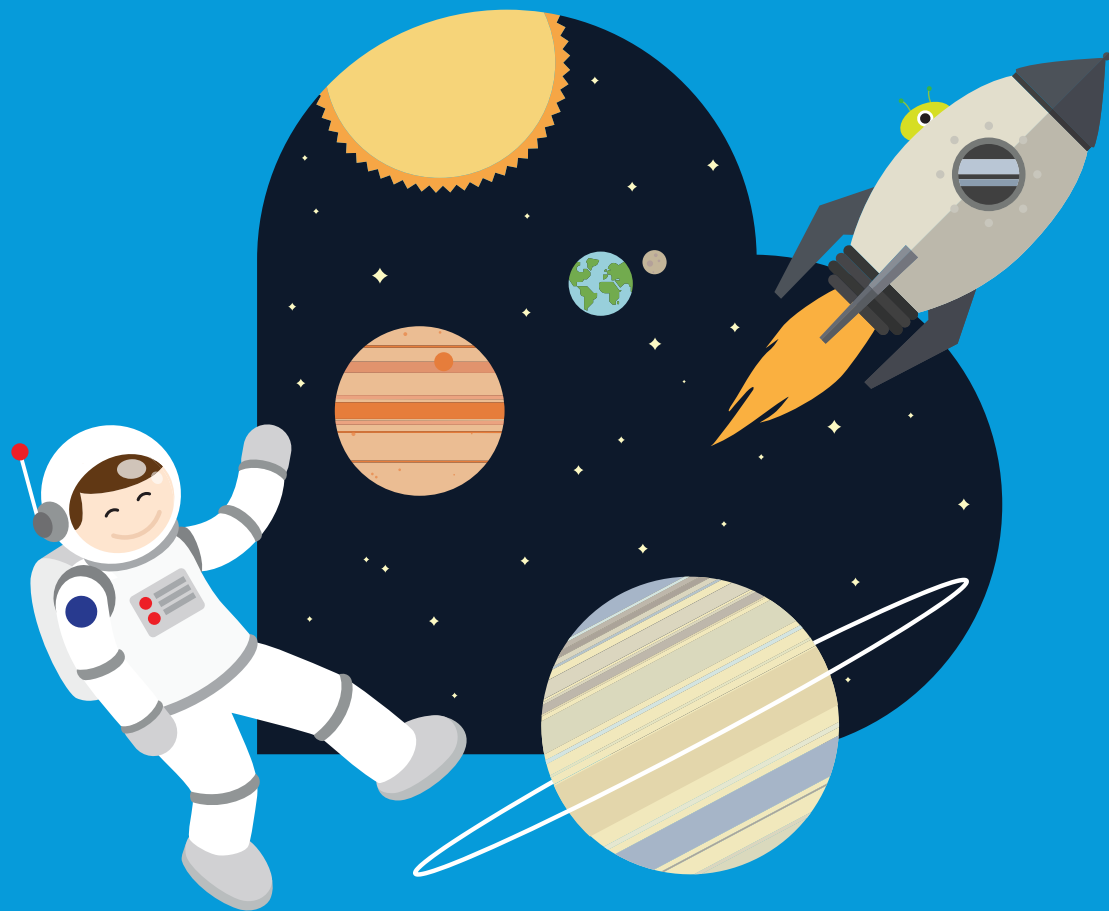


SPARK

A Guide to Sensory Stories

Teachers' Resource



Introduction

Welcome to the Guide to Sensory Stories resource for teachers.

Spark aims to inspire a love of stories and books in children with additional needs through resources designed to support practitioner engagement with reading for pleasure in the classroom. This resource outlines the benefits of sensory stories and provides further advice on their relevance to special schools and how to use them to engage students with books and reading.

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What are Sensory Stories?

A Sensory Story is a short story of a few lines (or a longer story which has been pared down to a few short statements) brought to life through a selection of meaningful sensory experiences. A Sensory Story represents an ideal way of engaging special school audiences with books and reading.

Sensory Stories are particularly useful for practitioners working with students with (PMLD).

Why Sensory Stories?

Sensory stimulation is vital for the development and maintenance of the brain – and this is true for all ages. Sensory learning can enable you to engage students with a wide range of different needs, providing meaningful experiences to those learning in a purely sensory way, as well as relevant

stimuli to those who are able to learn in more abstract ways.

Our Sensory Stories

Each Sensory Story resource includes a ready to-use story together with a list of suggested stimuli. A good sensory story will have each sentence paired with meaningful and relevant stimuli. Our suggestions have been tried and tested and we have provided advice on sourcing the stimuli.

Guidance on delivery is also included in each resource.

When using sensory stories you can choose to either share the whole story during a single session. Or build the story up over a number of sessions, for example, sharing the first two sentences during the first session, and then these sentences plus another two and so on. Choose what best suits your students and have fun.

Movement sequences - an alternative to sensory stimuli

Using movement can engage a wide range of students, from those who simply enjoy performing movements alongside their peers, to those who can understand what symbolic movements represent.

If your students are particularly motivated by movement you may wish to choose to structure your activity around the movement sequence instead of the sensory sequence.

We recognise that some movements may be challenging to students with motor difficulties, so the resources also include ideas as to how movements can be adapted so that everyone can join in.

Your choices about how to deliver the movement sequence are the same as with the sensory stories. For example, you will want to decide whether to use all the movements right away, or take time to build them up, bit by bit – do what is right for your students.

Delivering a Sensory Story effectively

Each sentence must be paired with a really meaningful and relevant experience. Each Sensory Story resource provides a list of tried and tested ideas for that story.

Not every student will be able to access every sense, however, covering a wide range of different forms of sensory experiences will maximise the chance of every student being able to participate.

Senses such as taste can be tricky. For example, many students with PMLD are unable to swallow and may be tube fed. However, there are still taste experiences that can be provided.

It is worth keeping in mind that just because you can see something does not make it a strong sight experience. A picture alone does not always represent a particularly effective sight experience. Compared to the world around you, a few squiggles and some

blobs of colour might not be very stimulating. However, looking through a colour filter or being plunged into total darkness is a very powerful experience. The same goes for touch, taste, smell and sound experiences.

You will want to take care to deliver the sensory experiences in the same way each time when working with pupils at the lower end of the P scales.

We have included links to the P scales as a flexible guide to support your planning and assessment.

Diverse needs

Sensory Stories are used particularly frequently with children with PMLD. However, they can also be of benefit to any student, whatever their needs may be.

For some students, sensory experiences can sometimes prove overwhelming. However, the chance to safely experience and re-experience through a sensory story is very beneficial, and predictability can be extremely reassuring.

Many students will find that the rhythm of the story can be calming, particularly when combined with the sensory experience. For some students, concentration will prove easier if all their senses are working together.

You may also find that students enjoy the social aspects and interaction involved in being told a story in this way, and are often able to take over the telling of the story and re-tell it either to the teacher or other students. This is something that is useful for students who struggle with speech or reading – having more to latch on to than just the words and the pictures can give them more chance of succeeding in re-telling. For example, they could reach for the water spray, to show that they know that what comes next in the story is a big splash, rather than relying on the words. It is important to note that this does not impede the acquisition of reading; students are not distracted from the text by these things anymore than they are distracted by the pictures in an early reading book.

It is also worth noting that Sensory Stories are not specifically or exclusively for special school audiences. The appeal of the Sensory Story is universal, and relevant to any setting.

How do students with PMLD learn from sensory stories?

Sensory stories give students the opportunity to:

- encounter experiences
- become aware of experiences
- react to experiences
- anticipate experiences
- cooperate in experiences
- concentrate on experiences

This is a progressive scale. Closer inspection of the P scales will demonstrate how these areas overlap with early literacy skills (as well as skills in other areas).

For example, the turn taking nature of speech requires cooperation. Being able to concentrate is required for reading. By showing they have anticipated an event, a student with PMLD can demonstrate that they remember a story.

Sensory Stories and the literacy P scales

P scales are performance descriptors for students working below the standard of the national curriculum tests and assessments. The following material aims to outline some aspects of the literacy P scales from 1 – 3 and how the use of Sensory Stories relates to each scale.

P1 characteristics

Students encounter activities and experiences. They may be passive or resistant. They may show simple reflex responses, eg starting at sudden noises or movements. Any participation is fully prompted.

Students show emerging awareness of activities and experiences. They may have periods when they appear alert and ready to focus their attention on certain people, events, objects, or parts of objects, eg briefly attending to interactions with a familiar person. They may give intermittent reactions, eg sometimes becoming excited in the midst of social activity.

Relevance of Sensory Stories:

Literacy for a child operating at this level means giving them the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities and experiences, without them being overwhelming.

P2 characteristics

Students begin to respond consistently to familiar people, events and objects. They react to new activities and experiences, for example. They begin to show interest in people, events and objects, eg smiling at familiar people. They accept and engage in co-active exploration, eg focusing their attention on sensory aspects of stories or rhymes when prompted.

Students begin to be proactive in their interactions. They communicate consistent preferences and affective responses, eg reaching out to a favourite person. They recognise familiar people, events and

objects, eg vocalising or gesturing in a particular way in response to a favourite visitor. They perform actions, often by trial and improvement, and they remember learnt responses over short periods of time, eg showing pleasure each time a particular puppet character appears in a poem dramatised with sensory cues. They cooperate with shared exploration and supported participation, eg taking turns in interactions with a familiar person; imitating actions and facial expressions.

Relevance of Sensory Stories:

Students at this level (and any level) can access material provided it is presented to them in an accessible format. Giving students the chance to listen to a pared down version of a story, whilst having it illustrated with experiences that will stimulate their senses is a great way to start them on their own literacy journey.

Being able to recognise people, events, objects etc is made easier for these students if they are initially presented in the same way. When using a Sensory Story with these students, say the sentences in the same way every time, and deliver the experiences in the same way, in order to give the student every opportunity to learn.

P3 characteristics

Students begin to communicate intentionally. They seek attention through eye contact, gesture or action. They request events or activities, eg pointing to key objects or people. They participate in shared activities with less support. They sustain concentration for short periods. They explore materials in increasingly complex ways, eg, reaching out and feeling for objects as tactile cues to events. They observe the results of their own actions with interest, eg listening to their own vocalisations. They remember learnt responses over more extended periods, eg following the sequence of a familiar daily routine and responding appropriately.

Students use emerging conventional communication. They greet known people and may initiate interactions and activities, eg prompting another person to join in with an interactive sequence. They can remember learnt responses over increasing periods of time and may anticipate known events, eg pre-empting sounds or actions in familiar poems. They may respond to options and choices with actions or gestures, eg by nodding or shaking their heads. They actively explore objects and events for more extended periods, eg turning the pages in a book shared with another person. They apply potential solutions systematically to problems, eg bringing an object to an adult in order to request a new activity.

Relevance of Sensory Stories:

- 'Communicating intentionally' can be joining in with a shout or a word at a particular part in a story.
- 'Seeking contact or requesting objects' could be as simple as reaching towards a favourite stimulus from the story.
- Participating in the shared activity of the sensory story, with less support, could mean that they reach for objects themselves, or they need less prompting to remember what to do with an object.
- Joining in with a sensory story is a perfect way to join in with an interactive sequence.
If there is a part of the story where something happens like a loud bang or a splash of cold water, or something particularly memorable, it enables students to demonstrate their anticipation of the event.

These resources have been designed to allow you to adapt the Sensory Story you choose to suit the particular needs of your students. We hope that both you and your students enjoy exploring Sensory Stories together.

In delivering this activity, it may also be useful to refer to the Assessment and Evaluation resource.

This guidance was developed for BookTrust by Alexandra Strick, Joanna Grace and Maria Evans, with input from a number of special school teachers and educational consultants.

Alexandra Strick is a disability/inclusion consultant who has worked in both the disability and children's book sectors. She has initiated and developed many projects, books and resources aiming to fully involve, represent and empower disabled children and is co-founder of Inclusive Minds.

Joanna Grace is an international sensory engagement and inclusion specialist, author, trainer and founder of The Sensory Projects: www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk

Maria Evans has spent most of her career working in the arts and/or education sector, with a focus on inclusive and cultural opportunities for young people facing disadvantage. She currently combines research and consultancy with a role at the Royal Shakespeare Company.

If you would like to contact us regarding these resources, please email schools@booktrust.org.uk

Creating sensory stories using other books and stories

Most children's stories can be translated into a sensory experience with a little thought and creativity.

Look out for books with concise texts that make references to sensory experiences within them. Even if they only reference one type of experience, you are bound to be able to find more opportunities within them to explore your senses, for example:

***Handa's Surprise* by Eileen Browne (Walker books, 1995)** - We see lots of different coloured fruits. We can imagine their tastes, and smells. We can feel the texture of Handa's basket on our hands and on our heads.

***The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler (Macmillan Children's Books, 1999)** - We can find a purple comb to be his purple prickles. We can wrap a torch in orange cellophane to be his eyes. We can feel a balloon full of hair gel and grit as his wart, and so on.

***Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (Red Fox, 2000)** - Here we can hear Max's roar. We can feel sharp gnashing teeth and the rock of the ocean as we sail away. We can experience light turning to dark as night falls. We can dance, and at the end of it all we can smell Max's dinner

waiting for him when he gets home.

***Way Home* by Libby Hathorn, illustrated by Gregory Rogers (Anderson Press, 2003)** - In this dark and sobering picture book for older readers, life on the streets is packed with sensory experiences. There are the angry car horns, roaring engines, screeching brakes and bright headlights, the barking of the ferocious dog, the plaintive mewing of a lost kitten, the chinking of bottles... all coming together to create a sombre reality of homelessness.

***Little Beauty* by Anthony Browne (Walker Books, 2009)** - This book offers a good opportunity to explore different ways of representing emotions such as happiness, loneliness, friendship and anger.

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity. We work to inspire a love of reading in children because we know that reading can transform lives.

Each year we reach 3.4 million children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading.

Every parent receives a BookTrust book in their baby's first year. Our books are delivered via health, library, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. Reading for pleasure has a dramatic impact on educational outcomes, well-being and social mobility, and is also a huge pleasure in itself. We are committed to starting children on their reading journey and supporting them throughout.

Find out more about BookTrust on our website booktrust.org.uk

This resource was developed for BookTrust by Alexandra Strick, Jo Grace and Maria Evans, with input from a number of special school teachers and educational consultants.

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