

MakeBelieveArts
Reimagine Learning



Helicopter Stories

Working with Twos

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A guide to accompany, Princesses, Dragons and
Helicopter Stories by Trisha Lee

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A Guide to Helicopter Stories

This booklet is an outline of how to use the Helicopter Stories approach with the under 3s. Everything contained within here is a guide to using the approach.

As practitioners, it's important that we look at what individual children need and adapt our approach accordingly. Therefore these points are not rules to be followed, but ideas to be explored.

At MakeBelieve Arts we believe our job is to support children to access Storytelling and Story Acting in a truly child centred way. We find it helps to go with the flow. Child centred learning does not mean you



can't support what's happening on the stage. Our role is to help facilitate each child's story. We hold a safe space for children to access this unique approach.

For the full guide on how to use Helicopter Stories, please see Princesses, Dragons and Helicopter Stories by Trisha Lee.

Adapting this Approach for 2-year-olds

High energy, fast paced, anarchy.

This is Helicopter Stories with the twos. Under each heading, we will explore the various elements of the approach and how they work with this age group.

Introduction Stories

Here are some simple stories to get you started. These can be used when introducing Helicopter Stories to a new group of children. The stories are adapted from examples told to us by 2-year-olds but do feel free to create your own, just remember to keep them super short and choose content that you know your children will engage with, i.e. dragons, butterflies, cars, etc.

'One day there were some butterflies flying through the sky, they landed on the ground. Then there was a dinosaur stamping his feet, and the butterflies flew away.'

'A dog goes for a walk, he runs around the park, he meets another dog, and they play. Then they go to sleep.'

'The frogs are jumping in the pond, and a butterfly comes along. A giant comes and chases the frogs away.'

'Once upon a time, there were some fish swimming in the sea. A big fish tried to eat them up, but they swam away and hid in the rocks, and the big fish couldn't find them.'

'Dinosaurs, rah! Dinosaurs have big teeth and sharp claws. Dinosaurs stamping through the trees, looking for something to eat. The dinosaurs find some dinner and eat it up.'

How many children?

When introducing Helicopter Stories for the first time, it is often easier to do it with a small group of children, approximately 8-10. If you do not have this many 2-year-olds, then mix in some of the younger 3-year-olds. When working with a circle of 30 children, the other side of the stage can seem a long way away when you are 2. This can make it difficult for young children to concentrate.

The advantage of having a smaller group is that 2-year-olds enjoy the intimacy of working with just a few children. Also, it is easier for both you and them to hear the stories.

Eye contact is important with this age group, it encourages them and helps to develop their confidence. It is much easier to maintain this with reduced numbers.

When you begin working with 2-year-olds, experiment with keeping them separate from the 3 and 4-year-olds. Both groups will benefit from this. 2-year-olds struggle with sitting and waiting their turn and this can be very frustrating for a 4-year-old who wants to play a Giraffe on their own. When twos become more familiar with the approach, you should be able to run a mixed age group session.



Depending on the age and makeup of a group, we normally start by asking the children to form a circle. However, if many of your children are aged 2 to 2.5, it may be a good idea to start by putting down a stage and using this process to engage them. Often children will self-elect to come over and see what you are doing, their curiosity bringing them to the activity.

The Stage

The stage is an indicator to the children that something is about to happen. For children familiar with the approach, this can be the signifier that we are about to do stories together.

The twos are generally not ready to sit around the outside of the masking tape stage, so be very relaxed about where they sit. The adults in the room should model sitting cross legged at the edge of the stage. Occasionally you could invite the children to do the same. However, do not waste time on this. 2-year-olds have a knack of just getting up and leaving. Your aim is to engage them in story for as long as they want to hang around, the rest will come later.



The stage is just an area to be near, on or in. It helps the children to identify where Helicopter Stories is taking place. This is useful when they run to the other end of the room to hide from a scary dinosaur, as it offers a place to encourage them back to.

Acting Out

Once the group are gathered, launch straight into the first story. Children do not need an explanation of what you are going to do, as they will instantly recognise this as play.

Once you have said the first line of the story, for example, 'One day there was a fish swimming in the sea,' stop and invite the children to be fish swimming. 'Shall we all be fish swimming in the sea? Can you show me how the fish swims in the sea? Can you pretend to be a fish swimming?' Find lots of different ways to ask the same question, to encourage the children's actions.

Ask don't show

When delivering Helicopter Stories with older children, MakeBelieve Arts are adamant that the adult delivering the activity doesn't need to join in or lead how the story is acted out. However, with 2-year-olds the guidelines change.

To support very young children, we often find a need to join in. Get children to stand up by standing up yourself. We always ask the same type of questions, 'can



you pretend to be a fish swimming?' But with 2-year-olds we are watching even more intently to see if anyone offers an action. The aim is to let the children lead as much as possible, so follow their lead, see how they move, however small, and then mirror this exactly.

It is important to accept whatever action they give, regardless of whether you think this is the 'right' action or not.

Point out the actions of other children as you move, 'Oh look, Jay is walking on his tiptoes' or 'look at Hannah's wings'.

Joining in with the twos helps to develop their confidence. By doing this, you align Helicopter Stories with play and facilitate them to join in. If you have a particularly quiet group, try offering an action to help them get started. Maybe the next time you do Helicopter Stories mix in some slightly more confident children and get them to help lead the acting out.

If the story a child has told you jumps from one character to another, then the acting out should follow this.

Here is an example:

Dog, giant stamp.

'Dog. Let's all be the dog, running around. Giant stamp. Now let's be the giant stamping our feet.'

When working with older children, we invite different children to become each of the characters in turn.

However, sustaining a role while other children are being something different is more difficult for our 2-year-olds, so keep the acting out simple. Also, if you have a list story containing a vast number of different characters, it will be impossible for you to keep track of which child is playing which character, let alone the children.

Telling a Story

Would anyone like to tell me a story?

Once we have acted out a few stories, we find out who would like to tell us a story. With many groups of 2-year-olds, they jump straight in, suggesting story ideas from the very beginning of the session so you may find yourself at this stage without realising it. If you think the children will cope with you writing down their stories, then try it. Initially, these will probably be quite short, and could all be contained on the same sheet of paper. When the stories get longer, you will need to introduce the one page per story rule, but at this stage it is unlikely.

We now use A6 pages with 2-year-olds at the start of this journey. As their stories get longer, we progress to A5. Here lies another benefit to having your older and younger children in separate groups. 2-year-olds do not generally want to sit and watch an older child tell a long a convoluted story. If you are writing a 4-year-old's story, which could fill an A5 page, then all the twos will disappear.

When you are scribing a story, write it verbatim, word for word, saying each word out loud as you write it down. If the child is sat next to you, angle your body so they can see the paper and watch you write. They might not show any interest in this, which is fine, but we always try to have our paper in a place where children can see it.

Private Stories

Once Helicopter Story sessions have taken place in your setting on a regular basis, and the children are accustomed to it, you can begin to take private stories.

This, as the name suggests, involves taking a story from individual children while they are engaged in other activities, this happens before you sit around the stage for the acting out.

Private stories have many benefits; they cut down on the length of time children are sitting around the stage, and they also give quieter children the opportunity to tell a story away from an audience.

Experiment with both private stories and taking stories around the stage. Sometimes 2-year-olds need the immediacy of acting their story out the moment it is told. If they are not ready to tell a private story, they may feel that they have already done their story when the time comes to act it out. You will recognise this because they will be reluctant to act out the first story, or they may wish to tell you a different one.



Let's Clap Thank you

At the end of every story, we say the words, 'Let's clap thank you.' All the children join in with clapping. We then model sitting at the edge of the stage and hoping the children will join us, ready to start the next story.

The ritual of clapping signifies the end. This is important for two reasons, it's a way of appreciating the children's contributions on the stage, being clapped affirms their actions, and secondly, it acts as a controlling device, getting the children back to the stage, ready for the next story. This can be especially helpful when searching for the bear that has taken them all over the room.

How often?

The more often you use Helicopter Stories, the greater the benefit. Your children will progress more quickly when this approach is used on a regular basis, once weekly as a minimum,

works for the over threes, but with the twos, it is better if they are doing Helicopter Story sessions two to three times a week.



Settings where this approach has had a significant impact, plan Helicopter Stories into their timetable so that it has a specific slot.

For this age group a 5–10-minute session each time is enough so you can fit scribing and acting out a few stories into a very small section of the day. It's a great activity to do just before the end of the session, where you might have had circle time or read a book.

Persevere to hear

In one setting we worked with a boy named Drini, who was 3 and a half. He was Albanian and experiencing difficulties with social and communication skills. Drini's struggle with language meant his ability to communicate his story was similar to that of some 2-year-olds.

There was clearly a story going on in his head. As Drini sat and played with his truck, Isla asked if he wanted to tell it.

(This can often be a perfect time, joining them at their activity or in their play and saying something like 'I can see you're doing a good story, do you want to tell it to me?')

21/6/17 Drini
I made a truck, a big truck. A butterfly. The truck stop. Work, sweet dreams. Trucks go. Trucks fast, swish, crash, trucks stop. Trucks moving, trucks moving again. Trucks start again. Trucks start again, crash, crash, crash and the car crash too. The car crashed again, the car moving again.

At this point, Drini said 'No'. But then he continued to engage with Isla, telling her about his truck. He looked at her pen and paper, and said 'I made a truck, a big truck'. Isla replied, 'do you want me to write that down. 'Yes'.

He watched intently as Isla wrote down his words.

His language was difficult to understand, and even with staff trying to assist, we

struggled. Drini was determined to tell his story, and Isla was determined to help.

This is where it is important to use your intuition, as some children may not be prepared to keep repeating themselves and they may become upset that you don't understand. However, this was not the case with Drini. He was dedicated to being understood, and both he and Isla persevered until the story was finished. When it came to the acting out, Drini beamed; so proud of his achievement.

Settling and Transition

Cherish, aged 2.5, was going through quite a difficult transition; her parents were splitting up, and her mum was having another baby. These are huge moments in an adult's life, but how can we understand if a child in our care is coping with this change, or indeed what they are thinking about it.

This is Cherish's story:

'Mummy got big belly. Belly don't happen now. Happy daddy. Mummy.'

What a privileged moment to share with a young child about such a sensitive time, a time that none of us would have asked about, but that Cherish was able to communicate in her own way, through the story.



Helicopter Stories is a great tool for transition.

In many instances, we have had young children join in with the acting out, on their very first day in a setting.

The benefits to the child are enormous, but also for the practitioner. It gives us a way to understand each child and quickly find out what is important to them. Through story, children open up a window into their thoughts.

Non-speakers

Layla is a selective mute. Staff at her setting wanted to see if there was a way to engage her with telling a story, so Isla tried an approach called Either, Or.

This is how it works:

'Once upon a time there was, either a princess (hold out one hand) or a dragon' (hold out the other hand). Ask the child which character they would like to have in their story. The child chooses by pointing to the hand that represents that character. Layla chose the princess. 'She lived in a castle or a forest?' Layla chose the castle.

'Once upon a time there was a princess, and she lived in a castle. She had a magic frog or a unicorn?' Layla chose unicorn, and so the story continued.

Layla smiled throughout the whole activity. She might have just ignored it, and that would have been fine, but the important thing is that she had the opportunity to join in, in a way that she was comfortable with.

We never want to force a child to join in, but with a bit of imagination, we can engage a child in a way that they are ready for.

Modelling storytelling

*'If we are not modelling what we teach,
we are teaching something else.'*

– Abraham Maslow

We believe that children need a rich and varied story diet. Children are not responsible for that diet, and we all know that there is a vast inequality between the children who are read to and the children who are not. As practitioners we can help to level this playing field, ensuring that children in our care have exposure to and are stimulated by story, whether from books or through oral retellings.



Making up stories with children and acting them out, or retelling traditional tales is an excellent way to model that you are a storyteller too. This will help feed a story diet in your setting and will foster children's confidence as storytellers.

If you are anxious about this, try co-creating a story with the children and asking them to tell you what's contained in it.

For example, '*One day there was a ...* I wonder what could be in our story?' The children will always have plenty of ideas, and you can simply hold these together and help move them forward, with questions such as, 'and then what happened?'

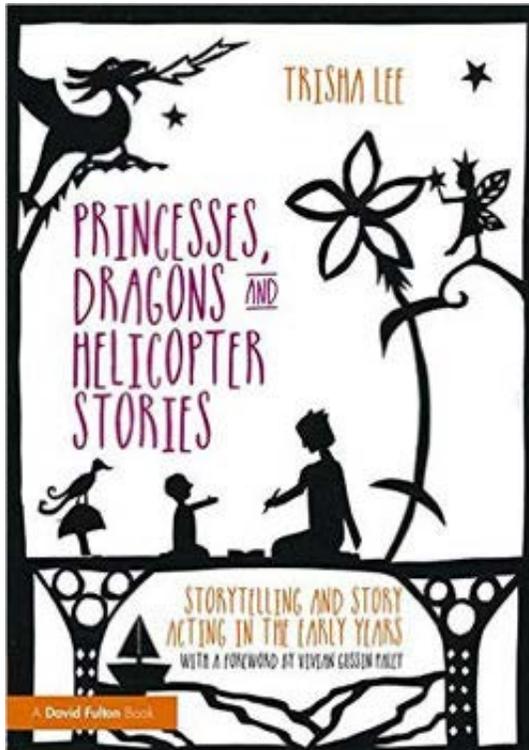
Just play

We want you to enjoy this approach with your children. Don't worry about the guidelines or getting it wrong, really it is just play on a stage. Let your children be the experts, and follow the direction they take.

This guide is designed to accompany,

Princesses, Dragons and Helicopter Stories by Trisha Lee.

Available from MakeBelieve Arts for £15.00 at www.makebelievearts.co.uk



MakeBelieve Arts is available to run INSET training, in-class sessions and Helicopter Stories Crash Courses.

For more information:

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*'I have powers in my hands and loads of
power rangers and everything...'
- Leo, aged 2½*

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