

### Language, maths and stories

Traditional tales like 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', and 'The Three Little Pigs' are just great for exploring many ideas that develop young children's understanding of early maths. Because they appeal to children's imaginations and make sense, children are able to quickly absorb the ideas within them. Through practical and imaginative play activities based on these stories we can help them understand ideas like 'big, bigger, biggest, small, medium and large'. Songs and rhymes based on these stories also help to give children the language they need to express these ideas, both in English and in their mother tongue.

Here is an example

*Book:* 'Pardon? Said the Giraffe' by Colin West

*Main idea:* A frog wants to talk to a giraffe, but the giraffe can't hear because he is much *taller* than the frog. The frog climbs on the backs of increasingly taller animals until he is at the giraffe's height.

I chose this book because I wanted to develop the idea of 'tall' as opposed to 'big'. (Most of the children were describing animals like giraffes, crocodiles and elephants as 'big'. While this was OK, 'tall' or 'long' are more accurate words, and can be used to develop ideas of measurement, including words like long/short.)

We used plastic African animals in small world play, and as we played we talked about their relative sizes and heights ('The lion is bigger than the the frog. He is very *tall*, (using lots of gesture and the sign for 'giraffe') but the giraffe is very tall: he is the tallest.' etc). As we played I introduced the book, and children described the animals.

I then brought out some sets of stacking beakers. As we played with these we talked about 'tall' towers ('It's not very tall/Mine is short right now, but I'm going to make it taller/Yours is the tallest' etc)

At story time the end of the session, I set out all the animals and asked the children to order them in terms of height. Then I gave them a stacking beaker each and we built a tower. Finally we shared the book together. and I emphasised the word 'tall', using gesture and sign whenever possible to emphasise my point. As the week progressed we kept out the small world play and stacking beakers and introduced more African stories.

Can you help compile a list of books that develop maths ideas? Contact Michael Jones on [jonmic57@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jonmic57@yahoo.co.uk)