

Picture Books in Early Childhood Foreign Language Education

Zhivka Stoyanova Ilieva

Dobrich College, Shumen University, Bulgaria

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Abstract.

Picture books unite text, pictures, special design. The work is practical. It aims at presenting ideas for using authentic picture books with very young learners, the author's experience and conclusions. A selection of 10 stories (out of a bigger corpus) is presented. They can be used as an exemplar reading list for very young learners as a basis of English language teaching syllabus. A set of sentences for adaptation in each story is offered together with variants for change or activities that make these difficult expressions easily understandable and memorable. Certain books are easily combined with other materials (songs, rhymes, games). The article outlines various approaches that can be based on picture books.

Keywords: drama, English across the curriculum; kindergarten; lexical approach; listening and speaking skills

1. Introduction

Picture books are a unique phenomenon in our society. When presented and used properly they attract and keep learners' motivation.

1.1 Title of the 2nd level (TNR 12pt., bold)

Books provide not only opportunities to work according to the lexical approach but also to integrate knowledge of all the disciplines in the curriculum realizing a variant of soft content and language integrated learning approach or teaching English across the curriculum. They provide context for the development of listening and speaking skills, and also lay foundations for the development of reading later at school.

1.1.1 Authentic language input

The work views picture books as an authentic language input that provides learners with whole chunks to use in conversations. As an authentic text picture books are very suitable for

lexical approach work, integrative approach work. They set context for listening and speaking skills development. They create positive attitude to books and reading.

1.1.2 Reading list

We present a collection of 10 picture books for work in the kindergarten. The readability indices of the books are calculated

1.1.3 Activities for very young learners based on picture books

The activities we offer are realized over three lessons per each book. They include listening to the story, discussing topics, problems, illustrations, substituting one or more slots in various sentences, drama, using suitable songs and games.

2. Body of paper: Picture books and very young learners

We have compiled a corpus of 90 stories for children. It is still developing. These stories are analysed in relation to readability indices, the potential for realizing cross-curricular links and for multiple literacies development. Most of these stories are approved at the kindergarten and at the primary school. Sometimes the most successful stories with the children are not the ones with the lowest indices. Out of this corpus we have chosen 10 authentic picture books suitable for young and very young learners. These are modern books with attractive design that can usually be found in bookstores or purchased on-line. As a result of this study we offer a reading list of 10 books and activities for work with young and very young learners towards communicative and linguistic development.

2.1. Authentic language input

Picture books we use are usually specially designed for very young native speakers of English. As such they offer natural language in natural context. The target reader is the same age as the foreign language learner and is still acquiring his/her native language. Language is presented in such a way that children easily understand it, learn the phrases by heart and then easily apply them in games or in conversations. Therefore the books we have chosen for this experiment are books with expressions suitable for the topics covered in the kindergarten or the primary school and topics similar to those in the other subjects in the curriculum.

2.1.1 Lexical approach with very young learners through picture books

People think in whole phrases, the same way they acquire language: they remember whole chunks and later are able to retrieve and use these chunks (Davis and Kryszewska, 2013; Lewis, 1993; McCarthy et al, 2010; Hill, 2000). Children like listening to their favourite stories again and again. This way they remember the whole story or the words of the characters.

In Dellar's (Dellar, 2013) opinion teaching lexically, teaching through whole language means that learners meet the most common structures very often (in each lesson). Exposing the

learners to language this way aids them in understanding English. Picture books present language as whole, moreover in the book text, pictures and design work as a whole.

When teaching lexically learners' attention is directed to useful expressions that can be included directly in a conversation (Ilieva 2015). We point young learners' attention to such expressions during games and drama activities.

2.1.2 Integrative approach (CLIL or English across the curriculum)

We view the integrative approach as a variation of soft CLIL (for soft CLIL see Ball, 2015): we incorporate material from other subjects into the English language lessons (Ilieva, 2016).

The variety of topics picture books offer provide a wealth of cross-curricular links. Brewster et al (2002) and Ellis and Brewster (2014) view the opportunities for cross-curricular work of the stories for children. A team of researchers promote teaching Mathematics through stories (Anderson et al, 2004; Casey et al, 2008; Casey et al, 2004; Elia et al 2010; Hassinger-Das et al, 2015; Rathé et al 2016; Rogers, 2015, Young-Loveridge, 2004).

2.1.3 Context for listening and speaking skills development

Reading stories to the learners practises their receptive skills: not only listening but understanding from the context, understanding with the help of the illustrations in the book, using the tone of voice and intonation as a clue, the storyteller's mime, gestures and other actions.

The activities based on stories usually include repeating the same phrases in a variety of ways in order to be remembered and later on included in conversations and drama activities. Drama activities contribute to the long lasting remembering of the phrases used (Clipson-Boyles, 1998; Roth, 1998). Hillyard (2015) sees books for children as a suitable context for drama activities.

2.1.4 Positive attitude to reading

When children are read to, when they have the opportunity to touch a book, they usually develop interest in listening to stories, in books and later in reading.

Tulloch et al (2012) claim that "Children's literature is the basis for good quality shared reading and writing across the curriculum. It is also the basis of motivating your pupils to become lifelong readers. Instigating a love of reading is part of the primary teacher's responsibility."

2.2. Reading list

We offer ten titles (out of a corpus of 90). They can be developed over a year if there is one lesson per week or over half a year if there are 2 lessons per week. We offer three lesson on each book, they can be extended or shortened. Activities can be adapted to other titles as well so the suggested books can be substituted by the ones teachers have in the classroom.

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Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



There's a monster under my bed (Robinson, 2014)

Mess monsters (Shoshan, 2008)

Millie the millipede (Ranson, 2013)

The best bed (Litton & Miller, 2012)

The very hungry caterpillar (Carle, 2016)

Monkey puzzle (Donaldson & Scheffler, 2016)

Mungo monkey goes to school (Monks, 2014)

Odd dog out (Riddulph, 2017)

The things I love about bedtime (Moroney, 2009)

We're not scared (Inpken & Inpken, 2014)

Children love monster stories. They offer a wealth of images, fonts and topics for cross-curricular links.

The other three stories offer links to biology: the development of an insect, insects' food, where various animals live. Pictures aid understanding.

There two monkey stories. In one of them a little monkey is looking for Mum, meeting various animals: reptiles, birds, a spider, an insect, amphibian, other mammals. In the other one Mungo monkey goes to school with other animals and there they have to find bugs. There is a rich potential for cross-curricular links and for a variety of conversations (while looking for mum or while playing at school and looking for bugs).

The Odd dog out is developing tolerance and understanding together with observation skills. The things I love about bedtime can be used for discussing daily routines: brushing teeth etc. before going to bed, talking about our day and discussing happenings with parents. Zoe and Beans: We're not afraid is discussing various activities and the fact that grown up children are usually not afraid of anything, but still do not like to stay in the dark. These books offer both social and natural topics for discussion and activities.

2.3. Activities for very young learners based on picture books

We discuss activities suitable for kindergarten: children listen to the teacher reading, then the book is discussed, the discussion is usually followed by games that reinforce certain structures that are used in the follow up drama activities. Picture books for children are easily combined with rhymes and songs and can be used for nonverbal activities (arts, crafts, dancing, TPR (total physical response) activities) that later are used as a basis of speaking activities.

We offer the following plan for activities with picture books:

Lesson 1

- Listening to the story 1

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Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



- Discussion for understanding
- Listening 2 with a task
- Activities / games practising the expressions from the book

Lesson 2

- Listening 3
- Activities / games practising the expressions from the book
- Drama activities

Lesson 2

- Listening 4
- Drama activities
- Songs and rhymes suitable for the topic of the story

There's a monster under my bed (Robinson, 2014)

Gunning Fog index: 3,99

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 4,93

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 3,37

ARI (Automated Readability Index): 2,11

These indices are calculated on the basis of the number of words per sentence and number of syllables per word. Mostly they show the number of years of education needed to understand the text. This is a comparatively easy text and understanding is aided by the illustrations in the book.

The programme offers a list of sentences to rewrite in order to improve readability. We can either adapt or we can practise these expressions so that children acquire them despite their level of difficulty.

For this story some of the sentences are:

- As Billy carefully opened the jar of tasty cookies, the naughty monster found the fridge full of fresh food behind him.

This sentence can be divided into two:

Billy (carefully) opened the jar of tasty cookies. The naughty monster found the fridge full of fresh food.

This sentence sets context for an activity on food (What is there in the fridge?) and a discussion about healthy/junk food.

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Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



- Billy watched, amazed, as the monster twirled and spun, flinging toys and clothes back into their places once more.

This sentence can be left as it is. Here we can practise toys (all kinds of animals and vehicles), clothes and furniture (cupboard, shelves, wardrobe).

- “You keep getting me in trouble,” he said crossly, as the monster crawled out from his hiding place.
- “It’s quite handy having a monster around, after all,” thought Billy to himself.
- “It’ll be done in no time,” said the monster, whizzing around the room at top speed.
- “There are some cookies in the cookie jar,” replied Billy.

Here we can omit indirect speech shortening both the text and the sentences this way. The last sentence can be a start for a game Who Took The Cookie from the Cookie Jar?

- As quick as a flash, Billy raced out of his bedroom, down the stairs and hid in a cupboard.
- “Sorry, Billy,” said the monster, feeling a little embarrassed.
- The monster leapt off the sofa and bounced all around the room.
- In the living room, the monster was jumping on the sofa.
- When the room was tidy again, Billy sat down for breakfast.

Although the programme suggests changes, we can keep these sentences. With the first one we can practise the rooms in the house, the second one gives ideas for practising excuses and politeness. The third and the fourth sentences set context for discussing furniture and what we can and must not do (jumping on the sofa). Here we can use a song 10 Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed or Five Little Monsters.

Ideas for drama:

- Meeting the monster (greeting each other, introducing oneself)

I think there’s something under the bed.

Let’s see. / Let’s run! / Run!

Who are you?

Hello! I’m ... What’s your name?

Let’s play together. / Let’s have fun!

- Conversation with mum

What’s going on in here?

It wasn’t me, Mum.

Then who was?

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Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



It was the monster.

I see. Go upstairs!

Tidy all this mess!

- Conversations with the monster while eating, while having fun, while tidying up.

Mess monsters (Shoshan, 2008)

Gunning Fog index: 5,05

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 2,72

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 3,87

ARI (Automated Readability Index): 0,87

For this story some of the sentences offered for rewriting are:

- What I didn't know, Was that under my bed, Was a big gang of monsters Who'd heard what I'd said.

Although the sentence is quite complex, we can practise it putting various toys (a giraffe, an elephant, a wolf, a fox, etc.) under the table, under the chair, later on we can put them on the table, on the chair. We can only change past perfect tense for past simple. This way a complex construction turns into a game: in turn learners can change the animals and choose where to put them.

- One day Mummy said That my room was a mess, And because it's untidy She suffers from stress.

This sentence can be turned from indirect into direct speech: Oh, what a mess! From all this mess I suffer from stress! Tidy your room!

- I said, "I need the mess, It's better that way, If I tidied my room I just wouldn't play!

The two sentences are role played in pairs with expressive intonation.

Millie the millipede (Ranson, 2013)

Gunning Fog index: 7,09

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 5,87

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 5,49

ARI (Automated Readability Index): 4,69

For this story some of the sentences are:

- It's a rainy night and it's very dark, Something is moving in the leaves and bark.

The sentence can be split into three simple sentences: *It's a rainy night. It's very dark. Something is moving in/among the leaves.*

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Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



These sentences and the following ones:

Millie is feeling very full, her feast is nearly through, There's just time for a cherry red and a berry blue.

During the day, in a nest that she's made, Millie closes her eyes and her spots slowly fade.

When Millie wakes up, she looks terribly plain, But her spots will come back when she's eating again!

can be pantomimed, providing physical activity for the children during the English language lesson.

The best bed (Litton & Miller, 2012)

Gunning Fog index: 5,63

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 2,85

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 3,33

ARI (Automated Readability Index): 1,26

For this story some of the sentences are:

The following complex sentences can be made into more simple sentences:

- Very tired Pip wants to sleep – he needs to rest his aching feet – when who should flutter down this way?
- There's lots of room, It's tall and wide, But wait – he's yet to see inside.
- He's just caught sight of one more bed – it looks so snug in Buddy's shed!

These sentences can be learned by the learners during multiple storytelling while showing the pictures:

- Pip moves on with a weary sigh To a golden hive that's caught his eye.
- He starts a search for somewhere new – a comfy bed with a charming view.
- Ruby says: "I must admit, With all your feet, you just won't fit!"

Here we can use only the direct speech for drama activities.

Ideas for drama:

We can easily create dialogues between Pip and the other animals he meets while looking for a suitable home (greeting, asking a permission, inviting, accepting or declining invitations, saying goodbye and wishing a nice day).

The very hungry caterpillar (Carle, 2016)

Gunning Fog index: 8,69

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 6,08

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Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 5,50

ARI (Automated Readability Index): 4,17

For this story the sentences are:

- On Saturday he ate through one piece of chocolate cake, one ice-cream cone, one pickle, one slice of swiss cheese, one slice of salami, one lollipop, one piece of cherry pie, one sausage, one cupcake, and one slice of watermelon.
- He built a small house around himself, called a Cocoon, And he stayed inside for more than two weeks.
- Now he wasn't hungry anymore, and he wasn't a little caterpillar anymore.
- The caterpillar ate through one nice green leaf, and after that he felt much better.
- out of the egg came a tiny and very hungry caterpillar.

Children easily understand them due to rich visualization. The context gives opportunity for creating dialogues for drama (see Ilieva & Terzieva, 2018).

Monkey puzzle (Donaldson & Scheffler, 2016)

Gunning Fog index: 3,81

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 0,92

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 0,94

ARI (Automated Readability Index): 2,52

For this story some of the sentences are:

- I told you, she's got no wings at all, And anyway, she's not nearly so small!

Can become *I told you: she has no wings. She's not so small.*

- It's legs we're looking for now, you say?

Can be shortened to *It's legs we're looking for?*

- You never told me she looked like you!
- Your mummy's hiding above your head.
- Butterfly, butterfly, can't you see?
- She's down by the river, having a drink!
- Brown fur – why didn't you tell me so?
- Why do you keep on getting it wrong?
- She's brown and furry, and nice to cuddle.

Are not changed.

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Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



- We'll find her in no time – off we go!
- Then she's very near, Quick, little monkey!

Are divided into two simple sentences.

This story is very rich in situations for drama and role play. The dialogue between the little monkey and the butterfly can be extended and conversations with each character they meet can be added so that more children participate in the dramatization.

Mungo monkey goes to school (Monks, 2014)

Gunning Fog index: 6,01

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 4,91

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 4,28

ARI (Automated Readability Index): 2,06

For this story the sentences are:

- Then there's just enough time for Mungo's favourite story before everyone goes home.

The whole sentence can be skipped (for ideas for adapting stories see Ilieva, 2013).

- Mungo's teacher, Miss Raffy, is waiting outside the school.

Is another sentence that can be turned into a substitution game:

First we start with the characters from the book: Mungo's friend, Hattie / Otto, is waiting outside his/her home.

Then we use toys to change the animals in the beginning:

e.g. My friend, the fox, is waiting outside. Or My favourite toy, the teddy bear, is...

Actions can also be changed: My friend, the fox, is walking in the park.

Ideas for drama:

Drama activities start with Mum waking Mungo in the morning, the family having breakfast, Mum saying Let's go.

Meeting each friend, greeting with Good morning and inviting them to join the journey.

Conversation between the children on the way to school.

Meeting the teacher in the morning.

The teacher setting the tasks for the day.

Conversations between friends while looking for bugs and while playing outside.

Saying goodbye to the teacher and to the friends.

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Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



Odd dog out (Riddulph, 2017)

Gunning Fog index: 4,34

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 1,30

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 1,92

ARI (Automated Readability Index): -0,71

For this story some of the sentences are:

- “It’s true,“ she sniffs, “I’ve tried my best, But I’m not made like all the rest.”
- You’ve made us all appreciate That being different’s really great!
- Somebody this afternoon Is whistling a different tune.
- On her own and out of place, She sighs a sigh and packs her case.
- I’m sorry but I have to fly.
- She smiles a smile And grabs her bag.

Can be played out (words, mime, gestures).

Ideas for drama:

Conversations between the two odd dogs

Give advice to the odd dog

The things I love about bedtime (Moroney, 2009)

Gunning Fog index: 5,58

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 5,10

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 4,01

ARI (Automated Readability Index): 2,41

For this story some of the sentences are:

- Of all the millions and squillions of little bunnies around the world, how did I get so lucky to have the best one?
- Mum pretends she is a huggle-monster and chases me into bed, and gives me a great big hug.
- or, sailing in a pirate ship on a sea of raspberry jam and goldfish.
- I snuggle into bed with my teddy-bunny and Dad reads me a story.
- Remembering my best moments makes me feel good about being me!

Some of them can be translated, others can be played out.

THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL SCIENCES & HUMANITIES

Barcelona, Spain

12-14 December, 2019



This story gives opportunities for discussing routines before going to bed (brushing teeth, putting on pyjamas, reading a story, talking to mum and dad).

We're not scared (Inpken & Inpken, 2014)

Gunning Fog index: 2,16

Coleman Liau index Coleman Liau index: 0,53

Flesch Kincaid Grade level: 1,23

ARI (Automated Readability Index): -1,23

For this story the sentences are:

- We're not scared of washing our hair.
- We're not scared of anything!
- We're not scared of jumping in!
- We're not scared of big balloons.

These sentences can be demonstrated or translated and pantomimed.

3. Conclusion (TNR 14pt., bold)

Picture books are suitable for work with young and very young learners. They are made for native speakers of the same age. Therefore they easily grab learners attention. As a result of preparing a corpus of stories for children we have chosen 10 picture books for work over a year at the kindergarten. The activities we offer develop listening and speaking skills, interest in reading and books. They create links to other spheres and provoke discussions. When applying an on-line instrument for readability indices calculation, we receive a list of sentences for change in order to improve text readability. Some of these sentences are easily shortened or adapted, others are used as a basis of repetition games.

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Barcelona, Spain

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Resources

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Songs

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- [38] Who Took The Cookie? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzKY5YHnOTg>