



Tips for Home or School Using Story Boxes With Older Children

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Reviewing the Purpose of Story Boxes

In the Winter 2007 newsletter we reprinted an article by Norma Drissel about story boxes as a hands-on literacy experience. The discussion and examples focused on younger children. However, the concept of story boxes is also applicable to older individuals who have disabilities. Remember that a story box is simply a collection of the items that are mentioned in a story or book. Representing key items in the story with concrete, hands-on items helps to make the story accessible to individuals who have disabilities. Exploration of the items helps the individual to participate in the story as well as assists in building concepts, gathering information, and increasing one's understanding of the world.

In her article Norma Drissel talked about three key steps to making a story box:

Step 1: Choose a story

Step 2: Actually construct the story box

Step 3: Read the story

At our annual parent conference last year (May, 2006), Liz Isaacs, Karen Barbee, and Terri Butler of the Nevada Special Education Technology Assistance Project showed how to apply these steps to create a story box for older students.

Step 1 -- Choosing a Story: A "Harry Potter" Example

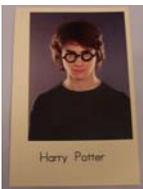
In choosing a story, they selected *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* by J. K. Rowling, a story liked by many people of all ages.



Step 2 -- Constructing the Story: Items for a Harry Potter Book

To construct the actual story box, they gathered photos of the actors who portray the key characters of the story (Harry, Hermione, Ron, Dumbledore). They then paired various objects / textures with the photos to make them even more concrete than the photos alone.

Dumbledore and Hermione both had physical features highlighted with textures: a "beard" to enhance Dumbledore's photo and curly "hair" added to Hermione's photo. For Ron they added fake "fur" to his pet rat.



The glasses on Harry's photo were enhanced with puffy paint.



In addition to concrete representations of the characters, key objects from the story were included in the story box: Harry's glasses, his wand, his broom, his hat, and his robe. In some cases actual objects were used (e.g., a wand) and in other instances textures were used (e.g., puffy paint on the drawing of the glasses, fabric for the robe). A of these items, including the actual book, were then stored in a box that was "titled" with the name of the story and a pair of glasses as a concrete title.

Step 3 – Read the Story

Before actually reading the story, encourage the individual to explore the items in the story box. The items can be used to help introduce the book to the individual. Discuss the items and what they represent.

With a longer story such as a Harry Potter book, you can read one chapter (or even a portion of a chapter) at a time. As you read the story aloud, assist the individual in exploring relevant items from the story box. Throughout the reading of the story, the items can be used to help in maintaining interest. (Remember that it is not necessary to use all of the items at once. Too many items at once can inadvertently overwhelm the individual.)

Drissel recommends reading with sound effects and dramatic intonation. Anyone can be encouraged to read the story in this manner. However, with a book such as any of the Harry Potter books you also have the option of using audio books, which are typically wonderfully dramatic in intonation and expression. An entire class could listen to the audio book or the person could listen to the book individually (with or without headphones — depending upon the setting.)

The items in the story box can also be used for follow-up activities. For example, the items could be used to check for simple comprehension. On her website, Paula Kluth suggests using story box items to cue the whole class in an activity such as writing a report. She suggests placing all of the items on a table in front of the classroom to help students to remember key events from the story.

References

Drissel, N. M. (undated). *Story boxes: A hands-on literacy experience*. Retrieved March 27, 2006 from <http://www.e-advisor.us/storyboxes>.

Kluth, P. (2006). *Do you see what I mean? Creating visual literacy supports for special needs students*. Retrieved May 15, 2007 from http://www.paulakluth.com/articles/visual_literacy.html.

(All of the photos in this article are courtesy of the Nevada Special Education Technology Assistance Project, which is sponsored by the Nevada Department of Education and housed in the Carson City School District.)



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