

# Laying the Foundations for Nature Based Story Play

## Overview

The first few sessions in this unit involve oral language strengthening activities and a focus on creativity. We might engage in 3 weeks of Story Workshop experiences before introducing the bridge to writing.

*It is recommended that this introductory series of lessons take place over three weeks with two lesson blocks per week. It is preferable that Day 1 and Day 2 occur on back to back days instead of spreading out across the week. This will make it easier for learners to remember what they did on Day 1.*

## Learning Intentions

- Learn and use new specific vocabulary about our natural environment while exploring & during story play
- Use loose parts & provided materials to build a story scene and play it out.
- Strengthen oral story telling
- Strengthen collaboration & cooperation skills

## Required Materials & Preparation

- BC or local stories about animals, the current season or playing outdoors (focused on nature or our interactions with nature)
- A paper bag or container for pairs or small groups to collect a few loose items from the outdoors
- Paper plates to hold story scenes (1 per pair or small group)
- Materials from the natural environment that are collected by learners (tree cones, grass, sticks, rocks)
- Other loose parts and purchased items like Canadian animals, cotton balls for snow, little glass gems, etc.
- inexpensive organizing buckets or baskets to store materials (either individuals each have their own bucket, or materials can be organized in containers for easy selection by learners)

### **Safety**

In preparation for exploring the outdoors, review guidelines for your community context to promote safe travel in nature and around the community. For example you may need to bring a basic first aid kit, use whistle signals to redirect learners if a safety issue arises.

**(Eg.** Learners must be within eyesight of an adult at all times. One whistle blow = stop, freeze, look at the teacher; Two whistle blows = form a line at the side of the trail (likely someone is passing by and we need to give them room); Three whistle blows = immediately gather around the teacher.

## Lesson Series

<u>The Process</u>	<u>Assessment/Feedback</u>
<p><b><u>Week 1: Inspire Story Through Nature and Play</u></b>  <b>Day 1</b>  <b>Story &amp; Outside (45 min to 1 hour)</b>            Story reading with a focus on nature based vocabulary using a short &amp; local land or BC based story. You can record the important words to remember and use while outside. If developing knowledge of a local Indigenous language, invite the community or school language teacher to join the lesson and teach some pronunciation.</p> <p>Go outside on the trails to notice, name and talk about the things we see that are signs of the season, important elements of the environment. Collect loose items we find on the ground, harvest a few berries if appropriate. Talk with each other about the ideas and inspiration we are getting for story telling.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can use a free app called '<a href="#">PlantNet</a>' to identify plants we discover and are curious about or use plant cards from <a href="#">Strong Nations Publishing</a>.</li> <li>• We stop and have mini-meetings frequently to ensure everyone sees the important plants, evidence of animals, practices the language/vocabulary.</li> <li>• Name, notice &amp; nurture the wonder, the use of the nature vocabulary, the joy, the respect you see learners demonstrating towards nature.</li> </ul> <p>Upon returning to the classroom, debrief about the experience by revisiting the story vocabulary that we also used while outside.</p> <p><b>Back in the Classroom</b>            Learning Intention: Tell a story using new vocabulary and materials.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Co-Create Criteria for stories in a meeting at the carpet               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Stories need to include some of our new vocabulary (learners share vocabulary words we learned from the story and from our walk and teacher writes them on the board so learners can</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>Story &amp; Outside</b>            Observation, descriptive oral feedback            *name, notice &amp; nurture vocabulary development, respect for the environment, expressing a sense of wonder and joy</p> <p><b>Back in the Classroom</b>            -Observation, oral descriptive feedback, moving learning forward with questions &amp; provocations            -Developing student skills with descriptive oral feedback using co-created storytelling criteria</p>

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<p>look and remind themselves as they build their stories.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Stories can be about our walk, about animals that we saw evidence of (beavers, chopped trees using the wood chips found underneath a felled tree). Stories can also be completely made up and have nothing to do with our walk.</li> <li>c. Stories need to have some action (could be a problem, an adventure, some details)</li> <li>d. Partners must each have equal turns for talking.</li> </ol> <p>2. Students use loose parts &amp; provided materials to build and tell a story in partnerships or at most a group of three if there is an uneven number of learners.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. If you have purchased materials, have learners come up to the display table a few pairs at a time with their paper plates to select items that will help them tell their stories.</li> <li>b. As learners work in pairs to build and tell their stories, adults circulate, supporting turn taking, story structure (beginning, middle, end) &amp; use of new vocabulary. Often learners need support to have narration because some will simply act as if they are a character in the story and use sound effects and actions without words. Sometimes you may need to pause the entire class to redirect if many are only using sound effects and actions without narration.</li> <li>c. Identify a few pairs of learners who are beginning to meet the criteria well and have either completed a story or are close to it. Or you could simply notice pairs who are strong with the vocabulary use and narration. Ask if they would be willing to share their stories, pause the class and invite <i>'all our friends to come listen to a story!'</i> Gather around the pair and have the audience listen for the criteria: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. New vocabulary, details</li> <li>ii. Turn taking</li> <li>iii. Beginning, middle, end</li> </ol> </li> <li>d. Encourage a round of applause and then choose learners to share one piece of descriptive verbal feedback.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Supporting specific descriptive feedback:</b>  <i>*Support peers speaking directly to the storytellers. Learners will often speak to the teacher and refer to the storytellers in the third person. Provide the sentence starter for those who need more support: "Can you look directly at your friend and say it like this: Casey, I noticed that you had an exciting beginning!"</i></p> <p>To support a wider range of learning needs, the teacher may need to</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “_____ please tell our friends about what new vocabulary you heard them use in their story.”</li> <li>• “What is one part that was either exciting or interesting?”</li> <li>• “What were the words that showed they had an opening or beginning to their story?”</li> <li>• “Give them a thumbs up if you noticed them taking turns telling their story.” (especially when learners need support to share the storytelling)</li> </ul> <p>Because this first experience of feedback is often new for learners, affirm the feedback even if it does not match the criteria the class developed... “Yes they had some humour in their story!” or “I agree, the most exciting part was when the bird got washed away in the river and the fox saved it.”</p> <p><i>*Often only one or two groups will have time to share their stories because the emphasis is on exploring and playing. Many will want to share, but if student stamina for listening is starting to wane, wrap up the session with a promise to do it again the next day.</i></p>	<p>scaffold by having them repeat parts of a modelled sentence to help them remember this slightly complex type of feedback.</p> <p>For example:  “Can you say repeat after me? ‘I noticed –<i>student repeats</i> - you used lots of nature words – <i>student repeats</i> – and you had a problem the characters had to solve – <i>student repeats</i>”</p>
<p><b>Day 2: Play and Story!</b></p> <p>Re-read the story, reviewing the vocabulary and talk a bit about the adventures from the previous day’s adventure. Revisit the criteria and set them to work to retell their stories. Students can add some materials, rehearse yesterday’s story again, or make up an entirely new story. All seem to love the chance to revisit their creations.</p> <p>Try to keep the same partners so they don’t have to start from scratch with their stories if they don’t want to.</p> <p>Repeat the sharing of stories with adult and peer feedback as described in Day 1.</p>	<p>Adults circulate, supporting students who are reluctant talkers, helping the dominant personalities to offer their partners a turn (and encourage them with suggestions or reminders if they forget what is supposed to happen next).</p> <p>Repeat the sharing &amp; descriptive feedback with students who have not had a chance to share yet.</p>
<p><b>Week 2: Introduction of StoryTeller’s Stage</b></p> <p>Repeat the process from week 1 with a new story. You may wait until Day 2 to introduce the idea of</p>	<p>Observation, descriptive feedback</p>

<u>The Process</u>	<u>Assessment/Feedback</u>
<p>Storyteller's Stage. It is simply a fancy name for 'Author's Chair' where the class gathers at the carpet in a circle to focus on and listen to the selected stories as the storytellers play out their story for the class.</p> <p>By leaving their workspaces and coming together at circle, we begin to formalize listening to others and honouring the work through even more intent active listening. It also elevates the importance of the storytellers in their role of sharing with others.</p>	
<p><b>Week 3: Feedback to feed-forward Story Skills</b> Repeat the process from week 1 using a third story for inspiration.</p> <p>This time during the strategic pausing of the class to listen to stories that are in progress, model how to provide feedback that helps the storytellers make their story even stronger. Use positive, supportive language and provide sentence starters for peers to practice. For example,</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">"I am going to say two things that I noticed that were strong, and then give one suggestion that might make the story even stronger: I noticed that _____ had an exciting adventure in the middle of the story and used many of the nature words we are practicing. I am thinking that if you added some more speaking parts for the moose it might make your story even stronger and fun!"</p>	<p>Again, as learners practice giving feedback, the teacher may need to scaffold by having them repeat parts of a modelled sentence to help them remember this slightly more complex type of feedback. (see assessment/ feedback advice for Week 1)</p>

## Extensions, Inspiration & Notes

*This series of explorations is repeated at least two to three times without any student writing. We use a different story each week, but leave all the stories out and available for learners to browse & refer to as they create their own stories.*

*\*\*A note about found materials from the natural environment:*

*We try to teach respect for the earth and our environment by mostly collecting found items from the forest floor. At times, we harvest edibles for tasting (only taste once we are back in the school) or for making tea. We try to follow the practices of local Indigenous peoples that honour and show gratitude for the gifts the earth provides for us. Some of these might include:*

- *Saying 'thank you' in the traditional language before we leave the forest*
- *Giving back to the earth*

- *some people use tobacco but you may use dried plants that are native to the area that have been harvested at another time, but always check in with an Indigenous community member to learn about local protocols, and always tell learners who taught you about the protocols.*
- *seed from native plants harvested at another time*

*At the end of a learning series or at the end of the school year or at the end of the learning series, bring a class back to the forest with the found materials and have them scatter them back on the ground.*

## Resources

### Stories:

- Many B.C. based and Indigenous stories are available at [www.strongnations.com](http://www.strongnations.com) The levelled readers like Let's Go For a Paddle and The Sandwich Mystery are great for retelling.
- The Busy Tree by Jennifer Ward [The Busy Tree](#)
- [Canadian Nature books for kids](#) (list from CBC)
- Scaredy Squirrel books are great for older learners because of the design of first aid kits, safety measures, etc. that are a bit intricate to make.
- If you are focusing on number sense, books that have count by two, 5 or 10 are always fun to retell because they also provide practice with that skill as they count gems, snowballs, footprints etc.

### Formative Assessment:

Austin's Butterfly : <https://vimeo.com/38247060>

Ron Berger from EL Education demonstrates the transformational power of models, critique, and descriptive feedback to improve student work. Here he tells the story of Austin's Butterfly. First-grade students at ANSER Charter School in Boise, ID, helped Austin take a scientific illustration of a butterfly through multiple drafts toward a high-quality final product.

This video accompanies the book "Leaders of Their Own Learning: Transforming Schools through Student-Engaged Assessment."

## Added Layers:

### Structures

- Partner stories are more predominant than solo

### Formative Assessment Elements:

- Criteria that is open to creativity
- Peer feedback that is personalized, descriptive, positive (celebratory) and/or constructive

### Competency Development

- Working collaboratively (PS)
- Determining common purposes (T)
- Development of welcoming and inclusive communities, where people feel safe and have a sense of belonging... learners feeling valued and celebrated (PS; C)

The structure or criteria the teacher provides for story creation varies depending on the learning goals.

- Equal turns to talk for partners
- Use powerful words (from the story)
- Include an element of humour
- Make your story anything you want it to be
- Retelling story events in the right order
- Changing one or more events to make them your own ideas

- **Share**  
Embed Formative Assessment Elements of:

- Criteria
- Feedback

Remind audience to listen for the criteria we focused on

And...

Add a dash of a powerful social elevating agent:  
*Say my name*



Storyteller's Stage



The class gathers around the storytellers, ready to listen for the story telling elements we are focusing on so they can give specific, descriptive feedback.



## Peer feedback through structured talk becomes the most powerful motivator of all!

### Audience is given criteria

- Listen for:
  - Story opener
  - Descriptive details
  - Action or adventure
  - Equal turns to talk for partner storytelling

### Say My Name:

Addy, I noticed, I appreciated, I liked....

Model how to give this feedback and if needed scaffold with more support to speak in full sentences.

Strategy inspired by research quoted by Susan Close about the power of a learner with high social power using a peer's name in front of the class and saying something positive and descriptive helps level the social power structure in a classroom. (Steven Covey research)

## Writing

- All forms of writing are accepted! Get the story on the page/computer
  - Partner writing –partner 1 write a sentence, partner 2 writes a sentence.
  - Side by side writing (more developed writer can support peer who is still learning)
  - Typing or speech to text (chrome book, computer, etc)
  - Adult scribe in rare cases
  - Encourage sound out spelling
- For younger learners (K), draw a picture of their story and labelling with sounds they know to represent the words
- Tip: we always use fancy paper, even though these are not polished, published pieces