

You Can... Use storytime for listen–imitate–innovate activities

Both RA-RA-RA and oral storytelling involve listening and imitating. When children have internalised the language patterns, you can encourage them to innovate on them.

Thinking points

- There are a limited number of story structures in the world. Listen–imitate–innovate activities show children how to pick up and internalise basic story frameworks and make them their own. The underpinning structures by which people tell stories are language patterns. Children must internalise these through listening before they can successfully innovate on them and come up with successful stories of their own.

- In the early days of the National Literacy Strategy, we urged teachers to help children 'to read like a writer', picking up story structures, ideas and phrases they could use in their own work. Over time, however, it became clear that, first, one has to 'listen like a prospective writer'. The ability to write fluently and easily depends upon:

- mastery of the basic skills of handwriting and spelling
- a deeply ingrained awareness of the patterns and rhythms of written language, born of effective listening.

Tips, ideas and activities

- Choose a familiar RA-RA-RA book and show it to the children. Then suggest making up your own story based on it. For instance, show *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell (Walker) and say: *Let's not have three little owls today, let's have three something else... We could have monsters, lions, caterpillars...* Let the children choose, then put the book aside and start telling the story from memory, with the new characters. Adjust it as necessary as you go along, for example: *They lived in... where would they live?* Go back to the beginning each time and tell the story with the innovated characters, setting and events. When you have finished, children might like to draw or paint the new story.

- Use the same method with oral stories the children know well. Tell the story, with the actions, in the usual way, changing characters, setting and events. You could use the same basic story frame on several days, trying different innovations. Each time, of course, you will be revising the key language structures and connectives. There are plenty of suggestions and ideas in Pie Corbett's *Bumper Book* (see page 41).

