

A Cardboard Box

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photographs by Winton Cleal

Overview

This book contains two folk tales about animals, retold as plays. The photographs provide ideas for masks and props, and there are comments from children about how they felt when they performed the plays.

Suggested purposes

These plays have strong, simple storylines and a high proportion of familiar vocabulary that allow children to focus on practising the conventions of reading and performing plays while developing reading fluency. Repetition provides support for less confident readers.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the use of a contents page
- the repetitive text structure
- the high proportion of familiar vocabulary
- the use of punctuation and print features, such as exclamation marks, question marks, italics, upper-case letters (on page 9), and ellipses, to support expressive reading
- the play-writing conventions – the list of characters, the use of upper-case letters to indicate when each character is speaking, and the use of italics for stage directions, scene information, and to indicate the speaking style
- the comments from children and the acknowledgment on page 24
- the theme of co-operation and resilience in “The Little House”
- the strong characterisation and the theme of trickery in “The Most Terrible Creature in the World”
- the abbreviation “M.T.C.” for the name of the Most Terrible Creature.

Possible challenges

- the conventions of the text structure for plays, especially the mix of dialogue, stage directions, and scene information
- managing to visualise the actions and read the play at the same time
- the relatively unfamiliar words “Master” and “Hare”.

Introducing the text

Focus on only one play in a reading session. Recall a play the children have seen or arrange for some children in a more senior class to perform a play for the group. The children may have read the play *Don't Forget Grandma* (guided at Blue). Talk about the conventions of reading and performing plays.

During the reading

Talk about the information on the contents page. *Why is a contents page helpful? What does this contents page tell you?* Tell the children which play you would like them to read and ask them to find it in the book. Note whether the children use the page numbers given on the contents page to help them do this.

You could ask the children to read the plays silently the first time through or, because these plays have such a strong framework of familiar vocabulary, you could launch straight into a verbal read-through, as outlined here.

During the first reading of each play, it may be helpful if the teacher reads the stage directions while the children read the dialogue out loud together. It may take a while for the children to get used to switching from reading out loud to silent reading of the stage directions and characters' names, so sharing the reading at this stage would provide support for this skill. You may find when you come to read the second play, the children no longer need this support.

"The Little House"

Page 4 – *What is this play called?* Remind the children that a play starts with a list of characters. Read the character list. The children may recall the word "Master" from the rhyme "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep". Briefly explain that it's an old-fashioned term. You may need to explain what a hare is and/or show the children the photograph of the hare mask on page 7. Draw attention to the cardboard box house. *I wonder who lives in this little house?*

Look at the text on page 5. *Why are some parts in italics?* Draw out the idea that those sections are not for reading out loud but that the first time through, you *will* read them out loud for the children so that they can concentrate on keeping the play flowing. Remind the children that the upper-case letters for the characters' names are there to tell the reader who's speaking and are not to be read out loud either. Ask the children to read what Mr Mouse says on page 5.

Continue to the end of page 9 with the children reading the characters' parts together and you reading the stage directions. *What do you think Mr Bear will do?*

Ask the children to read the stage directions on page 10 for themselves (silently). *Were you right?*

Read to the end of the play. Note the use of the word "EVERYONE" for the last speech. *Why did Mr Bear want to squash the house? What did the animals decide to do?*

Discuss any difficulties the children may have had during the reading.

“The Most Terrible Creature in the World”

Pages 12 and 13 – Read the title and the list of characters. *What are those letters in brackets for? What sort of creature do you think M.T.C. is?* If they haven’t read the previous play, you may need to explain what a hare is and/or show the children the photograph of the hare mask on page 15.

Look at the text on page 13. *Why are some parts in italics?* Tell the children that today you will read those parts (if you feel the children need this support) but that they should usually be read silently. Remind them that the upper-case letters for the character’s names are there to tell the reader who’s speaking and are not to be read out loud either.

Ask the children to read the speeches on page 13. *Why is the word “Calls” there? What part tells you about the sort of voice M.T.C. should use?*

Continue to the end of page 16 with the children reading the characters’ parts together and you reading the stage directions if you feel this is needed.

Page 17 – *How is Elephant going to read those words? How do you know? Draw out the idea that the ellipses are there to show hesitation. Why is Elephant talking like this? What will happen next?*

Page 19 – *What sort of voice is M.T.C. using now? Why?* Read to the end of the play.

Recall the children’s earlier predictions about M.T.C. *Did this play turn out as you thought it would? Do you think Caterpillar will try this trick again? How are the other characters feeling now? Why didn’t they thank Frog?*

Discuss any difficulties the children may have had during the reading.

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Reread the play, this time allocating parts. You could have two children reading the same part together if you feel they need extra support. While the children reread the play, note their ability to manage the format, to track the text when another character is speaking, and to read expressively.

Read about the feelings of the children on pages 22 and 23 together or, if you do want to perform either of the plays, you might decide to read these pages at a later date so that the children can compare their feelings with those of the children in the book.

If you plan to perform the plays, look closely at the photographs and talk about how the children could make the masks and props.

Focus on a particular section of the text, for example, pages 9 or 17, and discuss the features in the text that help the reader to know how to say the words.

Talk about the characters. *How would you describe Mr Bear? How was Mr Bear different from the other characters in this play? Was there a character in “The Most Terrible Creature in the World” that you liked/disliked more than the others? Why?* Create a chart using adjectives to describe the characters.

*Have you read other stories with tricky characters like Caterpillar? You could compare “The Most Terrible Creature in the World” with the Ready to Read book *I’m the King of the Mountain*. How are Flea and Caterpillar the same or different?*

Suggestions for further tasks

Have the children practise the plays, with supervision by a classroom helper if possible.

Prepare props, make masks, and perform the plays.

Make posters to advertise the plays.

Read and perform similar plays about animals, for example, “Waiting for the Feast” (in *Junior Journal 22*) or “Fast Hare, Smart Tortoise” (in *Junior Journal 23*).