



Bonny Norton at the launch of Storybooks Canada

Global Storybooks for multilingual UK classrooms

Bonny Norton and Liam Doherty consider the potential of their multi-lingual digital storybook project for UK classrooms

Why did we initiate the Global Storybooks project?

In this era of increasing transnational migration, teachers often feel ill-prepared to teach diverse, multilingual, and multicultural classrooms and lack the resources to respond to linguistically diverse students (UNESCO, 2019). Dominika Gordon's recent article for NALDIC's EAL Journal blog describes how she helped bilingual students become confident readers by using a series of lessons structured around a bilingual Polish-English storybook. Like Gordon and other bilingual educators (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cummins 2005), we are also interested in fostering

students' biliteracy, and we have seen that students' identities are affirmed when they are invested in both their first and second languages (Stranger-Johannessen & Norton, 2019). However, even in well-resourced countries like the UK and Canada, teachers do not necessarily have ready access to resources that will help them support the multilingual learners in their classrooms. To address this need, our team at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada has harnessed the power of open educational resources to develop multilingual storybooks that are freely available for use in schools and homes worldwide.

What is the Global Storybooks project?

Grounded in our pre-existing connection with the open-licensed African Storybook (Norton & Welch, 2015), as well as a shared vision of global literacy, our UBC team has repurposed for a global audience a curated selection of 40 openly licensed stories from the beautifully illustrated African Storybook, and hosted them on our Global Storybooks portal (Norton, Stranger-Johannessen, & Doherty, 2020). One of more than 40 sites on the portal is Storybooks UK, where you can find levelled storybooks, many of them with studio quality audio, in 18 of the most commonly spoken languages of the UK.

The ever-increasing number of translations, audio recordings, and classroom-ready downloads

is powered by the work of team members and volunteers from UBC and other institutions and communities around the world. We have spent several years researching the best ways to use these freely-available bilingual and multilingual materials in the classroom, and creating online and offline ways to make it easier for everyone to access this content. We will discuss next the particular design features of Storybooks UK and other sites and then share what we have learnt about using multilingual storybooks in linguistically diverse classrooms.

What are the design features of Storybooks UK?

Like other sites on the Global Storybooks portal, Storybooks UK has been specifically designed to pedagogically support multiple languages and a translanguaging approach. In addition to reading 40 stories of different levels, teachers and students can also digitally navigate these stories in ways that support students' identities as multilingual and multiliterate language learners. The following design features facilitate active engagement in multilingual texts (Norton, Stranger-Johannessen, & Doherty, 2020):

1. Single-click access. It takes just a single click to reach any one of the stories on Storybooks UK.

2. Mobile-first design. The site has been built from the ground up for mobile devices such as cell phones and tablets.

3. User-friendly layout. Beautiful illustrations, sparse use of buttons, and the use of icons all make Storybooks UK easy to read and navigate, at school and at home.

4. Parallel texts. Storybooks UK, like other Global Storybooks sites, has a useful toggle feature that enables the user to switch back and forth between the same text in different languages. The more familiar language serves as a scaffold for understanding the less familiar language.

5. Audio recordings. Storybooks UK has high-quality audio recordings that help to develop phonemic awareness and promote language learning. Audio recordings can be played on demand and repeatedly, at school or at home.

6. Download function. Stories can be downloaded in a range of PDF layouts, including regular/wordless/imageless texts. There are two different form factors: landscape (for reading on screens) and booklets (for printing).

Suggestions for teachers

There are many ways in which Storybooks UK can be used in the classroom, and we have set up a link (www.storybookscanada.ca/teachers) on the Storybooks Canada site to provide resources particularly for teachers. The following five suggestions may also be relevant to the UK context:

1. Link the stories to the local curriculum: In Storybooks Canada, we have investigated how stories can enhance the learning objectives of the new British Columbia Curriculum (Gilman & Norton, in press). In addition to using the stories for the English language arts curriculum, stories such as *Counting Animals* can develop arithmetic skills; *Look at the Animals* can enhance science goals; and *Feelings* can address physical and health education competencies.

2. Use the Download feature for individual or group activities:

Download the wordless texts or the imageless texts so that students can write their own stories or draw their own images. Download the regular text so that students can expand the existing story, or explore vocabulary to describe the images. If the Internet is not available, teachers can download a story and project it on the classroom screen, so that all students can read the same story at the same time. The website Storybooks Outline can provide downloadable stories that be used as a colouring book and will save on printing costs.

3. Use the stories to build home/school connections: Stories that use the mother tongue of linguistically diverse students can be read in the home, and compared to the English language version. Translanguaging activities could be helpful in mother tongue maintenance and second language learning. Immigrant and refugee parents are recognized as experts in the home language.

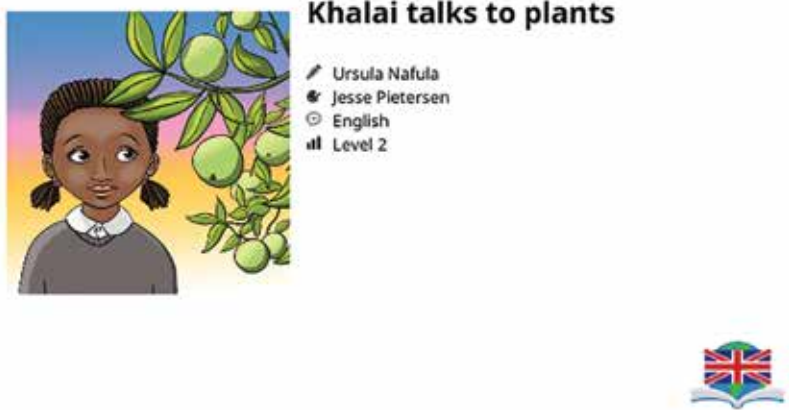
4. Promote language awareness: Research has found that valuing and sharing knowledge about diverse languages in classroom contexts help students develop more favourable representations of speakers of these languages (Dagenais, Walsh, Armand, & Maraillet, 2008). Storybooks UK introduces students to a wide variety of languages, with different orthographies and conventions. These texts and the related audio can facilitate discussions about language diversity, and give minority language speakers the opportunity to claim more powerful identities from which to speak.

5. Use high/low texts for youth: Youth and adolescents who are learning English may be reluctant to read books they perceive to be children's books. While most of the books on the Storybooks UK site are targeted for children, there are a number of "high/low" books in which the main characters are adolescents. These books are of "high interest" in content, but have "low vocabulary" levels. A list of high/low texts in the Global Storybooks collection can be found on the Teachers link on the Storybooks Canada site.

“In addition to reading 40 stories of different levels, teachers and students can also digitally navigate these stories in ways that support students' identities as multilingual and multiliterate language learners.”

Using stories in different formats

As mentioned above, one of the distinguishing features of the Storybooks UK site is the availability of downloadable stories in a number of formats specifically designed for use in multimodal activities in the classroom or at home. Below we will show some examples of these different formats and how they could be used.



Khalai talks to plants

- ✍ Ursula Nafula
- ✎ Jesse Pietersen
- 🌐 English
- 📖 Level 2

This is Khalai. She is seven years old. Her name means 'the good one' in her language, Lubukusu.

2

Regular PDFs

Regular PDFs are the most familiar and are great for reading on a screen such as a desktop or laptop computer or a tablet. They feature large, colourful illustrations and easy-to-read text, and are designed to be read full-page and to fill all of the available space on a rectangular screen.



ਖਾਲੀ ਪੌਦਿਆਂ ਨਾਲ ਗੱਲਬਾਤ ਕਰਦੀ ਹੈ
Khalai talks to plants

- ✍ Ursula Nafula
- ✎ Jesse Pietersen
- 🌐 English
- 📖 Level 2

ਇਹ ਖਾਲੀ ਹੈ। ਉਹ ਸੱਤ ਸਾਲ ਦੀ ਹੈ। ਉਸਦਾ ਨਾਮ, ਲੁਬੁਕੁਸੂ ਹੈ, ਉਸਦੇ ਨਾਮ ਦਾ ਅਰਥ 'ਥੋੜ੍ਹਾ ਚੰਗਾ' ਹੈ।

This is Khalai. She is seven years old. Her name means 'the good one' in her language, Lubukusu.

2

Bilingual PDFs

Bilingual PDFs, such as the Punjabi-English version pictured above, are available in a host of languages on Storybooks UK, and allow readers to practice reading in both their mother tongue and English. The text of the two languages is clearly separated, allowing for simple bilingual activities such as covering the top or bottom text while reading in one language and translating into the other, and then uncovering the text to check the translation and compare.

Students who are not bilingual can also benefit from bilingual stories by using them to develop their general language awareness, for example by comparing the English text with another language and seeking out patterns to try and make educated guesses about language structure, orthography, and so on.

For bilingual stories in Latin script such as English-French or English-German, one possible group activity for a class involves giving students multi-coloured pens or highlighters and having them try to work together to find a list of English words in a story and highlight the corresponding words in the other language with the same colour. You could even start off in an “easy” language such as French (with many cognates and familiar structure) and then move on to more challenging ones such as Polish or Tagalog.



Wordless PDFs:

While there are many ways to work with texts in different languages on the site, a very different kind of creativity can be fostered by removing all words entirely from the stories and challenging students to create and write down their own stories to match the pictures. This can be done monolingually in English or another language, but there is also ample room for two or more languages on the page if needed.



Imageless PDFs

Imageless PDFs allow for even more multimodal creativity, giving students the chance to unleash their inner artist by illustrating the stories themselves. Research has demonstrated the powerful effects of combining modalities such as text and images using active and creative work such as drawing or painting. This can help emerging readers to link the text and their imaginations, allowing words to evoke multiple levels of meaning.



Outline PDFs

As mentioned above, Outline PDFs from the related Storybooks Outline sister project are a great way to print the stories on a regular black and white printer. These versions can be used as colouring-in activities, or more structured multimodal drawing or painting work, as compared to the blank canvas of the imageless versions.



Booklet PDFs

Finally, if you have access to a printer that is capable of printing double sided (that is, on both sides of a single sheet of paper), the printable Booklet PDFs are a great option to consider. The pages in this version may seem to be upside-down, but there is a good reason for this: by setting the printer to print on both sides of the page, these printable versions can be simply folded together – no staples required – to form a compact, readable booklet. In this way, a 12 page story can be printed on just three sheets of standard A4 paper, saving printing time and resources.

If your school has a program for early readers to send books home to read, these booklets are a quick and easy way to supplement that – the booklets can be quickly printed, folded together and provided as material for extracurricular reading. Of course, there are also imageless, wordless, and bilingual booklet formats as well!

“By setting the printer to print on both sides of the page, these printable versions can be simply folded together to form a compact, readable booklet.”

Research in progress

The Global Storybooks project generates many questions for research, some of which concern the negotiation of identity for teachers, students, and translators associated with the project. A number of publications are available on the Storybooks Canada website under the 'Resources' tab. Research questions that our team are interested in include: *To what extent do parallel texts promote investment in multilingual literacy? Does the use of Global Storybooks promote language awareness in linguistically diverse classrooms? Which high/low texts generate investment on the part of adolescent youth? How do translators navigate cultural identity?*

In a chapter to be published in an edited collection by two UK scholars (Ayers-Bennett & Fisher, forthcoming), our team addresses current research on translation, identity, and translanguaging in order to better understand the translanguaging practices of translators active in the Global Storybooks project (Doherty, Norton, & Stranger-Johannessen, forthcoming). Extending the work of team member Asma Afreen (2017), we develop a new model of translator identity that seeks to legitimize the diverse participants active in two translation projects. With reference to data from a team of Swahili and Kurdish translators, respectively, we found that the fluidity of translanguaging practices enabled

Useful websites

African Storybook www.africanstorybook.org/
Global Storybooks Portal www.globalstorybooks.net/
Storybooks Canada www.storybookscanada.ca/
Storybooks Outline <https://global-asp.github.io/storybooks-outline/>
Storybooks UK <https://global-asp.github.io/storybooks-uk/>

translators to maximize the full use of their linguistic repertoires, crossing arbitrary sociolinguistic boundaries when needed. In this process, we worked within two divergent theorizations of translanguaging – one which recognizes the strategic usefulness and importance of named languages, and the other which recognizes the importance of drawing on the full range of linguistic repertoires available to individuals, groups, and communities in the construction of meaning making.

Conclusion

Providing opportunities for children to leverage both their home and school languages in the classroom can

be beneficial for developing bilingual and multilingual literacy. Freely available multilingual resources can help teachers facilitate this process, while providing flexibility for creative adaptation to suit the needs of particular classrooms and students. As an example of one such resource, Storybooks UK is focused specifically on the linguistic and pedagogical needs of teachers and students in the UK. We hope that this resource can help generations of children to discover the joy of reading and learning in multiple languages. ■

Bonny Norton and Liam Doherty, Dept. of Language & Literacy Education, University of British Columbia

“Providing opportunities for children to leverage both their home and school languages in the classroom can be beneficial for developing bilingual and multilingual literacy.”

References

- Afreen, A. (2017). *Translating Stories from the African Storybook to Storybooks Canada: Navigating Identity and Ideology*. Unpublished M.Ed Graduating Paper, University of British Columbia
- Ayers-Bennett, W. & Fisher, L. (forthcoming). *Multilingualism and identity: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2010). Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching? *The Modern Language Journal*, 94(1), 103–115.
- Cummins, J. (2005). A proposal for action: Strategies for recognizing heritage language competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 89, 585–592.
- Dagenais, D., Walsh, N., Armand, F., & Maraillet, E. (2008). Collaboration and co-construction of knowledge during language awareness activities in Canadian elementary school. *Language Awareness*, 17(2), 139–155
- Gilman, M. & Norton, B. (in press). Storybooks Canada and English language learners in multilingual classrooms. *BC TEAL Journal*.
- Gordon, D. (2018, November 12). Using dual language storybooks to foster biliteracy. *EAL Journal.org* <https://ealjournal.org/2018/11/12/using-dual-language-storybooks-to-foster-biliteracy/>
- Doherty, L., Norton, B. & Stranger-Johannessen, E. (forthcoming). Translation, identity, and translanguaging. In W. Ayers-Bennet & L. Fisher (eds). *Multilingualism and identity: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press
- Norton, B., Stranger-Johannessen, E., & Doherty, L. (2020, January 19). Global Storybooks: From Arabic to Zulu, freely available digital tales in 50+ language. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/global-storybooks-from-arabic-to-zulu-freely-available-digital-tales-in-50-languages-127480>
- Norton, B. & Welch, T. (2015, May 15). Digital stories could hold the key to multilingual literacy for African children. *The Conversation*. Retrieved from: <https://theconversation.com/digital-stories-could-hold-the-key-to-multilingual-literacy-for-african-children-40405>
- Stranger-Johannessen, E. & Norton, B. (2019) Promoting early literacy and student investment in the African Storybook. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 18(6), 400–411. DOI: 10.1080/15348458.2019.1674150
- UNESCO. (2019). Migration, displacement, education: Building bridges, not walls. *Global Education Monitoring Report*. UNESCO, Paris. <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2019/migration>