

THE STORY CAN TEACH US ...

Sylvie Doláková

If you want your children to be brilliant,
read them fairy tales.
If you want them to be geniuses,
read them more fairy tales.

~Albert Einstein

The story can teach us ...

... a lot. Not only to listen to and retell the text but also to learn attitudes, values, approach to life and people. Experiencing a model situation when listening to a story is easier than having to deal with it in real life. Stories, in short, teach children how things are done in real life, how things relate to each other, how to tell good from evil. Teachers like to work with stories. When they tell a story, children listen, say what it was about, what happened in it, they draw a picture of it and that's it. Some teachers think about role-play or drama. Others let the children re-tell it. A wise teacher will hold on to the story for a long time. They plan out their work so that children will see the theme linked to different activities and feel that they are learning many new things through the story. This technique uses the theme of the story to develop children's mathematical abilities and awareness of natural and social phenomena. Teachers try to find songs related to the story, its settings, or at least some character. Story characters can help children express themselves in terms of art, and even help them learn how to hold and control the pencil correctly.

How to work with a story?

Let's take a closer look at some of the possibilities of working with a story. The development of listening habits and speech skills are among the core goals. Children today are not used to listening to streams of texts, to concentrate, to endure listening. It's a long term task to teach them to concentrate for a moment only on the sound of the words. When we teach them step by step that there are plenty of exciting moments in the story, that what they learn will become a springboard for other exciting activities, they will get used to listening to longer texts. For younger children, it is reasonable to start with shorter stories or stories in verses. Texts that have a regular rhythm, words that rhyme, and a shorter overall length can attract the poor listeners. The tasks we employ during the listening process employ the children, so they slowly create listening habits.

The story as a starting point of the CLIL project method

Let's take a look at a few examples of variable techniques and activities using the well-known story of The Big Enormous Turnip.

Vocabulary - key words

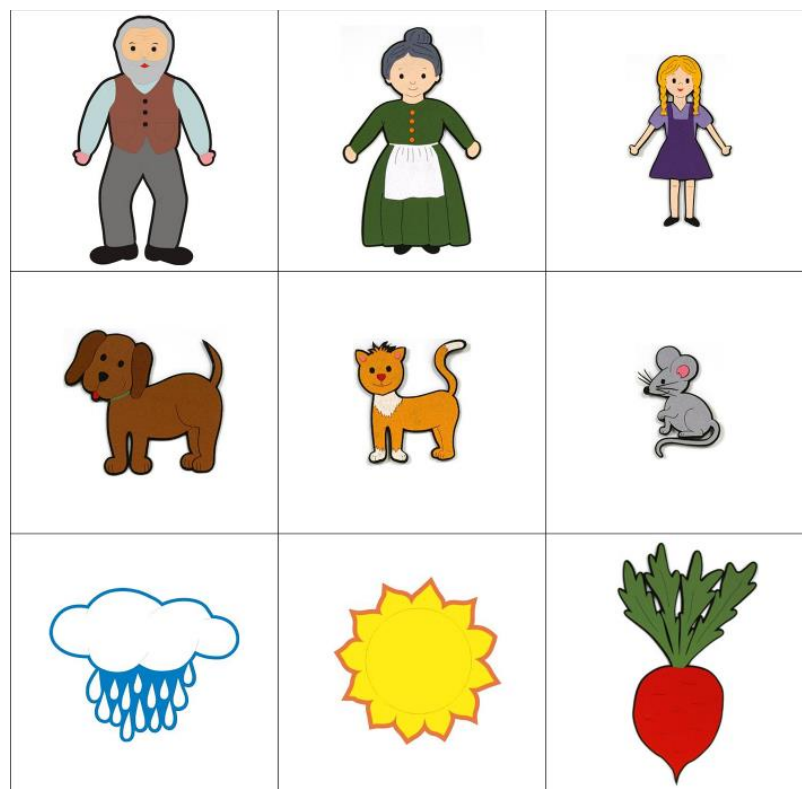
This is an essential part of preparation. When children are able to understand key vocabulary, meaning expressions that are important to understanding the story and often occur in the text, they can understand the content of the text. This could be the subject of various activities.



01. The Big, Enormous Turnip

In various language-focused activities children can play with words. They search for words with the same sound in initial and final positions, or words that contain the same sound, practising phonemic awareness (Grandma - Grandpa - Granddaughter, Seed - Seedling - Soil - Sun, rain - suN, grandmA - grandpA, tuRnip - gRandma - gRanddaughter - Rain, Pull - grandPa - turniP)

These activities are very beneficial for building early literacy and reading skills in children.



02. Miniflashcards

Children can clap the rhythm of words - they count the number of syllables, naming short and long words. They make up sentences about the pictures, rhyming phrases (*a mouse in a house*), alliterations (*crazy cats cooking carrot cakes*). This play with words is a valuable

training for broadening children's vocabulary, building pronunciation and intonation skills and developing literacy in children.

Children can do a listening dictation; they listen to the words and place pictures in a correct order; either with the text of the story, or our instructions. They get used to the sound of words, build concentration skills and show comprehension. Later we can incorporate prepositions, such as *Put the cat between the mouse and the turnip. Place a picture of a granddaughter above the sun. Put the dog under the soil.* etc.

We can ask children to put pictures in a specific order (according to the appearance in the story, size, alphabetic order)

How about categorizing? There may be various criteria, size, colour, kind (*people, animals, weather, all that grows* etc., features (*find all animals looking in the same direction as the dog does*). You will surely find more tasks.

During language games children can learn different strategies, such as describing pictures without saying their name. Another example is a game of LIAR: one player after another draws a card, looks at it and says with a poker face *"I'm looking at a cat."* This may, or may not be true. The others reply: *"I believe you."* or *"I don't believe you."* If they guess right, they get a point, otherwise the point goes to the liar. Children love this communicative game.

We can offer children an adventure trail, using the flashcards with key words. We place them (or, better, hide them) in space so that the children can see them while walking around. They either remember them or they can write or draw them in the correct order. We can give small children a sheet of paper with pictures and they are supposed to circle those they have seen on their way.

To practise and reinforce new vocabulary, we can play traditional games, such as dominoes or matching games. Children match the same pictures together and always name them aloud to strengthen the pronunciation.



03. Picture dominoes - we cut the cards with a pair of pictures.

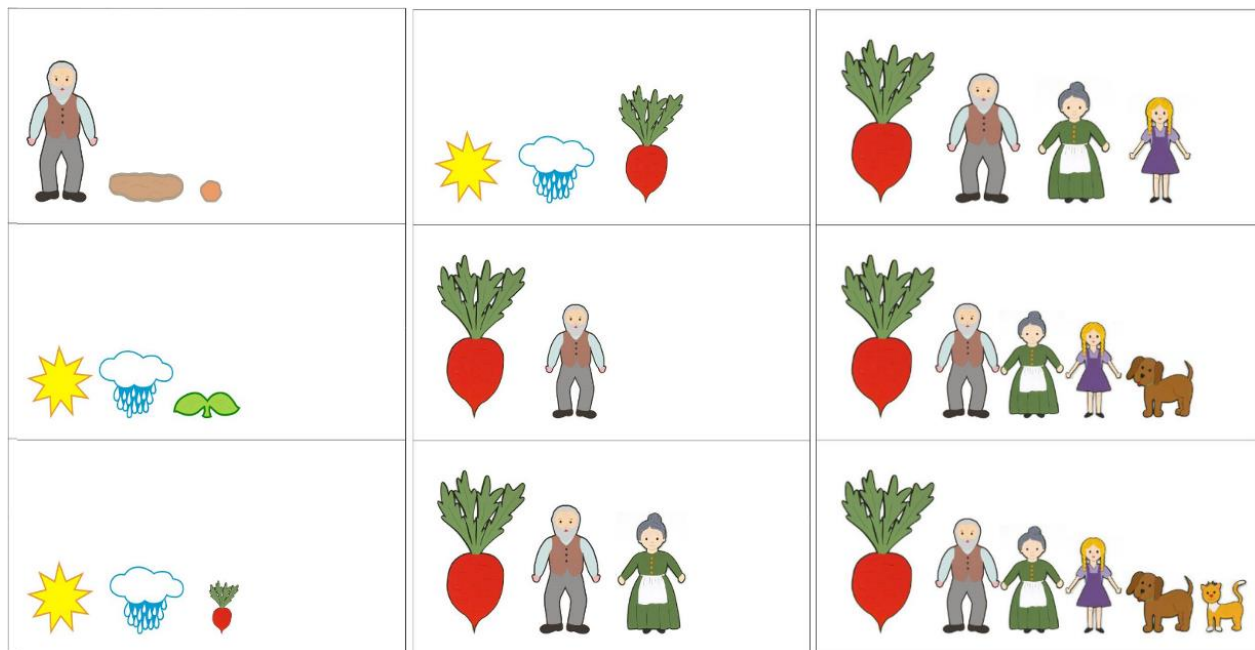
If we cut them in individual cards, we can play concentration game, or matching pairs.

Developing communicative skills

Children describe pictures, retell the story, make dialogues for characters, create new situations, such as what they all did in the evening after they had pulled the turnip out, or what would happen if...

What would the story be like if told by a mouse? Or a turnip? Or a scarecrow standing nearby? What would have happened if the mouse was scared of the cat and didn't come to help? Or the dog started to chase the cat instead of pulling the granddaughter? What if grandpa planted a pumpkin, a carrot or a cucumber? What are they going to do with the turnip? What would you do if you had such a huge turnip, carrot, pumpkin or a cucumber? Have you helped mum to prepare a meal out of these vegetables?

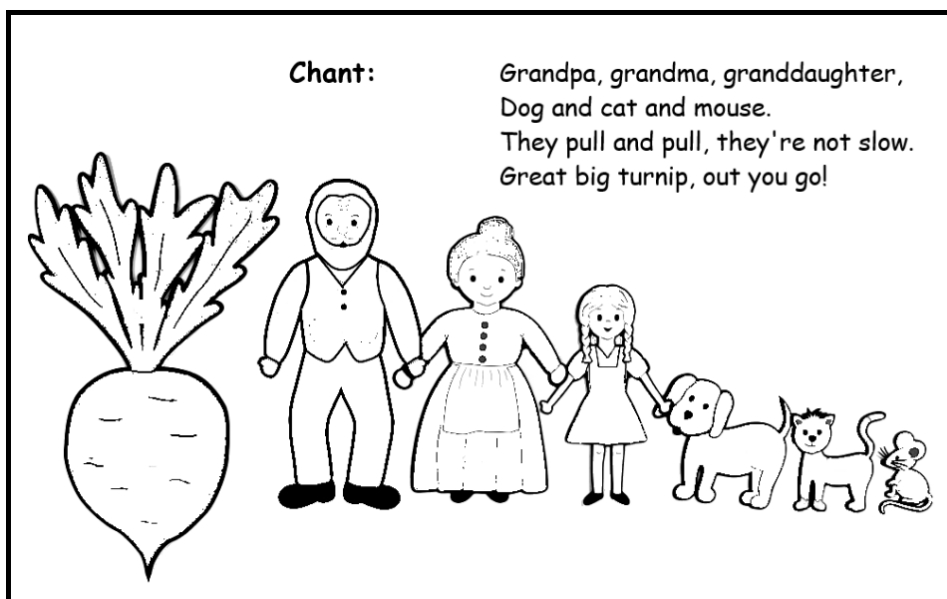
Let's stop at retelling skills. It's very difficult for small children as well as for dyslexics. It requires concentration, ability to formulate thoughts and describe the flow of the story in the correct order. We can practise this ability by the means of sequence pictures taken from different stages of the story. By placing them in an order children can concentrate on realising what was at the beginning, what followed, how it ended. The process is important for working with the overall information and sequencing skills and it helps mainly the children who are potential dyslexics. Those children need to be involved in the above described phonetic awareness activities, clapping to the rhythm, counting syllables to find long and short words, working with rhymes, chants and songs.



04. Story cards - children place them in order, describe them, re-tell sequences of the story in their own words

Working with rhyming words and rhythm is another beneficial area of learning. With simple texts, children can remember content better; rhyming vocabulary helps potential dyslexics to navigate through vocal groups more easily. Both the content and the form of the text will surely enrich the cultivated speech and the way children perceive the world. Linking with the story content contributes to understanding of the story and all the connections with life situations. The rhythm of the word will make children want to repeat the text (unconscious urge), so they are working on their language development repeatedly without the direct influence of the teacher. If the content at least partially matches the theme of the story, it will contribute to awareness of the content and understanding of the context.

Children learn to work with the text in a creative way – they may produce their own mini-books, the activity that intensifies their relationship with books as such.



05. Chant, practising vocabulary and revising the plot of the story. While colouring in the picture, children can learn the text, or, if they can't read yet, their parents can learn what their children are supposed to know

We accompany the chants with clapping to the rhythm, playing simple rhythmical instruments to stress the rhythm, we pause before the rhyming word letting children say it, accompany the text with movement. To make sure they can say the text, we can apply a tricky question: "Well, do you know the rhyme well? Can you say it like an angry tiger? Like a sleepy bear? A wet frog?" Children try to achieve the image of an animal not realising they are in fact drilling a bit more. The more unusual the goal is (a wet frog!) the more eager children are to try to show it.

Pre-literacy skills training

While working with language, we can also use pre-reading skills training.

A worksheet with the text of the story with pictures replacing some words will give children the opportunity to participate in reading with an adult who reads the words. The child will say the words in the place of the picture, but he/she also perceives the visual form of the words between the pictures and prepares for his/her role as a later reader (sounds and words long or short, letters high, low, below the line, use punctuation - it all is perceived unconsciously - which is the best way to build reading skills).

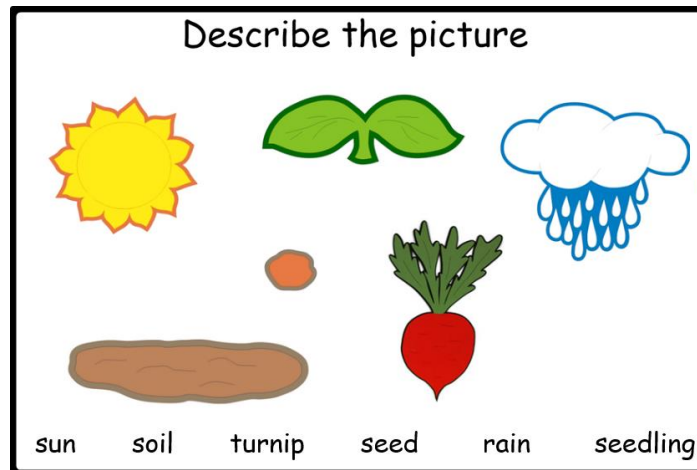
A Big, Enormous Turnip

This is .
This is a .
 plants the .
The sleeps.
The shines.
The comes.
The grows.
The shines.
The comes.
The grows. It grows into a .
The shines.
The comes.
The grows. It grows into a .
The shines.
The comes.
The grows. It grows into a big . A very big . An enormous !

06. Picture reading

Story as a platform to teach science

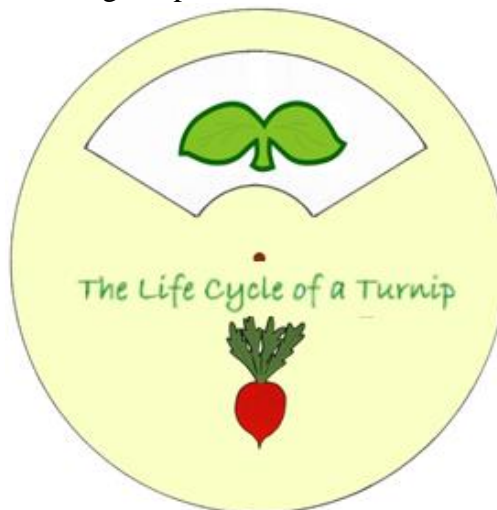
Another extensive area the story offers is learning about the science of nature. Understanding how a plant grows, then a turnip appears, can be a wonderful adventure. What does this small, small seed need to grow? Light and heat from the sun, rainwater, soil nutrients, human care, and a lot of time before the process is complete. We can offer children to make an experiment - sowing seeds to see how living things work. We can talk about how to care for the soil and later about the tiny plants. Terms such as a spade, a hoe, a rake, or a tractor with a plough will certainly be mentioned this time. Images help us to develop concepts such as root and leaves, soil, seedling, while children name pictures, learning to pronounce them correctly, to draw them, to know the shape and proportions of them.



07. How the plant grows – worksheet

Craft props

A clever, turning wheel that children can make in their craft lessons will help them understand the cycle of turnip growth. We print the worksheet, let children cut out both wheels and little see-through sections. Then they can draw individual stages - seed - seedling - turnip in the sections of the other circle. They adjust both wheels using a split pin. By rotating the wheels with the cut-out sections, individual pictures are displayed in the windows. Children describe how the turnip grows from a small seed. The prop that the children produce themselves will surely be the best help for remembering the process.



08. The turning wheel "How the turnip grows" - a teaching prop. Two circles attached with a split pin, with a cut-out window in which children can see the individual stages

Story as a part of music lessons

Songs play an important role in working with the theme of the story. Singing has an invaluable role in lessons with children - it offers text to remember well, with clear rhythm and melody; those who sing cannot frown (well, not for more than half a minute 😊), so singing contributes to a more positive atmosphere in the children's group. With a song, we can clap, stomp, tap wooden sticks, play the body instruments, or a game with movement.

In music lessons, we practise all the areas of rhythm and melody with children. We can enrich the song with attractive accompaniment, using rhythmical musical instruments, even those that are handmade, such as plastic Kinder Surprise eggs, which the children themselves fill with various loose materials of their own choice - rice, peas, lentils, sand, sawdust, screws, small Lego pieces - the children may come up with the idea of what they want to hear. Likewise, we can fill empty rolls from kitchen towels or toilet paper rolls with various materials, covered on both ends with a paper cover, tightly sealed with adhesive tape.

Growing seeds

Let's make a hole for four lit-tle seeds. One is for the mouse,
one is for the crow. One can't stand the rain and one will grow, tall, tall, tall.

09. Song and an action game (see the description on page 8)

An essential part of children's learning are songs comprising the contents of the story. Here, as an example, we introduce a song from another well-known story, The Three Little Pigs. The song contains the whole story in four verses. Children practise singing, vocabulary, story plot, they can role-play the story, they can even accompany the song with some rhythmical work; they can draw the story song, dance with it... Do you think there's a more effective way to work with the text?

Three Little Pigs

text and song: Sylvie Doláková arranged: Richard Savage

introduction
1. Once there was a
2. Then a se- cond
lit- tle pig, who built a lit- tle house. He built it out of
lit- tle pig__ built a lit- tle house. He built it out of
straw, not the best, with- out a doubt! When the big bad
wood- en sticks and nailed it all a- bout.

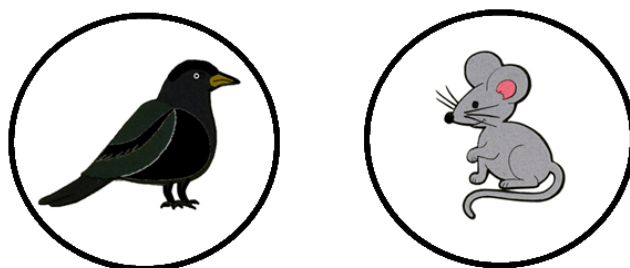
3. The third and cle- ver
4. The wolf climbed on the
lit- tle pig, built a lit- tle house. He built it out of
roof- top and took a look in- side. There he saw the
good, strong bricks. Built it safe and sound. When the big bad
lit- tle pigs, all three side by
wolf came round a- knock- ing on the door. The lit- tle pig said
No, no, no! NO! And ne- ver more! And what happened next?
The big bad wolf took a deep breath
and he huffed and he puffed and nothing happened!
He huffed again and he puffed again and again nothing happened!

side. He shout- ed down the chim- ney and made a big mis
take. He fell in- to the boil- ing pot and, howl- ing ran a -
way. *spoken:*
And what happened next?
Nothing, that's the end of the story.
Or is it?
What really happened next?
coda

10. Story song - the song reflects the whole story

An action game (circle game)

With a song, already mentioned on page 7, we can play a lively game. Children stand in a circle, singing the song. In the middle there are four children squatting down. They represent seeds in a hole. Why four? We will see soon. As the song reveals, there are different types of danger for the seeds - a hungry mouse, a crow, overly wet soil from the constant rain. Only the strongest seed will endure. We choose three more children in a circle, representing the mouse, the crow and the rain. They get the symbols so that they are recognised for their roles. The child who acts as the rain has a sheet of blue paper squeezed into a ball - a raindrop. During the song the “predators” draw “seeds” out of the circle into their homes. The child with the paper ball, the “raindrop”, throws it gently on the head of one of the two remaining seeds, making it rot (sorry, that’s life!). The last child is the seed that grows into a plant. We can interview them asking what they are going to grow into (a flower, a tree, moss, a mushroom...?)



11. Symbols of dangerous animals for the game - they can be attached to children’s hair using clasps

Action games are very popular among children; they use elements of movement, contents, goal to achieve, take advantage of the moment of uniqueness, togetherness (we need to be a group to play), responsibility for the task assigned, turn-taking, and a sense of justice.

Physical exercises with a story

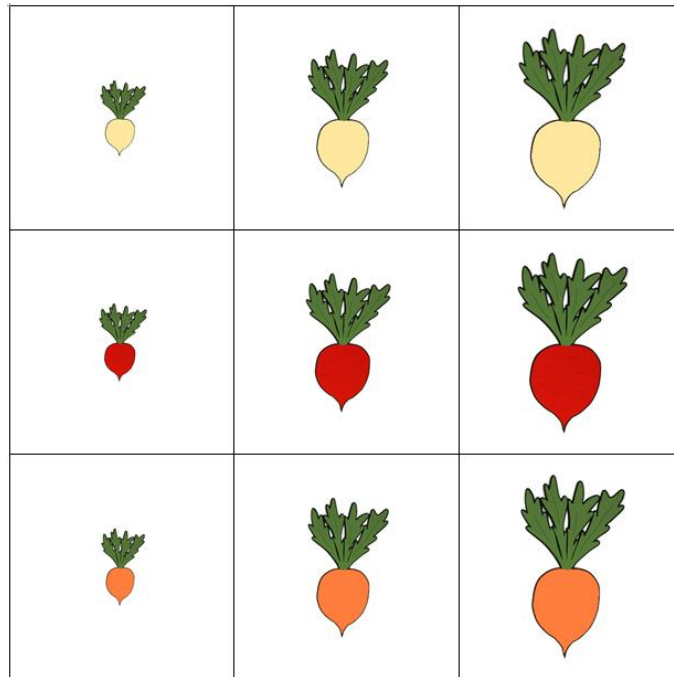
Speaking about movement, we can join it with the theme of the story in a TPR form. Motivated instructions with loops for turnips, bidding the “animals” - children – to jump around like frogs, run like deer, creep like mice, crawl like snakes, fly like butterflies - will make the movement more attractive for children. We can also choose the story characters and adjust the instructions to their perspective.

Story as a basis for mathematical activities

This has been the list of activities that we can normally encounter with the story. But can you imagine a story with mathematics? Is that at all possible?

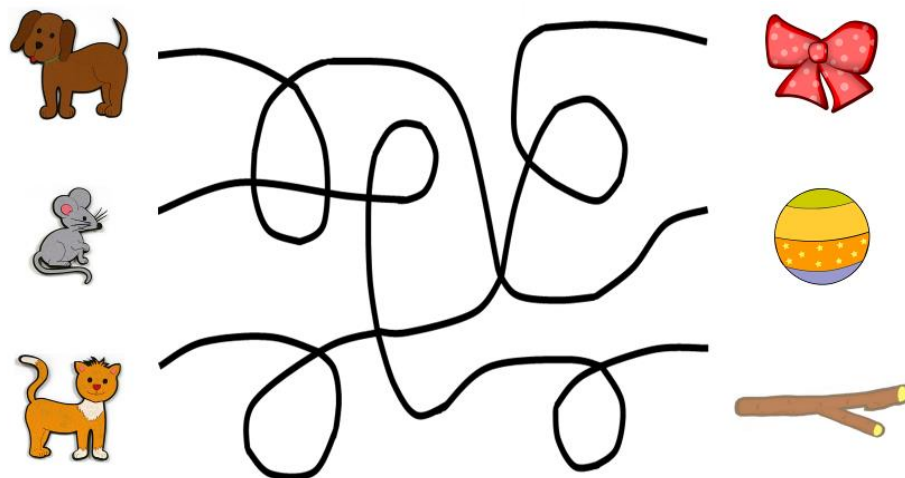
Let's try to outline several options here. Turnip grows out of a seed, at first it's small, then it grows bigger and bigger until it's huge. We can use cards with pictures of a turnip of three sizes and even different colours; red, orange, yellow. Children can create groups of equally large turnips, compare the size of groups (more or less - how much, by matching them), we can sort them by colour, size or both (so called Venn diagram), adding, subtracting, (two large yellow turnips, three small red, one middle-sized orange - the algorithm).

In order to compare and characterize a particular group or a number, it is a good idea to use paper plates - they are nice to define a group, we can see well how many pictures are placed on them, cards with numbers and/or with mathematical signs (plus, minus, less) can be inserted between them.









12. Cards - different colour and sizes


Mazes are suitable to train pencil control drawing, spatial orientation, verbal comments (*The dog is playing with a ball, the mouse is playing with a stick and the cat is playing with a ribbon.*). Children may be surprised to see there are more versions of mazes for them to compare and name!



13. Which animal is playing with what? – pencil control worksheet

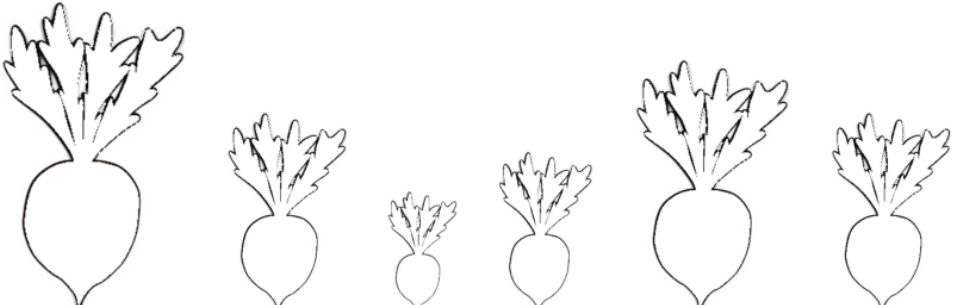
Another worksheet uses the picture of all protagonists of the story, standing in a line. We can practise the words such as *first, second, third, before, after, between, last*. We can count heads, legs, how many legs belong to animals, how many are human legs, we can practise words *more, fewer, thin, thick, small, big* etc.

Which turnip has the most leaves?
Which the least?
Is this turnip smallest of all? 
Which one has the biggest leaves?
Which one has the narrow leaves?
Which turnip is the tallest?
And which one is the widest?



14. Worksheet with questions



Circle the smallest turnip.
Put the biggest turnip in a box.
Colour in the same turnips. (How can you find out?)







15. Worksheet to practise sizes and critical thinking



How many?



 +  = _____



 +  = _____



 -  = _____



 +  = _____



 +  = _____



 -  = _____



 +  = _____



 -  = _____



 +  = _____



 -  = _____



 +  = _____

 +  = _____

 -  = _____

 +  = _____

 -  = _____

 +  = _____



17. Mathematical-logical task. How many cats can you see? How many heads? Tails...? Paws...?

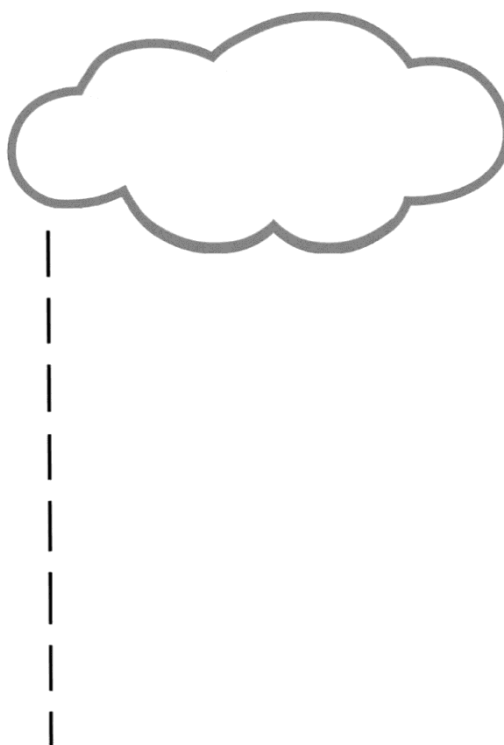
Fine motor skills and story

In art and craft lessons children can not only illustrate the story, but also practise fine motor skills with various worksheets, such as drawing a broken line – rain falling from clouds, circling around the sun, moving around the turnip, drawing motivated by the movement of animals, drawing the holes under the seeds etc.

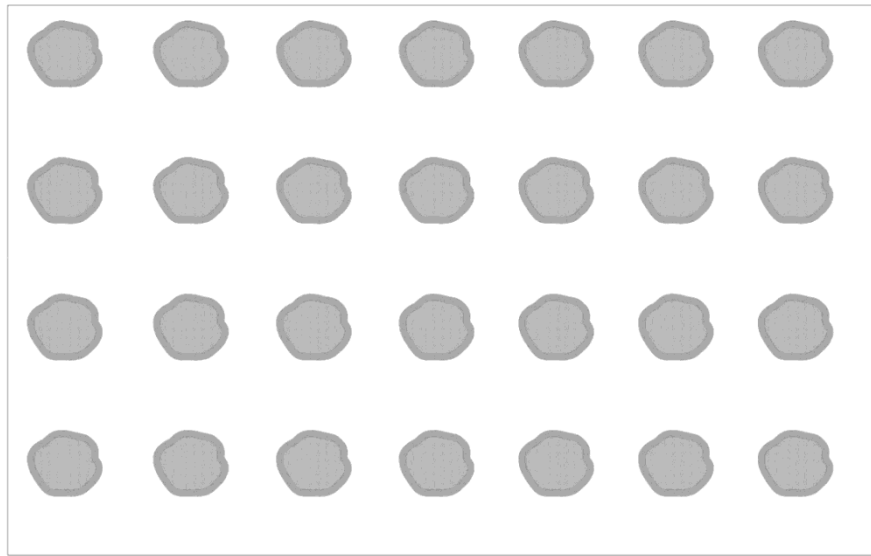
With clay, we can let the children make a long roll to shape the outlines of pictures, either of human or animal figures, or fill contours into the shape of an embossment.

The shapes of the figures can be painted with diluted glue and sprinkled with coloured sand, dyed semolina, rice, coconut, poppy - anything what is just available.

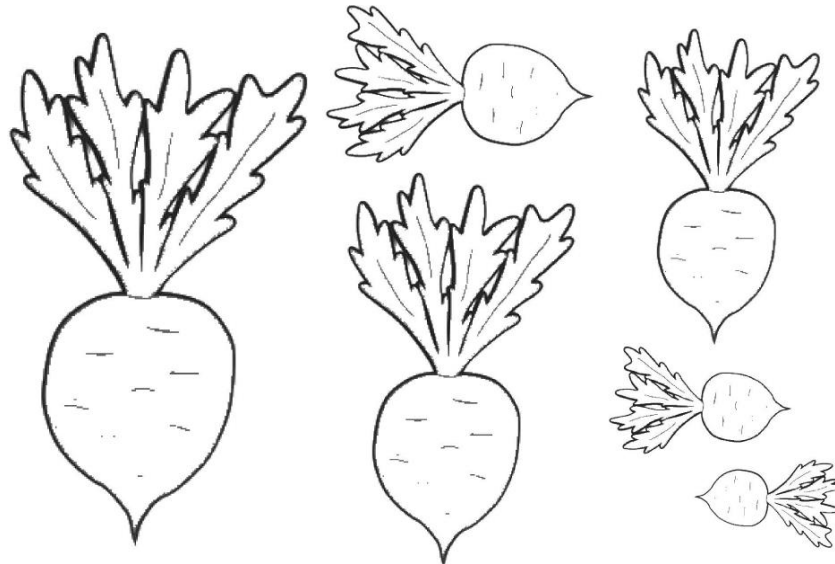
Children can colour in pictures from the story, making sure they work carefully, or they can cut the pictures out and assembling them in a collage or they glue them in order according to the story or their sizes.



18. Fine-motor skills – vertical broken line - rain



19. Fine-motor skills – holes for the seeds



20. Colour, cut out, order, glue onto a stripe of paper. How many learning areas are involved?

Story and foreign language learning

Stories are an ideal material to expose the children to a foreign language. There are many positive aspects. If the children know the story from their mother tongue, then it's easy to introduce the same story in a foreign language. All the activities, that have been introduced above, can be transferred into a foreign language without having to translate. Children already know what they are supposed to do, what are rhymes and songs about, how to play a game. With no translation, explanations, dull vocabulary drills, children are able to remember and understand a lot of activities. They know how to play with cards, how to draw a line on a worksheet, how to play a game. Moreover, by doing that after they have done that in mother tongue, they activate the prior knowledge and reinforce the knowledge in any language. We can say a teacher uses the elements of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning, which means combining foreign language use with the content of a lesson). The basic text is used to develop other cognitive areas. Activities are introduced step by step in a grading order. They build new areas of knowledge using already acquired ones. Children work all the time with the

topic they know, which we use to trigger their attention for new goals - to use a foreign language naturally, on the instant, without having to translate; to build their active vocabulary and make it sound natural; to improve fluent speech; to activate knowledge in maths, science and logical thinking while solving tasks with worksheets, card games and interactive word games; simply - children learn by doing things.

The importance and benefits of long-term work with a story

The series of activities will employ children for several weeks. Weeks, when children live by stories, learn everything much faster, because they are constantly motivated by the story, children know it and live with it, but even more thoroughly because the subject is discussed and worked on from all sides.

It is definitely not a way widely used in many kindergartens today, with one theme this week, another topic next week, discussed, finished, ticked off and moving on!

Will the children get time to stop, think, experience and absorb new information? To plan something new based on what they have been doing? Do they get a chance to create emotional bond to some activity or information? Will they learn to develop one topic with different options in a variety of areas, which is, by the way, a useful training for later studies at high school? The story approach is not a race through life. Children have enough time to play, experience, save, and repeat several times, each time in a different form.

Children feel great around stories. They find themselves in an adventurous environment where something happens all the time, something happens that they understand and can comprehend, grasp and process. Their minds can concentrate on long term tasks, because the objectives are clear, obviously desirable (they have a reason for doing it) and children see a lot of work behind them, which contributes to their self-confidence and self-esteem. By selecting appropriate stories, we will enable children not only to develop in all the areas described, but also to familiarize themselves with culture and tradition of other countries, thus contributing to the development of multicultural awareness and respect for national cultural traditions.

Good luck with stories and many inspirational ideas!

Illustrative pictures: Blanka Křížová, Plstík.cz, graphic design Sylvie Doláková

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