WHAT'S INSIDE

- Libraries and Literacy
- Story Sacks for the EFL Learner - An exciting way of bringing books to life
- The Story behind Story Sacks: Neil Griffiths and his “little red bag that changes lives”
- Promoting Literacy with Reading Events
The importance of sharing books and stories with young children has been long recognized (Fisher and Fisher-Medvic, 2000). By greatly enlarging the size of a storybook, you can create a comfortable atmosphere of bedtime story reading with an entire class. A shared reading event tends to be enjoyable, cooperative and interactive, enabling children to engage in genuine reading at a level beyond which they might be able to do independently. Holdaway (1979) says that “from the child’s point of view, the situation is among the happiest and most secure in his/her experience”.

Using story sacks during Shared Reading offers a multi-sensory approach to the reading process. Story sacks bring the characters to life and allow children to interact with the book on a higher level. Their eyes are seeing what their ears are hearing what their tongues are saying what their hands are feeling. Through voice, eye, gesture and touch, the children are drawn into the story. In this way, multisensory teaching is simultaneously visual, auditory, and kinesthetic-tactile (VAKT) that potentially enhances memory and language learning (Putnam, L.R. 1996). Children especially love to use their sense of touch. Because story sacks include soft toys, props and puppets, children get to examine the characters ‘in person’. This kinesthetic-tactile reinforcement tends to increase knowledge of characters, plot and sequence of the story. The use of accompanying interactive resources such as flashcards, games and percussion instruments can further enhance the shared reading experience where learning to read and reading to learn becomes a possibility as well as a reality. As a methodology set in a non-competitive learning environment, foreign language learners construct meaning through participation and social interaction while sharing books. This in turn enables them to gain confidence, share knowledge and self-correct. It’s making the most of reading together!

Story sacks enhance the shared reading experience and bring your books to life in the EFL classroom. This multisensory approach has the potential to enhance children’s language abilities immensely, by engaging and exciting children about reading. Story sacks are a motivating, challenging and colourful resource in the EFL classroom. Use them to increase children’s interest, involvement and understanding of stories.

References:
The Table shows a number of sample activities for using Story Sacks during the three stages of Shared Reading, which can be staggered over a period of a week. These activities can be adapted to suit any story sack which could address a common theme of the English Curriculum, e.g. My Family/My Body/Animals. Depending on the time of day and focus of the reading, you may just want to include a few props and scenery, rather than engaging in Shared Reading response activities, such as games. Remember, if you interrupt the flow of the story or ask too many questions, the children may lose interest in the story altogether.

### Sample Activities for using Story Sacks in a Shared Reading lesson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sack Item</th>
<th>Pre-Shared Reading</th>
<th>While Shared Reading</th>
<th>Post-Shared Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiction Book</td>
<td>Discuss the cover, title, author, illustrator and picture. Ask students to predict what the story will be about.</td>
<td>Demonstration The teacher reads the story aloud. The pace should be lively with few stops. Point to each line as you read to reinforce left-to-right orientation. Participation Ask the children to join in when they can and to predict how the story will develop. Practice Read parts of the story and take turns reading. Allow the children to dominate.</td>
<td>Reread children's favourite parts. Reread direct speech with expression. Cover key words and children can invent suitable alternatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenery</td>
<td>Introduce and describe the setting for the story.</td>
<td>Use different backdrops when moving from scene to scene. Children can describe the backdrop using adjectives.</td>
<td>Recall the different settings in the story. Create a new setting for the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puppets/masks</td>
<td>Introduce main characters. Describe the characters.</td>
<td>Assign puppets to different children, who present them throughout the story. Use the puppet or mask to read the dialogue during the story.</td>
<td>Performance- Use puppets to act out the story in a puppet theatre. Sit in the ‘Character’s Chair’ and wear a mask when answering questions based on events in the story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Props</td>
<td>Introduce key objects only.</td>
<td>Objects can be revealed from the story sack to maintain interest.</td>
<td>Retell a favourite part of the story using props.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashcards</td>
<td>Introduce key vocabulary.</td>
<td>Stop throughout the story and draw their attention to difficult words.</td>
<td>Recall key vocabulary - Play music and pass a box. When the music stops, the child holding the box chooses a word and reads it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassette</td>
<td>Listen to the beginning of the story and predict the storyline.</td>
<td>In small groups share a book, listen to the story and read along.</td>
<td>Make your own audio tape of the children reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percussion Instruments</td>
<td>Introduce each character with a different sound effect.</td>
<td>Where appropriate, introduce instruments throughout the story as sound effects, e.g. chime bells for a princess.</td>
<td>Retell the story in sequence using chosen instruments to represent main characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>Complete a jigsaw puzzle of the front cover of the story - then guess the title!</td>
<td>Play an ‘I spy’ game using words in the text, objects in the sack or details in the pictures.</td>
<td>Sequencing games – reorder the pictures. Vocabulary games – bingo, word searches and crosswords. Board games - using the story setting and vocabulary, make a customized version of monopoly, dominoes, dice games.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction book</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Related to the story. Can be read independently.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shared reading is a type of co-operative reading, where the teacher reads a text to the children and invites them to read along when they can. Both the teacher and students read orally using a book large enough for all to see. The relaxed, supportive atmosphere of Shared Reading allows children to develop their English skills in a meaningful context.

For more about this fun, simple, interactive and efficient reading approach, see Fíodhna’s feature in issue #1 of Classroom Connections, “Shared Reading: making it work in the second language classroom”.

In The Classroom

What is Shared Reading?

Q: How did you begin the initiative?
Fíodhna: I worked as a Language Coordinator in a primary school in Kuwait. I sent home a letter to parents, explaining the idea behind the ‘Story Sacks Initiative’, which was to establish more literacy links between home and school and promote a love of reading in English. They were also invited to observe ‘Story Sacks in Action’ during a parent’s information evening.

Q: How did you promote story sacks at the parents’ evening?
Fíodhna: We put a variety of story sacks on display and we modeled the shared reading process, using props, puppets and scenery. The parents were reassured that they should not expect their child to be able to read independently, that it was to be shared or read to the child. Children love to have good books reread to them so therefore taking the time to read it again (and again) was emphasized!

Q: What was the borrowing process organized?
Fíodhna: Once the initiative began, each child was given a Story Sack about once a fortnight, after their name was drawn from ‘a magic box’. He/she kept the story sack for three nights, and then returned it to school, where a favourite part of the story was retold in a ‘show and tell’ session. Then the next child’s name would be drawn from the magic box.

Q: How did you ensure that all items were accounted for in the story sacks?
Fíodhna: I took photographs of the contents of each sack and put these in a folder for children to browse through. Each child was given a tag with their name on it. When children selected a sack, they placed their name tag onto the appropriate ticket. A checklist of the sack’s contents proved useful in ensuring all items were returned intact.

Q: Did they invent ideas of their own?
Fíodhna: Yes! I found that parents had many ideas for toys, props and scenery and I was able to help them create appropriate language games and prompt cards to go with the sacks.

Story Sacks in Action - The Kuwait Context

Fíodhna explains to recent B.Ed graduates how she involved the parents of the children in her Primary School class in a story sacks initiative.

Q: How did you begin the initiative?
Fíodhna: I worked as a Language Coordinator in a primary school in Kuwait. I sent home a letter to parents, explaining the idea behind the ‘Story Sacks Initiative’, which was to establish more literacy links between home and school and promote a love of reading in English. They were also invited to observe ‘Story Sacks in Action’ during a parent’s information evening.

Q: How did you promote story sacks at the parents’ evening?
Fíodhna: We put a variety of story sacks on display and we modeled the shared reading process, using props, puppets and scenery. The parents were reassured that they should not expect their child to be able to read independently, that it was to be shared or read to the child. Children love to have good books reread to them so therefore taking the time to read it again (and again) was emphasized!

Q: How was the borrowing process organized?
Fíodhna: Once the initiative began, each child was given a Story Sack about once a fortnight, after their name was drawn from ‘a magic box’. He/she kept the story sack for three nights, and then returned it to school, where a favourite part of the story was retold in a ‘show and tell’ session. Then the next child’s name would be drawn from the magic box.

Q: How did you ensure that all items were accounted for in the story sacks?
Fíodhna: I took photographs of the contents of each sack and put these in a folder for children to browse through. Each child was given a tag with their name on it. When children selected a sack, they placed their name tag onto the appropriate ticket. A checklist of the sack’s contents proved useful in ensuring all items were returned intact.

Q: Did they invent ideas of their own?
Fíodhna: Yes! I found that parents had many ideas for toys, props and scenery and I was able to help them create appropriate language games and prompt cards to go with the sacks.

There were a variety of Story Sacks to choose from, including both fiction and non-fiction. In this way, the story sacks didn’t lose their appeal!

Q: How did you ensure that all items were accounted for in the story sacks?
Fíodhna: I took photographs of the contents of each sack and put these in a folder for children to browse through. Each child was given a tag with their name on it. When children selected a sack, they placed their name tag onto the appropriate ticket. A checklist of the sack’s contents proved useful in ensuring all items were returned intact.

Q: What was the response from parents?
Fíodhna: Having received a positive response from parents, some decided to make their own story sacks to share with their younger children at home. As a follow-up session, parents were invited to create their own story sack. I divided them into three groups and each group worked on ideas for a given story sack title, e.g. ‘Elmer’ by David McKee. We then discussed their ideas and selected the most appropriate ones.

Q: Did they invent ideas of their own?
Fíodhna: Yes! I found that parents had many ideas for toys, props and scenery and I was able to help them create appropriate language games and prompt cards to go with the sacks.