** Can children use the first letters of words to predict or begin sounding out a new word?

Patrick is keen to use ICT in his classroom. He has borrowed the school's overhead projector to show a Storybook in his English lessons. He has chosen *Friends*, a book with repetitive phrases, high-frequency and phonically regular words, and has downloaded the book on to his phone, projecting to a blank wall.

Lesson 1: pages 1–3

The **whole class** is encouraged to talk about the pictures. First they think about the pictures on their own, and then they talk about them in a pair. Each pair shares their ideas with another pair. Finally Patrick asks a few groups to share their thoughts. The class reads the first three pages as a chorus. Patrick emphasises how the first letter helps you to remember the names, especially Zizi, Lele and Sisa. Can the children see the letters repeated? Who in the class has a name starting with the same letters? The whole class is excited to recognise letters and familiar words that they have worked on and to have these extra friends in a book!

Lesson 2: pages 4–7

The **whole class** re-reads pages 1–3 and remembers the names of the friends. The whole class reads page 4 all together: 'My friend Zizi likes to play soccer.' Children act out the soccer playing! Patrick emphasises reading from left to right and looking at the first letter of each word. Patrick has cards with each of the seven words – 'My', 'friend', 'Zizi', 'likes', 'to', 'play' and 'soccer' – written on a separate card. Children come up to the front of the class and hold the cards up to make the sentence.

Now Patrick gives the class a **think/pair/share** activity. Page 5 is projected on the wall (or revealed on a large pre-prepared poster sheet): 'My friend Lele likes to swim.' Patrick pastes some paper over the word 'swim'. Patrick holds up a 'think' card. All children must look at the picture for 20 seconds and think about what it says. Can they recognise the pattern? Then he holds up the 'pair' card and children talk to their partners about page 5.

Patrick moves to **observe and make notes on his chosen three pairs of children:** who is recognising the pattern of words? After the whole class 'shares', Patrick uncovers the word 'swim'. Children think and pair to discuss what the word might say, and Patrick observes again: are any of the six children using the first letter 'S' to read the word 'swim'? Are children using context and picture to work out the word? Patrick changes the slide to page 6 and then page 7, both followed by think/pair/share. By the

end of this lesson all of the children have been involved, and Patrick has closely observed and made notes on six children. (You will find out more about making notes in next part of this section of the course.)

**Reflection point:** Do you think that lessons 1 and 2 achieved the two focus areas that Patrick planned for?

Lessons 3–10: pages 8–17

These lessons repeat the format of lesson 2, but look at new pages of repetitive text.

Patrick is able to observe new pairs of children in each lesson. Lessons 5–10 gradually develop work on the book, using cut-up words to recreate text. By the end, the whole class acts out the book using actions and word cards.

After ten lessons, Patrick has closely observed all 60 of his children and has noted down who are beginning readers, who are still at the pre-reading stage, and even who is becoming a more independent reader. Patrick uses this information to plan future lessons.

*This case study is also available to download.*

### Activity 6.2: Focusing on a few children

(We recommend you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

Think about your next literacy lesson and choose an appropriate focus from the 'stages of reading development' chart.

- 1 Devise an activity so you can carefully observe four to six children at work. Discuss your plan with a colleague.
- 2 Think about how you could use your observations from this activity to plan future lessons. Record your ideas in your study notebook.
- 3 If you get the chance to try your activity, consider the following questions:
  - How well did it work?
  - Did it give you an opportunity to notice children's reading skills?
  - Were you able to place children in the categories identified in the chart from pre-reader to independent reader?

## Recording progress

In Case Studies 6.1 and 6.2 teachers are given a 'snapshot' of children's reading development at a specific moment in time.

It is challenging for teachers, especially those with large classes, to:

- record each child's progress over a year to ensure that they are moving forward with their reading
- use this record to make notes about 'next steps' for children
- create a record that can be useful to the next teacher, as children move up a grade.

In the next two case studies, you will see how teachers have devised ways of recording progress so that they can remember how children are developing and therefore plan appropriate activities for them.

### Activity 6.3: Keeping records

(We recommend that you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

Read the Case Study 6.3. As you read, note down the following in your study notebook:

- What opportunities will you have in a typical week to assess reading outside of literacy lessons?
- Why do you think Anne put the three target children in different groups?
- How does Anne use the information she gained through this process?

### Case Study 6.3: A reading record book

Anne (see Case Study 6.1) decides to use the 'stages of reading development' chart in all her lessons – not just in English lessons. By doing this she can quickly make a note of how children are progressing with their reading.

As shown in Figure 6.1, Anne has made a class list in her mark book that includes six ruled columns labelled 'Pre 1', 'Pre 2', 'Beg 1', 'Beg 2', 'Ind 1' and 'Ind 2', as in the chart. There is also space for her to make notes for three reading assessments a year, plus an extra notes column.

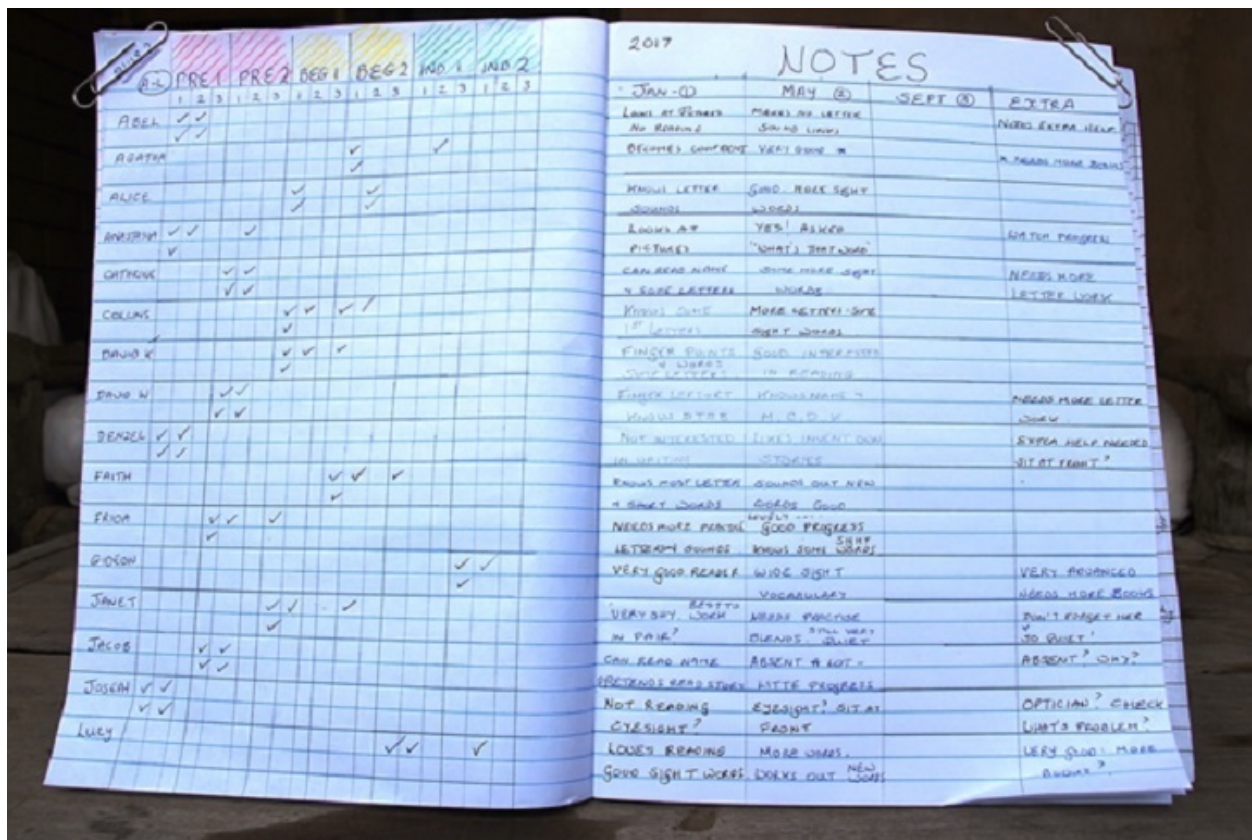


Figure 6.1: Anne's mark book, featuring columns from the 'stages of reading development' chart

Anne decides to observe four to six children each day during two separate lessons. With 60 children in her class, she can complete the class list in ten to fifteen days. She selects children alphabetically because this makes note-taking easier. Today it will be: Frida, Gideon and Janet in the first lesson, and Jared, Joseph and Lucy in the second.

Anne is doing a science lesson on parts of plants. She has written a title, 'Parts of a plant', and has drawn a plant on the board with the first letter of four key words: 'leaf', 'stem', 'root' and 'flower'. She goes over the key words with the whole class and writes up the words in large print.

Anne then divides the class into small groups of four. Each group has a real plant to look at and four pieces of card with these four words on one side and the initial letters on the other side. Groups are asked to talk about the plant, take a card each and rehearse the names of each part. They then swap cards in the group and help each other to become confident with the words and plant parts. Every five minutes they change their plant with another group and repeat the cards activity. The whole class is busy and engaged. This gives Anne time to move to the groups that Frida, Gideon and Janet are in. Anne has a copy of the cards and a Grade 1 textbook with more writing about plants. She asks each of the three children questions appropriate to their reading level:

- 1 Can you read the four initial letters 'l', 's', 'r' and 'f'?
- 2 Can you read the words 'leaf', 'stem', 'root' and 'flower'?
- 3 What is the title of the diagram? (The answer is 'Parts of a plant'.)

- 4 Can you read this line from the Grade 1 textbook? (It's a question that the children are not familiar with: 'What parts of a plant do we eat? Root, leaf, stem, flower, seed or fruit?')

Anne knows **Frida** is lively and likes to try and answer in class, but she finds reading difficult. She notices that Frida uses her finger to follow words and mostly starts at the left. Anne finds that Frida cannot give her the sounds of 'P', 'L' or 'R', but does know the sound of 'F' (for Frida!) and 'S' or 'snake' – a sound they've just been practising in class. Anne notes Frida down as 'Pre 2' and notes that Frida needs a lot more practice on initial sounds and a few sight words.

Anne knows that **Gideon** always puts his hand up to read from the board. She is confident he can read the words and the title, and quickly checks this. But can he read a question from the textbook that he hasn't seen before? She shows him the textbook and asks him to read the first sentence. Gideon doesn't use his finger and reads quite confidently: 'What parts of a plant do we eat? Root, leaf, stem, flower, seed or fruit?' 'Seed' and 'fruit' are new words: Gideon uses his knowledge of phonics to read 'seed', and blends 'fr' together to begin 'fruit'. He hesitates – '-uit' is an unusual spelling – but he makes a guess from the context and reads 'fruit'. Anne notes Gideon down as 'Ind 2' and makes a note that she must give him extra books to extend his reading.

**Janet** is a very quiet girl who never puts her hand up. Anne is not sure how well she is progressing, but on her own, Janet is happy to have a go at reading. She uses her finger from left to right and knows all the initial letter sounds. She can slowly read the four familiar words. She struggles with the title 'Parts of a plant', as she reads 'plant' twice. She uses her finger on the textbook but can't read 'what', and needs help from Anne to move across the rest of the sentence and recognise the familiar words in a different context. Anne notes Janet down as 'Beg 1' and makes a note that Janet will work best in a pair, not a large group, and is ready to begin blending sounds.

Whilst working with Frida, Anne notices that one of Frida's group, Collins, is very eager to help Frida get the right answers. Although Collins is not on Anne's target list today, she also quickly makes a note in the mark book that he knows all his initial letters and some sight words, and is now working at the 'Beg 2' level: Anne needs to check up on that!

Anne spends about five minutes with each child and is also able to keep an eye on the class's group work. She then resumes the whole class lesson. After morning playtime, she will make notes on Jared, Joseph and Lucy's reading progress during the literacy lesson.

It takes Anne two to three weeks to complete the class list; some days she is not able to cover as many observations, and some days she can do more. She is pleased with how much better she knows the children's reading stages: who needs extra help and who needs to move to the next step. With this detailed information she can plan for some differentiated activities in future lessons, such as grouping children with others of a similar reading ability. The colours on the chart are useful here, for example in creating red, yellow and green groups. Anne can also plan for spending extra time with (red group) pre-readers. She decides to use this reading record book to add extra notes throughout the week – whenever she notices something specific about individual children, for example. Anne plans to repeat this detailed assessment of every child at least once a term, and will eventually pass her record book on to the Grade 3 teacher so that they will be well informed about each child's reading progress.

*This case study is also available to download.*

Anne created a page in her mark book to record her assessments. In the next activity, you will analyse and critically review Anne's records.

### Activity 6.4: Analysing Anne's records

(We recommend that you spend 60 minutes on this activity)

Look carefully at Figure 6.1. You will notice that Anne needs several pages for her 60+ class – the page shown in the figure has room to make notes on 16 children. On the left-hand page she has drawn red, yellow and green columns linked to the categories in the stages of reading development chart. She can add ticks to show the children's reading level. On the right-hand page she has divided the pages into three main school terms. She can make short notes when she observes a child's reading.

Can you answer the following questions?

- 1 Which four children are independent readers?
- 2 Look at the 'Extra' column on the right-hand page. What is Anne reminding herself to do for these independent readers?
- 3 Which three children are still at the 'Pre 1' stage of reading?
- 4 What has Anne written in the 'Extra' column for Denzel and Joseph?
- 5 Anne writes that Janet is 'very quiet'. Why might this worry Anne?
- 6 Which child may be ready to be an independent reader by the third term: Alice or Catherine? Give a reason.
- 7 Give two reasons why this record book helps Anne to track her class's reading progress.
- 8 Give two reasons why this record book will be helpful for the Grade 3 teacher next year.

Would you find Anne's record sheet useful? What changes (if any) would you suggest?

Here are two downloadable resources to help you think about how to record progress in reading. If you have a large Aclass, then Anne's record will work best for you. If you have a small class then it might be possible for you to create an individual record for each child.

- Class reading progress record
- Individual progress record

If you have a mobile phone with a note-taking app, you may prefer to keep records on that. At the end of term you would then be able to email your notes to another teacher.

### Activity 6.5: Keeping reading records

(We recommend that you spend 30 minutes on this activity)

Martin works in a small village school. He has 25 children in his class, with Grades 1 and 2 mixed together. He uses a record book like Anne's for six months but finds it doesn't have enough space to make detailed notes about each child.



Martin doesn't have many children, but he does have the added challenge of a multi-grade class. So he decides to adapt the 'stages of reading development' chart and make a single-page record sheet for each child.

Look at Martin's individual reading record for Paxima and consider the following:

- 1 Look at Martin's individual reading record for Paxima. In April, what sort of opportunities does he need to provide for Paxima to develop her reading? What should he be looking for?
- 2 Do you think that you could also create individual record sheets for your class? Could you do this for each child? Would you do this only for children who you wish to monitor more closely?
- 3 Could you use a note-taking app on your phone to keep records about your children? What would the advantages be of doing this? What would be the challenges?
- 4 Discuss records with your colleagues. What are the advantages and disadvantages of whole class records and individual records? Think about the sort of records that would be useful you.

## Strategies to assess children's reading

In order to carry out formative assessment, you need to ensure that the children are actively engaged in an activity. Carefully read through Table 6.1, which summarises some strategies to assess reading.

**Table 6.1: Strategies to assess reading**

Preparation before lessons	Strategies during lessons	Next steps
Plan to use child's prior learning – from class or homework tasks.	Keep a copy of the 'stages of reading development' chart to hand while walking around the classroom.	Review all children's progress in reading. Highlight focus children's learning successes.
Collaborate with colleagues; discuss reading activities and assessment strategies.	As you teach the whole class, observe how well children are reading. Make notes when you can.	Identify next steps for the reading activity and include them in next week's planning.
Choose which lessons to make notes on reading progress (not just in English lessons).	Observe children working in groups and assess their collaboration skills, listening skills and speaking skills. Make notes when you can.	Look for opportunities to revisit the learning, such as sharing stories or practising reading aloud. Ask and answer questions about the stories.
Decide which aspects of reading will be the focus for assessment.	Join in with a group, listen and check focus children's response to the reading task.	Visit <a href="#">the ASb website</a> to find some more books for the class.
Create a whole-class record book (and single child record sheets, if appropriate).	Ask the children questions about the reading task and responses to their own learning.	Ask the children to write their own stories and post them to <a href="#">the ASb website</a> .

Laminate a copy of the 'stages of reading development' chart to keep on the teacher's desk.	Make sure to notice the reading progress in all lessons, such as science, maths and home language opportunities.	Look at the reading record book frequently. Which children are of concern? Plan to work in a small group with these children.
Use the 'stages of reading development' chart to plan a reading focus for your lessons, for example reading aloud.	Do not always ask the good readers to answer: use paired or small group activities so that every child is involved.	For children with reading problems, plan extra small group lessons or extra help during lessons.
Organise class into mixed-ability groups.	Make notes on the progress of the focus child in the record book.	In some lessons, plan activities to focus on different stages of reading and group readers, such as in red ('Pre'), yellow ('Beg'), green ('Ind') pairs or groups.
Decide which child to assess before a lesson begins. Identify these children as 'focus' child.	During small group or pair work, walk around the classroom to observe how children are reading.	Use the 'stages of reading development' chart to plan for next steps.
Plan into the lesson pair or small group reading activities.	If adults or older children are helping groups (for example, leading a shared reading story), give them a written copy of the lesson focus so that they don't forget the focus of the learning.	Use children's pictures and sentences to create storybooks for the class to enjoy.
Arrange for extra adults or an older child to help with small group work.	Ask adults or older children to share their observations of the child's learning in reading.	Identify the good readers and find extra reading books. Ask the community for help. Download storybooks from <a href="#">the ASb website</a> onto a phone or school laptop.
Choose a story to read aloud. Decide on five questions (open and closed) to ask as you read the story.	Read aloud the story to the class. Ask the five questions and let children share their ideas in pairs before answering.	Make a note of which children answered the questions. Create a new list of children to ask ready for the next lesson.

### Activity 6.6: Strategies to assess reading

(We recommend you spend 60 minutes on this activity)

Now read Case Study 6.4. As you read, write down the opportunities that the teacher, Mrs Ndaba, will have to assess the children's reading. Use Table 6.1 to help you.

#### Discussion

The activity in '**Stories taken apart and put together**' gives all the children the chance to read aloud in a safe environment. The independent readers are able to help the others. You can listen as you walk around and note who is having difficulty reading their sentence. If you focus on one group and listen to the discussion, you will be able to tell who has understood the story and how they decide which order the sentences should be in.

If you were to replicate '**Collecting local stories**', as you moved around the room you would see what the children decided to draw or write. This would tell you how well they understood the stories. By listening to pairs talking, you would be able to assess some of the beginning readers as they read the words written by the independent readers.

Now read Case Study 6.4 and try the activity that follows.

## Case Study 6.4: Two examples of using stories

### Stories taken apart and put together

Mrs Ndaba's Grade 6 class had brought stories from home and illustrated them. On each page, they had written a sentence and drawn a picture to match it. The pages had been tied together to make books.

Her colleague, Ms Mdlalose, who taught the Grade 3s, had seen the illustrated stories, and asked to borrow them for a reading activity with her children. Mrs Ndaba came and watched.

Ms Mdlalose divided her class into five groups. She gave each group a story but she untied the pages. She then gave each child in the group one page of the story, making sure that she mixed the order of the pages. Each child had to read the sentence on their page to the group. The group discussed the sentences to decide which order the sentences should go in.

Ms Mdlalose asked one child from each group to read their group's story to the class and they commented about the order. As a class, they selected their favourite story and prepared a five-minute drama to perform this story.

### Collecting local stories

I asked my Grade 2 children to learn a story from their family members or neighbours. I gave them about a week to collect and learn the story. I then invited one or two children a day to tell their story to the class, using different voices, gestures and actions to accompany it. Not everyone was confident enough to do this, so I let them choose whether or not they wanted to. For each story, I wrote a few key words on the chalkboard.

The children told their stories in their local language. Afterwards, I asked the class to draw pictures of the key events or main characters in a story they had heard. If they were confident, I encouraged them to write down some of the key words. Working in pairs, I let the independent readers share their words and pictures with a beginning reader, getting the beginning reader to try and read the written words. Sometimes I challenged them to think of key words in the story that begin with a certain letter. (For example, Baron told a story about a monkey, so I asked them to try and find words beginning with 'm'.)

By sharing the stories from their communities with their peers, this activity builds connections among the children in the class.

*This case study is also available to download.*

# Supporting progression

As you become more confident at assessing the children's level of reading, you will be able to plan more effectively and ensure they have the opportunity to improve their reading skills.

[The ASb website](#) has hundreds of books that support teaching reading and extend children's enjoyment of books.

## Activity 6.7: Analysing stories to support reading development

(We recommend that you spend 30 minutes on this activity)



Figure 6.2: Some African Storybook stories.

It is important to be able to identify stories that are suitable for children at each of the six stages of development.

- Download the reading development template and look up the following nine titles on [the ASb website](#):
  - *Counting cats*
  - *My red ball*
  - *Ah! Football!*
  - *I like*
  - *Friends*
  - *Greedy Anansi*
  - *Grandmother, Hare and Elephant*
  - *I like to read*
  - *A very tall man*

Which books will be most suitable for the six stages of reading development? (Early Years Teachers will want to choose from Level 1 (first words) and Level 2 (first sentences).)

- Identify which of these nine books should go in the pre-reader, beginner and independent reader columns in the template.
  - Note that some titles have several versions of text on the ASb site.
  - You can use them at different stages of reading development.
- Research the site and find at least one or two more books for each column. Add them on the 'Researched title 1' and 'Researched title 2' lines of the table.
  - You may want to look for titles in your home language.
- Plan to use at least one of these titles next term.
  - Your choice may depend on the age and reading level of your class.
- Share your choice of books with a colleague.
  - Explain to your colleague how you will use the books.

#### Discussion

The books for pre-readers are *My red ball, I like* and *Counting cats*.

The books for beginner readers are *I like to read, Friends* and *A very tall man*.

The books for pre-readers are *Greedy Anansi, Ah! Football!* and *Grandmother, Hare and Elephant*.

## End-of-course assessment

During *Teaching early reading in Africa* you have considered:

- how to support children's early reading
- some specific approaches to teaching reading
- the way stories support children's meaning making
- useful ways to assess early reading in order to inform planning.

You are now familiar with the ASb website and are hopefully aware that teachers can add stories to the site, or adapt existing stories to different reading levels or alternative languages. Anyone can upload stories to the Community area of the website. The website team then selects stories that are suitable to be published on the main website. This process of academic review ensures that the overall quality is maintained. In the final activity of this course, we want you to make a contribution to the ASb website.

### Activity 6.8: Contributing to the ASb website

(We recommend that you spend 60 minutes on this activity)

#### Part 1

Choose one of the following options to complete this activity:

- Upload your own story to the ASb website.

- Translate a story already on the site that hasn't been translated:
  - from a home language to English
  - from English to a home language
  - from one home language to another.
- Adapt an existing story to a different reading level (Note that Level 1 = first words, Level 2 = first sentences, Level 3 = first paragraphs):
  - change the words in a Level 2–3 story to make it Level 1
  - increase the vocabulary in a Level 1 story to make it Level 2–3.

When you've done this, visit this page to confirm completing this part of the activity.

## Part 2

Post a comment on this blog to reflect on your learning on this course. Write 200–400 words on your journey, in particular:

- what you have enjoyed
- what challenges you have faced
- how you approached the assessments (Activities 3.9 and 6.8)
- how you will use what you have learnt in the future.

## Final words

Whether you have studied *Teaching early reading in Africa* on your own or with a group of colleagues, we hope that it represents the start of your journey to become a reflective, confident, informed and enthusiastic teacher of early reading. You can return to the course at any point and you can keep and adapt the downloadable resources.

Teaching early reading is one of the most important jobs in teaching. If children can read fluently and make meaning from what they are reading, by the time they encounter a wider curriculum with a range of different subjects they will have the best possible chance of achieving success at school and giving themselves a range of options as they move into the adult world.

Now that you have completed this course, you may want to complete the post-course survey.