

Using TEFL-Friendly Literature with Children

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Introduction

Many children's books have an overwhelming amount of complex English for a child in the initial stages of learning English. Children books are often written to expose English speaking children to poems and art, to reading, and to narrative language. These purposes are incompatible with the needs of the earliest beginner in English (Lado & Daly, 2004). Using literature with beginners presents some challenges. However, many teachers like teaching with children's literature. They either develop appropriate EFL activities that mediate between the language of the books and the language proficiency of the students, or they find books with simple English that match their proficiency.

Language Proficiency

As with all language learning, English language learning is a continuum. Yet there are commonly accepted developmental benchmarks or stages (Huddleston & Serna, 2002; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Children's abilities differ widely between the starting and ending points of the beginning level, and children differ widely in the pace of their learning (Cox, 2002). With absolute beginners, teachers make significant adjustments in their speech just in order to obtain successful interaction. As the child progresses, fewer adjustments are needed.

The Language-Learning Continuum

For the purposes of using literature, the continuum of beginning level learners can be grouped into four stages. A child in the First Stage needs specially adjusted speech in order to begin talking. Teachers use a limited amount and talk to them slowly and deliberately. When these types of accommodations are not made, children can remain in the Silent Period longer than needed because the absolute beginner needs to be exposed to language that is decipherable (Gee, 1994; Tabors, 1997). Once a child reaches the final stage of the beginner level, they are able to learn from English presented in a more natural context.

Below is a compiled analysis of these books (Table 1).

TABLE 1
EFL-Friendly Books for Beginner Children

Title & Stage	Features of Book	Classroom Constraints	TESOL Strategies
Ten Seeds Stage 1	Total 45 words, different 30. Topic: plants. Two-word phrases.	Board book. Broad age range. Photographs	Use for oral recitation. Drama.
Bunny Stage 2	Total 45 words, different 45. Concrete topic. Patterned text.	Small board book. Broad age range	Use as model for LEA.

Conclusion

Currently, there are few resources available for teachers wishing to use literature with EFL beginners. My research project considers a multiplicity of factors involved in using literature with beginners. The objective has been to develop a system of describing books that is easy to use in the teaching of English. The information that is needed by teachers includes whether the book is useful, appropriate in its English proficiency level, and interesting. Several books quite suitable for use with EFL beginners have been selected and described in terms of language, topic, style, and instructional considerations.

References

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