

Story Time Sense

The storyteller opened his book. Large, vibrant pictures mesmerized children clustered at his feet. Children farther away were captivated by his voice as it changed from that of a monstrous giant to a conniving young boy. Other children were drawn into the tale when asked to stomp like the giant, slap their knees like the footsteps of a fleeing boy, and pretend to climb the beanstalk.

Stories have the capacity to appeal to every style of learning – styles that suggest we learn and remember best when information is presented either through our ears, eyes, or sense of touch and movement. We refer to these learning styles as auditory, visual or kinesthetic. Though children are absorbing information about their world using all three styles, they will eventually show a preference for one (or two) of these styles above the others.

Young children typically have short attention spans, but children who simply cannot attend to any part of a story may need the book shared in a different way. A child who is developing a strong preference as an auditory learner will need a story told with lilting rhythms, distinctive character voices, or repeated words or tunes. Begin with “Once upon a time…” and allow your child to add the next idea. The story can be fanciful, crazy or simply a recollection of the day.

A child with a strong visual preference needs books with beautiful pictures, rich colours or interesting details. Illustrations are as important as the storyline. Look for books with a variety of artistic styles and allow your child plenty of time to drink in each page before moving on to the next. Encourage your child to tell a story or create a different ending to a familiar story through drawing or painting pictures.

An interactive story encourages a kinesthetic learner to move rather than sit still. “Barnyard Dance” and other titles by Sandra Boynton’s are written in just such a way. Stories can be interactive through use of props and puppetry. A paper towel tube can become the story’s pirate spyglass or fairy godmother wand. A band-aid over the tip of each index finger can become story character finger puppets when facial features are added with a marker. Concoct stories together at the kitchen table creating characters with a mound of play dough. Simply ensuring that your child is the one holding the book and turning the pages increases the enjoyment of story time for a kinesthetic learner.

Sensitivity to a child’s learning preferences can be the switch that turns young children onto books.

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