

## **The Strategy: Coffee Can Theatre**

Coffee Can Theatre is strategy for sharing stories in which the teller uses small props to represent characters and elements of setting. Children can then retell and sequence the story in a hands-on way. Coffee Can Theatre can also be used to create original class stories.

### **Some ideas for using coffee can theatre:**

- Establish the setting of the story.
- Introduce characters.
- Tell and sequence a full story.
- Tell stories that would otherwise be challenging for the children to understand. The added visual element can allow children to understand more complex plots.
- Reinforce math concepts. (How many animals in all? Which animal came first? Which animal came second?)
- Sort characters or setting elements by attribute.
- Explore spatial and positional words related to the story. (For example: The lake is far from the barn. The cows are inside the barn. The duck is near the lake. The duck walked over rocks and between the trees to get to the barn.)
- Teach story elements. (Which of these toys is a character? Which of these toys is part of the setting?)
- Compare and contrast a Coffee Can Theatre story with the same or similar story from a book.
- Teach flexibility. (There's a badger in the book, and we don't have any badger toys. Are there any other animals we can put in our story instead?)
- Work on imagination by using neutral or abstract props for the story. (We will pretend that these blocks are the castle. We will pretend that this ball is a giant rock.)
- Let children gather or make props for a story.
- Adapt a well-known story using different characters or setting elements. ("The Three Little Fish and the Big Bad Shark", "The Three Little Zebras and the Big Bad Lion")
- Create a simple classroom story inspired by props of a certain theme, like signs of spring, things that are soft, or the letter C.

**Whether you share a story from a book, with Coffee Can Theatre, children can be active participants right from the start.**

**These are some ways for children to participate the first time they hear a story:**

- Chant along with a line that repeats in the story (“I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house down!”)
- Chant along with a repeated line that the teacher has created for that purpose.
- Create sound effects using their bodies and voices.
- Create sound effects using instruments.
- Create gestures for characters and elements of setting in the story.
- Visualize elements of the story. (So Squirrel ran out into a meadow and saw all sorts of flowers. Everyone imagine lots of flowers. I see tall, round, purple flowers and tiny, spiky, orange flowers. What kind of flowers do you see?)
- Reflect on the character’s emotions. (Show me on your faces how Bunny is feeling with his big block tower. Now show me how Bunny feels when the tower falls down.)
- Predict what will happen next in the story.
- Create dialogue for the characters. (What did Baby Bear say when he saw that he favorite chair was broken?)

**Coffee Can Theatre Tips for Success:**

- If the story you are telling comes from a book, you can read the book *and* share the story in a Coffee Can Theatre style, in either order. Sharing a story in multiple ways is a great way to teach about same and different.
- When sharing a Coffee Can Theatre story, do not hold or read from the book. Your hands need to be free to manipulate the props. You can post a simple sequence chart behind the children to help you recall the major details of the story.
- Use a small table or stool so the props are at eye level for the children. Set up this table a few feet away from children. Make sure children understand the boundaries of the audience area and that they should not touch the props.
- Provide an opportunity for children to touch some of the props, either before or after the storytelling.
- Put the story props out as a center area afterwards so children can retell the story on their own.
- Get creative with your Coffee Can Theatre materials. Substitute an animal in the story for one you have on hand, use neutral objects like blocks to stand in for setting elements, or make simple props.