

The Home/School Connection:
Collaborating to Promote Best Practice in World Language Education, PreK-8
Issue 14
Reading with Your Child

Dear Parents,

In this issue of Home/School Connection the focus is on reading with your child in English and other languages. Reading aloud helps the child become a better reader and it creates opportunities for learning new information. Through books, you can expand your child's knowledge of other cultures and languages.

Stories from Around the World

Some fairy tales and fables are shared worldwide. They have been adapted to reflect different cultures through a change of characters, setting, and even language. The story of Cinderella is one of those stories. Many cultures have adapted it, but much of the core of the story is the same.

The story of Cinderella can be a starting point for exploring other cultures with your child. Begin by reading a familiar version of the story with your child. Search for versions from different countries and cultures to compare with the familiar version. Here are a few questions to discuss with your child while you read:

- How are the characters similar in the stories? How are they different?
- Are the foods, clothing, and chores the same in any of the stories?
- How do the different versions of the story compare with the one that is most familiar to you and your child?
- What can you learn about other cultures by reading different versions of Cinderella?

The book Glass Slipper, Gold Sandal: A Worldwide Cinderella combines the Cinderella stories from seventeen countries. The author Paul Fleischman and the illustrator Julie Paschkis give the reader glimpses into the different countries and cultures through this familiar story.

Something as simple as reading different versions of Cinderella can enrich your child's understanding of other cultures. Reading these stories can stimulate the inquisitive mind which can foster further study of the culture and language of a particular country.

Making Connections

Many phenomenal stories are based on families immigrating to the United States. Some families immigrated here centuries, decades, or even just a few days ago. Some passed on their own arrival stories to their children, but in other families that story has been lost. Many children's books retell the story of immigration. These stories can help you and your child reconnect with your family's arrival story.

Some books focus on stories passed down from generation to generation. Tales Our Abuelitas Told: A Hispanic Folktale Collection by F. Isabel Campoy and Alma Flor Ada is a collection of stories passed down from the authors' grandmothers. At the end of each story, the authors give additional background information about the story. These stories not only educate children about cultural diversity, but they also enable children to make connections to

past experiences or to the experiences of their peers.

Reading in another Language

The U.S. Department of Education recommends that parents and their children “read many stories with rhyming words and lines that repeat. Invite the child to join in on these parts” (Simple Strategies). This strategy can be used when reading in any language. Many familiar stories can be found in languages other than English. If it is a story with much repetition, the pattern of the story can be learned quickly by you and your child. Additional stories can be created using the same pattern but different vocabulary. Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? by Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle is an example of repetitive story known to many children. Children enjoying taking the familiar story and creating their own version. This is a way to expand your child’s vocabulary in another language.

Your child’s second language teacher may send stories home that are written in the language your child learns at school. This is the perfect opportunity to practice that language at home in a way that is familiar and comfortable for your child. Most likely, your child has heard and practiced reading the story several times.

Many parents’ first reaction is to have their child translate the story into English because the parent does not speak the language their child is learning. Resist that urge because translating is a difficult skill and one your child is not learning in school. Ask your child to act out the story so you can understand it without the use of English. If you feel a translation is absolutely necessary, ask your child to give a brief summary of the story in his/her own words, and then have your child read the story as it is printed. Celebrate together the fact that s/he can read a story in another language!

Conclusion

Children’s books can be an easy and nonthreatening way to introduce other cultures and customs of the world. They present opportunities for exploring your family’s heritage or the heritage of a friend or neighbor. Children’s stories are also a valuable tool for reinforcing the second language your child learns at school.

“Simple Strategies for Creating Strong Readers.” U.S. Department of Education. 2009. ED.Gov Reading Tips for Parents. April. 2009. http://www.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/readingtips/part_pg4.html#4

NELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today. We would love to hear from you!

This issue of Home/School Connection was written by Tammy Dann. It is full of tips and resources that can be found at www.nnell.org. Teachers may reproduce it and send it home in their students’ backpacks. Send suggestions/comments to Tammy Dann, NELL’s Early Language Advocate: trdann@q.com