

Storyboxes and special needs

by Helen Bromley

“I think that it’s wonderful for special needs children to be able to use the same resource as others in the class, particularly one that is so attractive and inviting.”

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In all my work with Storyboxes over the last 12 years, some of the most significant has been with children designated as having ‘special needs’. It is vital that such children have access to attractive resources which enable them to show what they already know about literacy. Storyboxes offer an inclusive approach for all learners, which is especially important for special needs children who need to feel fully involved in a rich literacy curriculum if learning is to be most effective.



For many children with special needs, the formality of the literacy curriculum poses a problem. Long periods of directed teaching and an emphasis on success with secretarial skills mask the abilities that these children may have with spoken language. Such children need to find literacy activities motivational and exciting. Too often they are offered activities that focus on discrete aspects of the reading and writing process and lack an emphasis on the enjoyment that should underpin it.

Storyboxes offer special needs children a way into literacy, as their visual appeal, combined with elements of magic and surprise, makes children want to begin using them immediately. All children naturally create stories through play and Storyboxes provide an ideal context for this, encouraging children to use talk in a variety of ways, such as planning, sharing ideas, editing and drafting – all without the need for a pencil and paper. A supporting adult can scribe special needs children’s stories so they can be published alongside those of the rest of the class, giving them equal status and allowing all the children to see themselves as successful authors. Storyboxes are also perfect for small groups or pairs, where children can learn from each other whilst developing speaking and listening skills.



Storyboxes are not related to any particular story, so children can experiment with as many narratives as they wish without fear of ‘getting it wrong’. The box and its contents are a point of reference, inspiring ideas about characters, settings and plots. However, as the children physically move the toys around, they are free to improvise and invent any number of stories. The props are designed to reflect children’s interests in the outside world – insects, dinosaurs and mythical creatures are the stuff of many children’s stories in print and the media, helping children to build stories using prior knowledge and experiences. Storyboxes also reflect the personal interests of many boys, which are often not obvious in the school curriculum.

In an era when personalised learning and assessment for learning are to the fore, Storyboxes offer children a place to play with ideas and create a range of stories that are firmly rooted in their personal experiences.

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