

# Using ‘Storybooks Canada’ in the Classroom

Justine Younie-Gillham discovers the potential for inclusion in digital storybooks

**A**s a newly qualified French and Spanish teacher, I am joining a generation of teachers for whom inclusive practice has been a high priority in our training. As a trainee teacher, undertaking my second teaching placement in a large mixed comprehensive, I sought to develop this inclusive practice, within a

Modern Foreign Language classroom, for learners who have EAL.

As a linguist myself, I know that language learning helps to develop curiosity and openness towards other people and other cultures and provides a vehicle for encouraging interaction with and between pupils from different social identities and cultures. With the current emphasis

on literature and the use of authentic texts in the National Curriculum, use of texts seemed to provide an opportunity for the development of inclusive practice, since they offer opportunities for exploration of the cultures associated with the languages being taught.

Thus, in a classroom, with three pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), two of whom were not actively engaged with Spanish lessons, one of whom had been a source of low-level disruption in the class during my previous classes; I sought an approach which would engage and enhance their inclusion in lessons.

## Central concern

With inclusion as a central concern, and inspired by Bonny Norton’s work in this area (see issue 11 of the *EAL Journal*), I identified Storybooks Canada as a potential resource. Storybooks Canada is a free, open educational resource, which is part of the Global Storybooks and African Storybooks projects. African Storybook is a South African initiative

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The Storybooks Canada website



A screenshot of a story about cooking in Spanish from Storybooks Canada

to promote literacy in schools containing around forty stories. The stories can be translated into a range of languages and can be displayed with pictures and text, together with audio options in different languages and accents to make them more accessible to English as additional language (EAL) learners. Teachers are able to choose a text based on the target language and the appropriate level.

Trialling this resource as a way of promoting inclusion and diversity, I selected one very simple text with pictures and audio for a Year 9 Spanish class, where I was teaching the topic of Food and Drink. This class had a wide range of abilities, including the three EAL students, whose first languages could be found in African Storybooks. It was a double lesson and holding the class' attention had been a constant preoccupation when lesson planning. In the lesson, pupils learnt new vocabulary and began to talk about eating and drinking in the target language.

### Listening and reading exercise

We learnt how to use direct object pronouns to replace nouns and we learnt about Spanish foods and typical meals. At this point, I introduced the text from Storybooks Canada and I talked about some of the countries,

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other than Spain, where Spanish is spoken and about some of the ways in which the Spanish language differs from country to country. Once I had got them thinking about the reach of the Spanish language, we treated the story as a listening and reading exercise using a story from African Storybooks. The pictures showed a child preparing different ingredients for a recipe. The story was beautifully short and simple, as was the language.

To my delight, this story caught the eye and imagination of one EAL child. I could tell by his body language that he was curious, he was not chatting, he had turned towards the board and was paying attention - for the first time I saw him engaged. On reflection, the fact that he saw a boy, who looked similar to him in the story displayed on the board, had provoked his interest. The thing that surprised me and made the biggest impression on me was that this adaptation to my lesson had taken little effort on my part. Following lessons of low level

disruption, I discovered that the one thing which won him over in my class was seeing something he could relate to, reflected in the form of a simple picture on the board. This was a powerful lesson for me. I am now acutely aware of the need to make sure the faces, languages and cultures in my classroom, are reflected in the resources I hold up to my classes for learning.

Inclusion means enriching our classrooms, and our schools. As reflective practitioners we are obliged to examine how inclusive, effective, friendly and welcoming our lessons are. We have a role to play in making education socially inclusive. ■

*Justine Younie-Gillham was a trainee French and Spanish teacher at King's College London, 2019-2020.*

#### References:

<https://www.storybookscanada.ca/>  
<https://africanstorybook.org/>  
<https://globalstorybooks.net>