



## African Storybook Guides

### Using African Storybooks with children

The activities and resources on these pages have been tried by our education partners or ourselves when using African Storybooks with children.

They include oral work with storybooks, asking questions and working with new words, linking reading and writing activities, talking about storybook pictures, and lots of ideas from successful reading lessons.

We also give a detailed example of how to use African Storybooks for literacy activities in a multi-grade classroom with children of different ages.

See also the other guides in this series:  
*Preparing to use African Storybooks with children*  
*Developing, translating and adapting African Storybooks*

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[www.africanstorybook.org](http://www.africanstorybook.org)

### Activity 1: Preparing to use an African Storybook with children

Choose a storybook that you think the children will enjoy. There are lots of ideas for choosing and collecting storybooks in the *Preparing to use African Storybooks with children African Storybook Guides*, available at [www.africanstorybook.org](http://www.africanstorybook.org).

Here are some questions that will help you select.

- What do you think the children will like about this storybook?
- Can the children understand the language used in this storybook?
- What questions might the children ask about the story?
- What questions could you ask about the story?
- What can the children learn from this storybook?
- What activities can you plan that will help them to enjoy and learn from the storybook?

### Resource 1: Types of reading activities

Think about some of these ideas to help you plan activities.

1. To **practice reading the words and the pictures on their own:**
  - Read alone quietly or while they are listening to the storybook being read.
  - Read to each other aloud.
  - Take books home to read.
  - Talk about books (words and pictures) with each other.
  - Group reading.
  - Identify and read the words, for example, pointing to words on the page, using word cards, etc.
2. To **talk about their feelings and experiences with reference to what they are reading:**
  - Choose books
  - Ask feelings questions, for example 'How did you feel when the child in the story was lost in the forest?', 'Why was the boy angry with his friends? How would you feel?', 'Do you like the girl in this story? Why or why not?'
  - Answer questions about their feelings.
3. To **think about what they are reading:**
  - Ask questions, for example, related to the content of the story, or to encourage children to think about a problem or solution in the story.
  - Answer questions about story content.
  - Meaningful enquiry (see Activity 9, later in this Guide).

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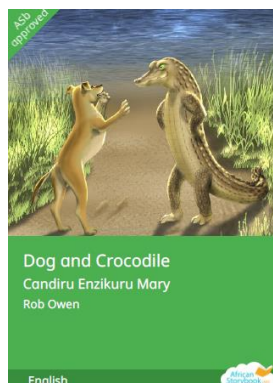
4. To **write about what they read** and to **read what they write**:
  - Adults write down what children say about stories and pictures.
  - Children write what they think and say about stories and pictures.
  - Read what others have written about stories.
5. To **learn language from what they read**:
  - Learn new words, find words that mean the same, find words in other languages.
  - Practice pronunciation; learn about other symbols, for example, punctuation.

### Activity 2: Re-telling the story

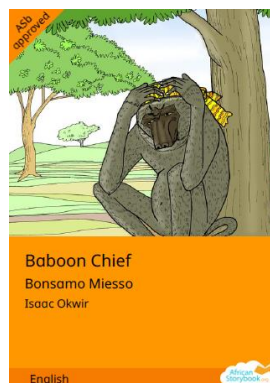
Here is the method most of our African Storybook teachers used when they read storybooks with children. How does it compare with yours?

1. Show the learners the picture on the cover and ask them what the picture might tell us about the story or characters.
2. Read the title, and talk about what the title tells us about the story.
3. Ask learners predictive questions, such as 'What do you think the story is about?', or 'Who do you think the main character of the story is?'
4. Introduce any new words before you read. (Ask learners to volunteer the meaning of new words, so that they can learn from each other too.)
5. Read the story out loud.
6. After the story ask learners some simple questions about the story.
7. Let the learners ask questions about the story.
8. Re-tell the story yourself, and ask the learners to help you.
9. Ask if anyone would like to re-tell the story.

Here are some storybooks for re-telling – they have stories and characters that are quite easy to remember.



[Dog and Crocodile](#)



[Baboon chief](#)



[How tortoise got a crooked nose](#)



[Father's advice](#)

### Activity 3: Making your own colour copies of printed books



Thuli Dyonase, working with teachers at Mseki Primary in Gugulethu (Cape) used the colour-in versions of African Storybooks on the website.

This was the method she used.

1. Choose a colour-in version of an African Storybook. Make enough A4 copies of the colour-in version of a storybook so that each child gets one page of the storybook. For example: make 5 copies of the same 8-page storybook = 40 pages for 40 children; or, make copies of 4 different storybooks, 4 x 12-page storybooks = 48 pages for 48 children.
2. Give crayons and copied sheets to children to colour in. Encourage the children to colour freely. Remember we want to encourage creativity, so not all the pictures in one storybook have to look the same.
3. Group leaders collect and order the pages once they have been coloured in.
4. Staple them together into copies of the colour-in storybook. Now you have full-colour versions of the colour-in storybook!

### Activity 4: Learning from other teachers

Here are links to videos where Emily Mbhele is reading with children at Tholulwazi Literacy Project in the Lower Molweni Valley in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.



<https://youtu.be/kotepvhKImI>: Emily Mbhele reads a printed book with children

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<https://youtu.be/8fCCQag954I>: A child in Emily Mbhele's class reading a storybook page projected on to the classroom wall.

What do you notice about the method Emily's method of reading the storybooks with children?

Here are some of the things that we noticed.

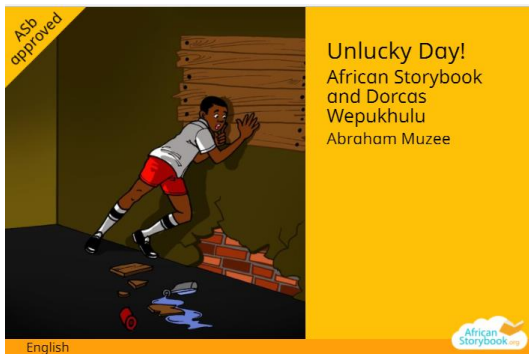
- Emily makes eye contact with children.
- Emily makes sure the children hear all the words clearly and understand them. She reads slowly, observes their faces, asks questions.
- Emily helps children to link the oral word to the written word.
- The children can see the book clearly while Emily is reading.
- Emily asks predictive questions, such as 'What do you think will happen next?'
- Emily asks children questions that make them think.
- Emily gives the children time to think before she chooses a child to answer.
- Children read individually, aloud, as well as in a group.
- If the storybook is being projected, then individual children point out a word on the screen.
- Children learn new words, and read them.
- Children help each other.
- Children are allowed to make mistakes without feeling bad, and when they get an answer right, the other children are encouraged to clap.

**Resource 2: Learning from our experiences**

In 2017, we observed a librarian reading with 50 primary school children from an African storybook projected on the wall in a room in a community library.



The storybook chosen was an adaptation of an English storybook that had been written by two boys from the area, called *Kidnapped!*. The children could read the Level 4 storybook easily in Kiswahili (*Kutekwa nyari!*) but the librarian chose to read the Level 1 version in English (*Unlucky day!*) to teach the children some English in an enjoyable way.



*Unlucky day!* The children enjoyed the storybook enormously – an exciting adventure story in which two boys are kidnapped for ransom.

Here is a description of aspects of the lesson, and ideas for adding learning opportunities.

What the librarian did	More learning
<p>The librarian asked the children to read the title. They were able to do this easily. She asked what they saw on the cover. This led to a range of good answers from the children which helped them practice their English vocabulary – such as ‘uniform’, ‘timber’, ‘broken’.</p>	<p><i>She could have asked a predictive question: ‘Who do you think is unlucky?’</i></p> <p><i>‘What do you think is going to happen in this story?’</i></p> <p><i>‘Why do you think there are two boys in the picture?’</i></p>

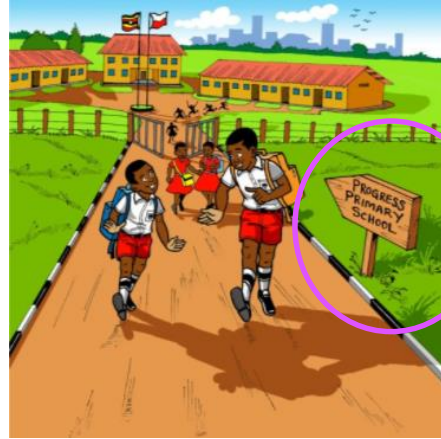
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They read pg. 1:

*My friend Kiki and I walk home from school.*

The librarian emphasised the importance of each child putting him- or herself in the place of the 'I' character in the story. Each time a child said, 'Kiki and ...' she reminded the child that he or she was in the story and should say, 'Kiki and I'. This helped the children to identify with the character and enter into the story.

*She could have drawn the attention to the sign pointing backwards, and asked them to say what it shows. She could also have asked if any learners could recognise or write the name of their school.*



On pg. 3 the children could not pronounce the word 'pimples'; on pg. 5, they didn't seem to know the word 'van' or the word 'managed' on pg. 6. Only one child could pronounce the word 'cigarette' on pg. 9. It wasn't clear if the children knew the meaning of 'cigarette' or not. On pg. 13 they did not seem to know the word 'wood'.

*The librarian needed to spend some time helping the children to pronounce and understand the words that they found difficult. It would also have helped if the librarian had used the Kiswahili word to further explain these words.*

*For this group of children, it might have been better to use an English storybook with simpler vocabulary.*

The children continued to read the story to the end.

The librarian asked: Who was actually unlucky, the boys who were kidnapped or the people who kidnapped them?

*The session ended before the children had a chance to re-tell or talk about the story.*

*Often time is too limited!*

*The librarian could continue with this storybook the next time these children are at the library, focusing on helping them to read and understand the words.*

*If she had the resources, the librarian could print A5 storybooks from the website, so that children could take these home to read. If parents have cellphones and data, they could download the African Storybook Reader App, and save this storybook on their cellphone for children to read.*



### Activity 5: Talking about pictures

Look at the pictures in the Mozambican folktale, [Why Frog is so Ugly](#).

1. What questions could you ask about this picture from the storybook?
2. What conversations could you have with children about this picture?



We had the following ideas for questions:

- The frog has a speech bubble (or a thought bubble) in the picture. What language is the frog speaking (or thinking in)? What is it saying or thinking?
- Do frogs really use language? How do we know?
- What colour is the frog in the picture? Are frogs this colour in life?
- Does this frog have a tail? Do frogs usually have a tail?
- How many legs does the frog have?

At Kabubbu Development Project in Uganda, we learned from a good example of how to talk about story pictures with children.

*The teacher projected the storybook onto a screen, and read the storybook with the children. He asked the children, 'How many legs does the frog have?' The children talked about whether the frog has three legs or four legs.*

*One of the children said, 'There is a fourth leg at the back!' Much to the amusement of the children, the teacher looked behind the screen to see if he could see the fourth leg! Then the children talked about how you can see things differently, depending on where you are standing. During the conversation there was a lot of discussion about prepositions.*

This lesson on visual literacy helped the children to understand different ways of 'reading' pictures in stories, and expressing different opinions about it.

**Activity 6: Working with new words – using a word wall**

1. Choose a storybook to read with children. To prepare:
  - a. Identify words in this storybook that will be new for your children.
  - b. Write word cards for the new words.
2. Show children the word cards you have made, and put them on the word wall.
3. Read the storybook to the children. After reading, ask the children questions about the story. Try and use the new words in the questions and encourage children to use the new words in their answers.



**In this example of a word wall, the words are organised alphabetically.**

The yellow words in the example are high frequency English words (for example, 'all', 'an', 'no', 'out', and 'them'). The green words are the names of boys in the class, and the pink words are the names of the girls. The purple words are difficult words but important concepts for children to know (for example, 'acceptance', 'fairness', and 'responsibility').

Make a word wall to suit the language needs and interests of your children.

You can also do lots of things with the **word cards**. For example, you can:

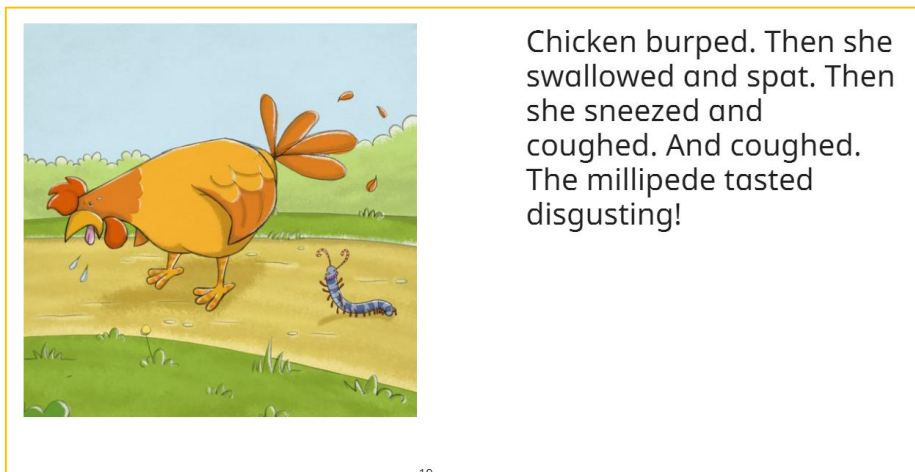
- Ask children if they know the meaning of the word, and discuss the meaning.
- Ask children to read the card.
- Clap out syllables in the words, practising the difficult sounds.
- Use the words in a phrase or short sentence.
- Identify the sounds in the words, for example *th* in *thin*.
- Give examples of how the words can be used in a sentence. Talk about other words that sound the same, for example 'th' in 'thin' sounds the same as 'th' in 'think'.

## Activity 7: Exploring language in a storybook



The African Storybook title, [Chicken and Millipede](#), is good for working with vocabulary and language sounds. It is available in over 28 languages.

1. Look at page 10 of *Chicken and Millipede* below.



Chicken burped. Then she swallowed and spat. Then she sneezed and coughed. And coughed. The millipede tasted disgusting!

2. What words on this page will be new for the children you work with?

You could write these words on cards, and explain them. But the best way for children to understand them might be to act them out. For example, children love acting out 'burp', 'sneeze' and 'cough'!

3. As you read the sentences on this page, become aware of the rhythm.

What patterns of language are repeated on this page? How would you draw the attention of children to these patterns?

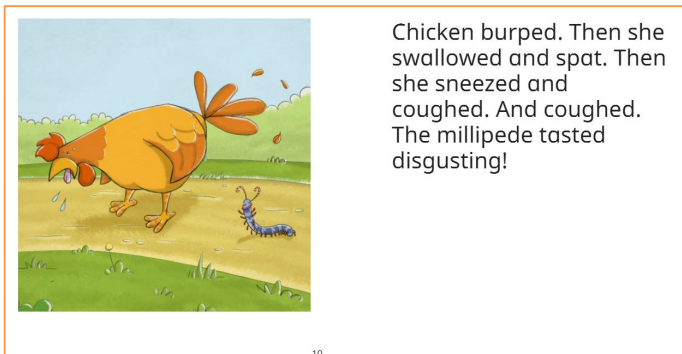
4. Choose a storybook in your own language. What language patterns can you find in stories your own language/s?

### Activity 8: Asking questions

1. Choose any storybook that you want to read with the children.
2. After reading the storybook:
  - a. Write down questions about the story that you can ask during or after you read it with the children.
  - b. Write down questions you think children might ask about the story.

For example, on page 10 of [Chicken and Millipede](#), you could ask:

- 'Why did the chicken burp?'
- 'Is it rude to burp?'
- 'Why did the millipede taste so bad?'
- 'How do you think the mommy millipede felt in this picture?'



Chicken burped. Then she swallowed and spat. Then she sneezed and coughed. And coughed. The millipede tasted disgusting!

You can also ask the children what they think happened before this picture, and what they think will happen in the next picture.

The children might ask questions like, 'Why did the chicken eat the millipede?' or 'What happened to the millipede?'

We always try to use words from the storybook in your questions, especially if they are new words. This gives children a chance to practice using those words when they answer the questions.

### Resource 3: Meaningful enquiry

In our experience, young children begin to ask questions from as young as two years old. Like all of us, they appear to ask questions in order to understand the world around them. We have heard children asking questions like:

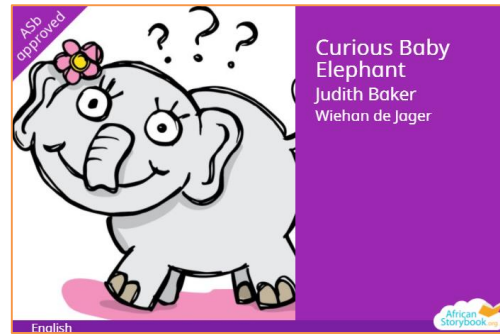
- What is that?
- Why did the person do that?
- Where did something/someone go?
- How did that happen?
- Why is that there?

Several storybooks on the African Storybook website emphasize the value of asking questions. Here are some examples:

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[Karabo's question](#)



[Curious baby elephant](#)



[Rainbow visits the village](#)

Children often respond to statements that people around them make, or things that they observe in their environment, by asking questions.

In the storybook from Rwanda, *Kubaza bitera kumeny* (translated as *Kariza's questions*), we read how Kariza was encouraged by her parents to ask questions. These questions led her to know the importance of washing hands before eating. She also learned about a washing tool and how to use it.

We believe that we can encourage children to find out more about the world around them by using stories to raise questions and explore possible answers. In other words, we can use stories for enquiry.

### **Meaningful enquiry usually follows a process of:**

- Asking a question about an idea or concept. For example, 'What is love?'
- Defining that idea or concept. For example, 'Love is a good feeling we have about someone else ...'
- Turning the definition into more questions that we explore in dialogue with other people. For example, 'Can I be angry with someone I love?'

Often these ideas and concepts are about things that are important and interesting to all human beings, things that we don't always have an answer to, and that different people have different thoughts about. In other words, philosophical issues.

Here is a list of issues which are common themes in many stories, along with suggestions of African Storybooks that could be used to explore those issue with children. You can find these titles by typing them on the website **Search for storybooks**.

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Love and hate	<i>The boy nobody loved; Mother-in-law; Lion's shoes; Three boxes of wealth; Child as a peacemaker</i>
Greed and selflessness	<i>Anansi and vulture; Greedy woman; Elders; Old woman in a bottle; The girl who got rich</i>
Rich and poor	<i>Mojalefa's mistake; Look for the gold; King Kayanja and his daughter; Why is Yayeri great?</i>
Famine and plenty	<i>Monkey and the drought; Mulongo and the ogre; Locusts</i>
Good and bad	<i>The Hyena's funeral; Abel and his sister's doll; Hare the trickster</i>
Wisdom and ignorance	<i>Father's advice; Clever woman; Advice from an old man; Unwise judge</i>
Bravery and cowardice	<i>Nangila's courage; Thabani's spear; Otukolia fights Lingiri</i>

Stories can encourage children to discuss these issues and to:

- Ask different types of questions, including feeling and thinking questions.
- Think independently and critically about the world and events.
- Listen to others' opinions.
- Share their own opinions.
- Agree and disagree, with respect for others.
- Read to find out more.



### Activity 9: Meaningful enquiry

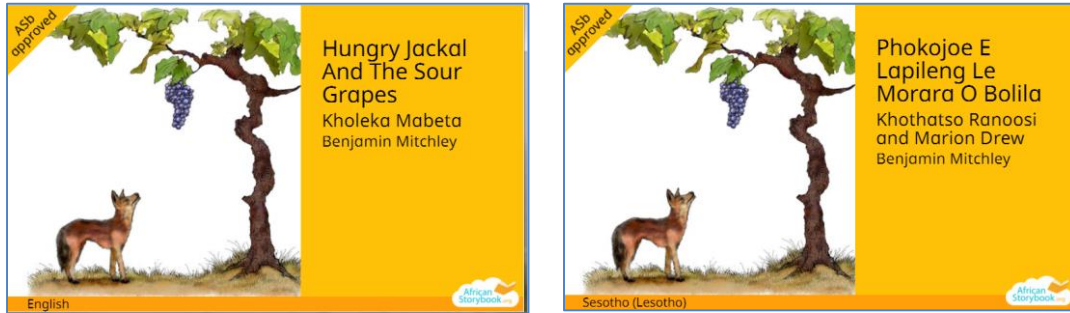
Choose a book from the list in Resource 3, one that you think will generate a good number of issues and questions. Read the storybook to children. Ask the children to listen carefully and think about an idea that is in the storybook.

1. Write each idea, issue, or concept on a separate card as the children suggest them. You might need to give an example to help the children.
2. For each issue write a question on the back of the card, for example, 'What is jealousy?' Let the children help you to think of the questions. Maybe some of the children are even able to write the questions themselves. This is valuable learning in itself.
3. From the cards choose one for discussion, or let the children choose one.
4. The children can have an open and guided discussion about the issues.

#### Resource 4: Children making their own ending to a storybook

Thinking of a different ending to a story. is an excellent way to stimulate children's imagination and it also helps with comprehension.

At Paleng Library in the mountains of Lesotho, Marion Drew and Khothatso Ranoosi read the storybook [Hungry Jackal and the Sour Grapes](#) in English and Sesotho with a group of children.



They chose the storybook because it is enjoyable, and because they wanted to talk about the idiom, 'sour grapes'. There is a similar idiom in Sesotho.

They read the storybook and used the projector to show the illustrations, which they like very much. The children enjoyed the storybook (even though the younger ones didn't understand what 'sour grapes' meant).

At the end of the lesson, they asked the children if they could think of a different ending to the story. This led to a great deal of discussion, ending with the development of an extended version of the storybook both in English and in Sesotho.

#### The original version of the storybook ended like this:

*Jackal was not happy at all. He stopped, looked back at the grapes and thought, 'Those grapes look really sour anyway.' He carried on walking. He was hungrier than before.*

#### The new ending read like this:

*Jackal left the orchard. Little Jackal came out from behind the tree. 'I know how to get those grapes,' he said to himself. He called his three big brothers. 'Come and help me get these delicious grapes,' he asked them. 'We can take them home and eat them.'*

*They all stood under the tree and looked at the grapes. 'Now we will all stand on each other's backs,' little Jackal said to his brothers. When they were ready, little Jackal climbed right onto the top of his brothers' backs. Now little Jackal could reach the bunch of grapes! He picked them, and they all went home.*

*When they got home, Jackal asked them, 'How did you get those grapes?'*

*'I had a good idea,' said little Jackal. 'My brothers helped me to reach that bunch of grapes. We all stood on each other's backs. Then I could reach those grapes.'*

*'Aaaah,' said mother Jackal, 'You see, my husband, it is a good thing never to give up. If you keep trying, you will succeed.'*

### Activity 10: Children making new endings to storybooks

Choose a storybook that you think could get a new ending.

1. Read the storybook with a group of children.
2. Before the end stop and ask, 'How do you think this story will end?'
3. Each person in the group writes down a new ending on a piece of paper.
4. Read the storybook again, but this time use one or more of the new endings from the group.
5. Decide how you could use the new endings to the story. Will you ask the children to write them down? Should they act out their new version of the storybook?

It is possible to adapt the endings of many of the storybooks on the website and to publish new versions. You can read more about adapting storybooks in *Developing, translating and adapting African Storybooks (African Storybook Guides, available on the website).*

### Resource 5: Linking reading and writing

There is a strong connection between reading and writing. You have to know how to read in order to write otherwise what are you writing will not make sense. But many children can write their name before they can read properly. It is important for children to understand the link between reading and writing.



Have a look at the video: *Emily Mbhele links reading and writing*

<https://youtu.be/R7WOZtUMus8>

When we watched the video, we noticed the following:

- When she has finished reading the storybook with the children, Emily asks the children to write three words that they liked from the story.
- Individual children read the words they have written down.
- Emily returns to the storybook and asks a child to read a page.
- Emily asks a child to identify a word on that page that they wrote down. Another child reads the next page, and so on.
- Emily asks questions about the story, such as 'Who is saying the words in the story?'
- Emily encourages the children to write down words they found in the storybook. So she is showing them that what we read we can also write.



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We can ask the children questions to encourage them to think about what they have written. These could be questions such as:

- Now that you have written your favourite word, can you find it in the storybook?
- Does it look the same? Or different?

### Activity 11: Children acting out stories

This is a favourite activity with our African Storybook teachers – from acting out individual words in a storybook, to role-playing conversations to dramatization of a whole storybook, even with dressing up.

1. Choose a storybook that you think the children can act out and read it to them. If there are interesting characters, and exciting action, the story will be good to act out.
2. To prepare the children to act the story, involve the children in a discussion about:
  - Who are the main characters?
  - What do they do?
  - Which words can you act out?
3. Let the children choose different characters to act out.
  - You can make labels for the characters to wear, and even hats or costumes for them to use.
  - The children can write out the words that they need to say – they don't have to learn them off by heart.
  - Don't hesitate to add characters to the story if all the children want to participate.



At Paleng Library, children acted out a story using dolls.

Two of the storybooks that African Storybook teachers have used for dramatisation

[The Rain Bird](#)



Paleng Library reported:

The adults told the story in both languages (Sesotho and English). Then we told the story again and asked the children to help us to dramatised it. Children acted the different people and animals in the story. We used some props like boxes to help us, and one child wore a bird costume that had been donated to us.

[Look at the animals](#) in Sepedi ([Diphoofolo tsa ka qae](#)) and in isiZulu ([Izilwane Zazepulazni](#)).

In Makgatho Primary School in Atteridgeville, the ECD teachers reported that they used masks to help the children act out this story. As the teacher was reading, the child wearing an animal mask would make the sound of their animal. Did you know that the sounds animals make are different in different languages?



Mpša e re, "Hou-hou-hou." Mpša e nyaka meetse.



Inja ikhala ithi, "Hhawu-hhawu-hhawu." Inja ifuna amanzi.

**Activity 12: Wall reading**

At Mseki Primary in Gugulethu, Nokuthula Dyonase has a method for displaying the separate pages of a storybook, so that children can read in groups. Here is her method:

1. Select an African Storybook that you would like to use with your class. This can be a new storybook, or one that the class has already read.
2. Make A4 copies of each page of the storybook, preferably in colour. If you have a laminating machine, you can laminate each page in a plastic cover (or you could use see-through plastic sleeves).
3. Put up the separate pages of the storybook on the classroom walls using Prestick. The pages should be spaced around the classroom, but in order.

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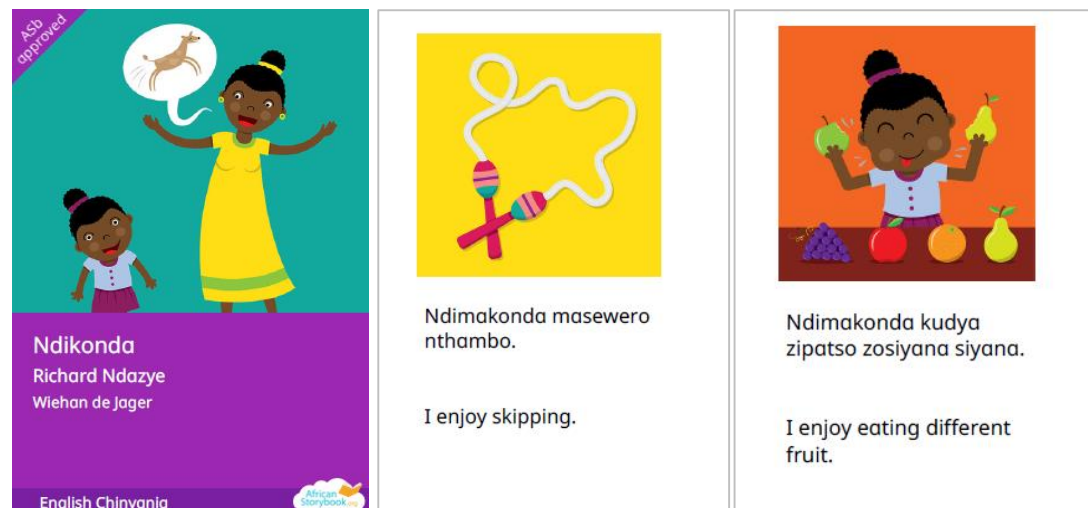
4. Divide the class into groups of 4 to 5 children. Each group goes to a page.
5. Each group reads the page they are at. It doesn't matter if they are not starting at the first page of the storybook. Make sure each person in the group gets a chance to read.
6. Then, the groups circulate round the room clockwise until they have all read the whole storybook.
7. Leave the storybook pages up on the classroom wall for a week, and then you can pass it on to a different class.

We thought that this was a good way for a single book to be used for group and individual reading not only with one class, but with many classes.

### Resource 6: Using an African Storybook in a multi-grade classroom

The material for this resource is from a video-based course for Zambian community school teachers entitled *Interactive Learning and Teaching (iAct)*, produced by [Saide](#).

One of the sequences of activities in this course shows a teacher using a bilingual English and Cinyanja storybook, [Ndikonda](#) / [I enjoy doing](#) in a multi-grade classroom.



The Grade 1 group used the local language version of the storybook to practice reading and writing in Cinyanja, while the Grade 2 and Grade 3 groups used the English version. Here is the method.

#### WHOLE CLASS READING (Grades 1, 2 and 3 together)

1. The teacher prepares by putting the separate pages of the storybook on the wall, and also writing out the words for each page on a page of flip chart paper, big enough for everyone to read. She also prepares black and white copies of the pictures to hand out to the children.

## Using African Storybooks with children



2. The teacher talks with children in the local language about what they enjoy doing. She asks the Grade 2 and 3 learners how they would say these things in English.
3. Then she turns to the local language story written out on chart paper or the board. She reads one sentence at a time, pointing to words as she reads.
4. She hands out the black and white copies of the pictures to children. When she reads a sentence, a learner holds up the correct picture to describe the action.



5. Finally, the teacher reads the storybook out loud in English from her copy.

## Using African Storybooks with children

### GROUP WORK (Grade 1)

The teacher asks children to make a drawing of themselves doing something they enjoy, and to try to write the action word on the picture, for example, jumping or eating.



Grade 2 and 3 learners are organised into three different ability groups and given different tasks to do.

**Group 1:** Children build words from the letters that have been cut out of old newspapers and magazines.



1. Each child in the group chooses an action word from the African Storybook story, *enjoy*, written on a card.
2. The child finds letters to make this word.
3. She writes the word on her piece of paper, and draws a picture of it.

**Group 2:** Children match the sentences to the pictures.

This picture shows how to make the resources for the task.



## Using African Storybooks with children

Each child:

1. Chooses one sentence and picture.
2. Writes out the sentence.
3. Draws own picture to illustrate the action in the sentence.

**Group 3:** Children write a sentence that describes the action in the picture that they chose.



1. Each child in the group chooses one of the action pictures cut from the newspapers or magazines and writes a sentence about it.
2. Each child writes a sentence describing the action in the picture that they have chosen and then draw their own picture to illustrate the action or activity.

### WHOLE CLASS REPORTBACK



As each child shows their work to the whole class, the teacher writes action words in both English and Cinyanja on the chalkboard.

The final list of action words is a consolidation of the vocabulary learned in the lesson.

### **Other African Storybooks with which a similar method could be used**

*Friends*. After reading this story together, learners can draw a picture of themselves doing something with a friend. The teacher asks them for a sentence about the picture and writes it. They read and copy the sentence.

*Disability is not inability*. After reading this story together, learners can draw a picture of someone they know who has a disability, and something that person does. The teacher asks them for a sentence about the picture and writes it. They read and copy the sentence.

*My teacher*. After reading this story together, learners can draw a picture of their teacher. The teacher asks them for a sentence about the picture and writes it. They read and copy the sentence.

*Pendo our cow*. After reading this story together, learners can draw a picture of an animal, plant (or person) whom they take care of. The teacher asks them for a sentence about the picture and writes it. They read and copy the sentence.

These same storybooks could be used to prepare tasks involving matching pictures and sentences.

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### ***African Storybook Guides:***

*Preparing to use African Storybooks with children*

*Using African Storybooks with children*

*Developing, translating and adapting African Storybooks*



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