



PRAESA

*Nurturing the growth of
biliteracy and multilingualism*



*The Project for the Study of
Alternative Education in South Africa*

Choosing books

As with many things in life, the books and stories we like are often a matter of personal taste – and we need to take this into account when we are choosing stories to read to children. Just like with us, there will be some stories that they like more than others.

But most of us are drawn to great stories ... because they weave magic! They are the stories that we can all relate to in some way. They have depth, are well-written and, most often, they have themes that relate to the experience of being human – themes like love, acceptance, rejection, good versus evil, choice, power, resilience, struggle and so on. Great stories are the ones that we think about long after we have read the words on the last page.

How to choose books

Most often the books that we choose to read to children are the ones that we like! So, when you are trying to decide whether or not to share a particular story with children, it's worth thinking about *why you* like the book!

Here are some guiding questions to help you decide whether you want to share a book with a particular child or group of children:

- * Does this story touch on a real-life experience that you have had or one that you can relate to? Will the children be able to relate to this and/or is it a real-life experience for them?
- * Do you like the pictures/illustrations? What is it about them that you dislike or feel drawn to?

- * How does the experience of reading the book make you feel? Does the story touch on emotions that you can relate to? Does this make you like or dislike the book?
- * Does the length of the story feel right?
- * Does the story have themes or concepts that you could explore further, talk about or think about with the children?
- * Will you enjoy reading the story to the children?

Books to choose

Here are a few ideas on the different kinds of books to choose for sharing with children.

- * Books for babies and young children should be in their home language wherever possible.
- * Babies enjoy board books and cloth books and the bonus is that these are virtually indestructible! They respond well to brightly-coloured pictures of objects or people with simple text that has rhythm and/or rhyme.
- * Pop-up and flap books are also firm favourites with toddlers.
- * Wordless books are a great investment. You can use them to tell a story to children and they can also use them to create their own stories.
- * Young children often enjoy books of rhymes as well as books in which the text has a strong rhythm, or in which phrases are repeated. Through the rhythm and rhyme in these books, children experience the sounds of our languages. The repetition in them (for example, "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!"), allows children to join in by saying some of the words of the story, even before they are able to read.
- * Choose some books that reflect things that will be familiar to the children you read to – for example, books in which the homes look like your children's homes. Choose other books that provide new experiences, such as folktales or stories set in different places and cultures.
- * Choose stories that enable young children to join someone else's world for a moment. These kinds of stories help children to begin learning how to step into someone else's shoes and to see life from a different perspective. Developing the

ability to do this takes lots of practice but is essential for the development of empathy. Stories provide a safe place to start the process.

- * Search on the internet or in the library for award-winning books.