

Creating a Story Box

Developed by Amanda Layton

Story Boxes: Looking Beyond the Book, Thinking Inside the Box

Objective/Goal:

In this experience, educators can explore tools to enrich and extend children's literature using a variation on Wolf Trap Coffee Can Theater in order to ignite a way of thinking that will allow the teacher to see the book beyond the page and bring it to life with creative arts experiences.

This experience enhances children's literature by creating sensory experiences in the classroom through the use of creative containers, engaging objects, and music.

Educational Impact:

- ✓ Comprehension
 - ✓ Memory
 - ✓ Vocabulary
 - ✓ Creative problem-solving
 - ✓ Prosody
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Materials Needed:

- ✓ A box decorated with pictures of scene/characters from the book *We're Going on a Lion Hunt* by David Axtell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999)
 - ✓ Two girls
 - ✓ A lion
 - ✓ Green felt (grass)
 - ✓ Blue paper (lake)
 - ✓ Brown paper (swamp)
 - ✓ Foam cave
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Procedure and Process:

Story boxes facilitate a range of early childhood developmental domains and enhance children's learning in the classroom while utilizing a variety of learning styles and intelligences. Creating a box full of found objects can, with a little imagination, provide many dance, theatrical, and creative

experiences. Using story boxes creates an environment; introduces characters or the setting of a story; and stimulates children's creativity, problem-solving, and imagination.

Any box/container will work when creating your story box, although size and shape are dictated by the size of the objects inside. Most importantly, the items inside should remain hidden from view, allowing their revelation to become part of the ritual. Keeping the contents of the box a mystery helps to create suspense and interest.

Outside the Box

Decorating the outside of the box can be as simple as gluing on a photocopied picture from a book, or as elaborate as you'd like to imagine. Visual clues on the outside, hinting at the theme or characters inside, become the first lesson. When introducing a new box, you might ask:

What do you think might be inside?

Can anyone guess who is living inside my box?

What was your clue?

Making predictions and connecting the symbol on the outside with the theme or story inside is a great way to become acquainted with a new story.

Introduction to a New Story Box

Introducing the box to the children, ask them what they see on the outside. Elicit ideas about what might be inside the box.

What do you see on the outside of the box?

What do you think might live inside here?

Why do you think that?

What do you think it might look like?

For example, if introducing a box with a picture of a farm animal on the front, consider asking the children to not only answer you verbally, but also to show you how they move.

Think in your mind—don't say it out loud!—of one farm animal you might find inside our farm box. Can you show us how your animal might move?

How does it sound?

This becomes a great guessing game for the children to play, and allows for practice of predicting and associating symbols with objects and ideas.

Inside the Box

When searching for items to put inside the box, be flexible. Children are forgiving if the doll inside doesn't exactly match the character from the book. They are happy to call a piece of green construction paper "grass," if you establish it as such. Their ability to substitute your symbol of grass for that of the savannah setting in your story comes naturally. It only requires a little imagination!

Where to Find Story Box Props



Your backyard: Nature's bounty makes for wonderful themed boxes. Fall-themed boxes filled with leaves, acorns, and pine cones; or spring boxes with flowers, seeds, and dirt are great accompaniments to your seasonal literature.

The thrift store or garage sales: Any thrift store usually has small, inexpensive dolls, stuffed animals, and knick-knacks that work great for story props.

Dollar store or craft supply stores: Although craft stores can be somewhat expensive, sales and coupons can help with those must-have items.

Your own basement/garage/attic: Don't forget about your son's stuffed animal collection, or the many little fast food toys that collect dust around the house. They often

make wonderful representations of characters or movement phrases.

Photos and magazines: Simply cut pictures from magazines or old books, use old photographs, or print images you find online. With a little lamination, and a stick glued to the back, you've created easy puppet characters.

Selecting a Book to Use with Story Boxes

The physical construction of the story box is easy. It can be more difficult to choose a book that inspires a box. Some books may be more appropriate than others when it comes to engaging children in creative drama and dance experiences.

Look for books that have:

- Repeated dialogue or phrases
- A clear sequence of events
- Words that inspire movement
- An interesting setting or environment
- Animals as characters

Books that inspire storytelling and dramatic role-play

Books that inspire drama experiences will often have several defined characters with repeated actions or dialogue; will have an easy to follow sequence of events; and will have a clear beginning, middle and end. *Are you My Mother* by P.D. Eastman (New York: Random House, 1960), *The Very Busy Spider* by Eric Carle (New York: Putnam, 1984) and *We're Going on a Lion Hunt* by David Axtell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1999) are great examples of books that allow children to actively participate in role-playing. All three have repetitive dialogue that provides opportunities to actively participate in telling and retelling the story, either as a group or individually.



Story Box for We're Going on a Lion Hunt

Introduce the story as you pull out the characters from the box.

We're going on a lion hunt. We're going to catch a big one!

We're not scared! We've been here before.

Bring out the older sister.

Bring out the little sister.

Bring out the grass, lake, swamp, and cave, repeating the character's dialogue in between each prop. Cue the children for participation in dialogue as well as hand gestures for the phrases.

We can't go over it; we can't go under it; we can't go around it; we must go through it.

When the story sequence is finished, ask the children to recall what order the objects came out of the box.

Who came out of the box first?

Who came out second?

What did we see third?