

Retelling Stories



A variety of communication goals can be targeted by having children retell stories. Many clinicians use stories to target specific speech sounds (e.g., the /k/ sound) or grammatical concepts (e.g., the auxiliary verb “is”). Other clinicians target “story-retelling” as a goal in itself.

Story-retelling as a goal is typically reserved for older, more verbal preschoolers. First the story is read and then told again using props (e.g., pictures, manipulatives) Not only do the props make the activity more fun and interactive, but they can also serve as visual cues to help the child remember elements of the story. Below are examples of expressive language goals related to retelling stories.

Sequencing Events

Stories have a natural progression of “first... then... last...” and are therefore ideal when helping a child learn to sequence events. Different stories will have a different number of basic events to sequence, and the level of the child should be considered when selecting the story.

A simple story has only a few steps in the sequence:

- *The Enormous Potato* retold by Aubrey Davis
- *Mr. Gumpy’s Outing* by John Burningham
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
- *Troubles With Bubbles* by Frank B. Edwards

Other stories have more steps, but are still fairly straightforward:

- *The Hat* by Jan Brett
- *The Lazy Ladybug* by Isobel Finn
- *The Three Little Pigs*
- *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*

Some children may be ready for more detailed stories with a longer sequence of events:

- *Stanley’s Party* by Linda Bailey
- *Stone Soup* by Ann McGovern
- *Big Sarah’s Little Boots* by Paulette Bourgeois
- *Jack and the Beanstalk*

Recalling and Describing Details

This goal involves responding to closed-ended questions. The goal is for the child to recall and report information from the story they just heard. The closed-ended questions may relate to the story as a whole and may include:

- Who is this story about?
- What did he want to do?
- What happened instead?

The child might also be asked to recall details from one particular part of the story:

- toys from *The Bag I'm Taking to Grandma's* by Shirley Neitzel
- animals from *I Went Walking* by Sue Williams
- food from *Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Ehlert
- clothing or pets from *Pants Off First* by Ruth Ohi

Sentence Formulation

Children can have difficulty formulating longer sentences, as well as using correct word-order. Choosing books with repeated phrases gives the child lots of opportunities to practice new, longer sentence forms. Many books already have repeated phrases within the text:

- "I see a x x looking at me." (*Brown Bear* by Eric Carle)
- "She was very busy spinning her web." (*The Very Busy Spider* by Eric Carle)
- "I sent him back." (*Dear Zoo* by Rod Campbell)
- "There is just enough here to make a x." (*Something From Nothing* by Phoebe Gilman)

Other books can be modified to contain these phrases based on the repetitive nature of the story:

- "The gorilla opened the cage." (*Goodnight Gorilla* by Peggy Rathman)
- "Whose x is this?" (*It's Mine* by Rod Campbell)
- "Who will help me?" (*The Little Red Hen*)
- "I am so cold." (*The Mitten* adapted by Jan Brett)

Retelling stories can also provide opportunities to practice responding to open-ended questions about the story's details. This will be a more challenging task for the child because they will have to formulate the response themselves. Open-ended questions could include:

- Tell me about (the character) in this book.
- What was the problem?
- Was there anybody to help?
- What did they do?
- How did the story end?

**Remember that retelling stories does not have to be a formal, sit-down activity. Be silly and incorporate familiar storylines into pretend play situations. Join in, play with your child, and have fun!