В КОПИЛКУ УЧИТЕЛЯ

Creating stories with children

T. Kuznetsova,
an honoured teacher of Russia,
secondary school of the settlement of Novopodrezkovo,
Moskovskaya oblast, Himky

Teachers always think about how to involve students into the process of active learning and how to motivate them. One of the ways to develop speaking and writing skills is to create stories together with students.

Creating stories with children is grounded in students' ability to create a story from their personal experience. It gives encouragement to children within a structured framework and confidence in their creativity.

Creativity is very important in language teaching, because:

- language teaching is about the development of the whole person;
- it is a key part of the child's development;
- it gives opportunity and encouragement to use new language, to play with the language and to feel the language.

There are problems in creating a story:

- fluency
- whether the students have enough language to create a story
- accuracy

— Fluency is an important aspect of creativity; it means willingness to develop the ability to speak, to listen and to participate. Of course, it takes time and depends on a teacher.

— Here is an example of a story with single words but it is a story. The language in it is very limited but we can understand the succession of actions: *Little ... green ... frog ... jump ... from ... leaf ... to ... leaf ... play ... dive.*

— As far as accuracy is concerned: any interesting and relevant idea should be clearly expressed with correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. Accuracy and fluency must not be in conflict.

There are two types of stories:

- quick — time story
- long — time story

Let's consider some quick-time stories. These stories can be produced during one lesson or even part of the lesson:

- *Chain story.* The teacher gives a sentence, then the first student repeats the sentence and adds his / her own, the second repeats the two previous sentences and adds one more and so on. Before you should say that there should be a story not separate sentences. The topic of the story depends on the topic of the lesson.
- *"If" stories.* These types of stories are very successful while using the first conditionals. For example: If you go to the seaside in summer you will swim in the sea. If you swim in the sea you will meet dolphins... and so on.
- *This is the house that Jack built.* This type of story is also repetition with adding new facts. The plot of the story may be any the teacher or students choose. For example: This is the place we visited last year and in this place we saw ... met ... played ... spent and so on.
- *In the dark, dark house.* These types of stories are very good for practicing the construction there is / are.
- *Fortunately / unfortunately stories.* Each sentence begins with the word fortunately / unfortunately.

Long — time stories need more time for preparation.

With my students we decided to write a Christmas story.

— The first stage was brainstorming. I asked my students to think about as many words connected with Christmas as they can.

— Then we discussed:

- who we want to be in the story
- where the action will take place
- when the action will take place
- how the action will develop

— The next stage was to produce a questionnaire. We included the following questions:

- What do you know about Christmas in Britain?
- What don't you know about Christmas in Britain?
- What do you know about Christmas in Russia?
- What don't you know about Christmas in Russia?

The students asked their parents, classmates, and friends to answer the questions.

— Another important stage was to particularize the characters:

Father Frost:

- very old
- kind
- loves children
- with beard
- wears a long red coat
- has a granddaughter called Snowmaiden
- travels by horses
- puts presents under a fur tree

Santa Claus:

- old
- wears a red suit

- has no helpers
- travels by reindeers
- puts presents into Christmas stockings
- comes to children though chimneys

– Then we discussed the place of the story – North Pole and the plot itself – Santa Claus and Father Frost met in a special shop to buy presents for the children on Christmas Eve.
– After collecting all the necessary facts we started to produce the story.

A short description of the project:

Number of students – 20
Level – from elementary to intermediate
Final product – a story
Form of presentation – a play and a poster
Language work:

– asking and answering different types of questions
– making a questionnaire about Christmas in Britain and in Russia

Main activities:

– creating a story
– practising in dialogue speech

Illustrations – pictures, stickers.
Duration – 3 lessons.

Christmas Story

Once upon a time Santa Claus and Father Frost met in a special shop where they usually took toys for children. They received letters from all over the world in which the children asked to send them different presents for Christmas. Santa Claus was in a hurry; he took everything from the shelves. Father Frost was going much more slowly.

"Why are you in a hurry?" asked Father Frost, "we have more than ten days to prepare for Christmas."

"Your calendar is wrong, Christmas is the day after tomorrow on the 25th of December," replied Santa.

"No, we have Christmas on the 7th of January", argued Father Frost.

"Really? I've never heard about it, but ... . Sorry, I have no time and besides I have to train everyday to be strong enough to climb up the roofs and go through chimneys to put presents into the stockings," said Santa.

"Why should you climb up the roofs, I simply put the presents under Christmas tree," replied Father Frost. Then he asked: "Do you have any helpers?"

Santa: "My only helper is a reindeer Rudolph with a shiny red nose. His nose shines in the dark and I can see the way. He is the most important of the other eight. Their names are: Blitzer, Comet, Cupid, Dancer, Dasher, Donner, Prancer, Vixen".

Father Frost: "I usually travel by horses but my best helper is my granddaughter Snowmaiden. She helps me to give presents to children, to sing songs and dance with them around the fur-tree."

Santa: "How old is she? What kind of girl is she?"

Father Frost: "She is a nice girl of about 11 years old. She knows a lot of songs and games. Our children are very glad to play games outside and make a snowwoman."

Santa: "But we call it a snowman, what songs do you usually sing on Christmas?"

Father Frost: «The most popular song is "A fur tree was born in a forest." And what about you?»

Santa: "We used to sing Christmas Carols but now special groups (usually children) sing carols in the street and collect money for charity. What do you eat on this holiday?"

Father Frost: "Different things: salads, roast chicken, fruit and vegetables and of course, drink champagne. I have heard that your dinner is very special."

Santa: "Oh, yes. Christmas dinner is very special for us. We usually cook turkey, roast potatoes, Brussels sprouts and Christmas pudding."

Father Frost: "Can you give me a recipe of a Christmas pudding?"

Santa: "Sorry, the recipe is very complicated, there are many ingredients in it. I can send you the recipe by post."

Father Frost: "Thank you very much."

Santa: "Do you decorate your houses?"

Father Frost: "Yes, of course, we usually decorate fur trees (natural and artificial). We put balls, toys, candles and a star on the top."

Santa: "A star? We put an angel on the top of the fur tree. We don't have natural trees in Britain; we decorate our homes with wreaths, holly, mistletoe and ivy. There is a belief that if you kiss someone under mistletoe you'll be friends forever. And also people from Norway send a natural fur tree to the people of Britain every year. We put it on Trafalgar Square."

Father Frost: "That's very exciting. I like all this. What do you wish each other?"

Santa: "We wish Merry Christmas."

Father Frost: "We also wish Merry Christmas."

Santa: "Oh, sorry I have to go as quickly as possible. See you! Good luck!"

Father Frost: "Good luck. See you again on Christmas Eve next year."

Variations: If your students are upper-intermediate or advanced, you can develop the story including more facts about similarities and differences between two cultures.