

The background features a diagonal split between a light purple and a light green. Scattered across this background are several orange musical notes and four-pointed stars. In the top right corner, there is a black triangle.

**National
Literacy
Trust**

Change your story

In partnership with

**GO
ALL
IN.**

National
Year of
Reading
2026

Soundtrack your story

Early years resource pack

National Storytelling Week

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Introduction

To celebrate National Storytelling Week 2026, the National Literacy Trust, supported by Amazon, have created a variety of storytelling activities for your setting. For National Storytelling Week, we celebrate the magic of stories and the many ways they help children explore language, imagination and the world around them. Storytelling doesn't need to begin with a book, it can grow from a sound, a question, a walk in the garden or even a wriggly worm making its way through the soil.

This year, our inspiration comes from *A First Book of Bugs* by Simon Mole, a beautifully poetic introduction to the fascinating world of minibeasts. This book reminds us that stories are everywhere, just waiting to be discovered.



How should I use this resource?

The session plans are designed to be used throughout National Storytelling Week, with nursery or reception age children, where possible working in small groups. They will support you to take children through the process of creating a short story together with sound and rhythm.

However, you know your children best, you may decide to use these plans at a different time of the year, select just some of the activity ideas or to use them as inspiration for your own storytelling activities and to extend this learning focus over a longer period of time.

Please note: You may wish to purchase a copy of Simon Mole's *A First Book of Bugs* to support the sessions or use the *Earthworms* poem included in the resource.

Using this resource

This resource includes:

- 5 session plans
- 2 supporting videos by poet Simon Mole and musician Gecko
- *Earthworms* poem by Simon Mole
- Bug illustrations
- What next? Additional activities to supplement the session plans
- Continuous provision ideas
- Book list
- Home learning resource



Tips to support your planning:

- If it's hard to choose one story idea, you could add different options to your plan throughout, children's stories naturally evolve and change, that's okay and will be supporting their imaginations.
- You may choose to do more physical storytelling, if this works best for your group, make sure you're working in an area where there is space to move around.
- And remember, it's okay if your story doesn't follow a rigid structure. It can describe a moment or a series of moments, let the children's imaginations take you on an adventure.

Session one:

Explore the poem: 'Earthworms'

Resources:

- Simon and Gecko video 1
- Non-fiction worm information (websites or books)
- Large paper and pens for scribing

Starter:

Watch the video together: Provide time for children to respond physically and orally as they watch and join in. Comment on how you noticed them respond to the video, ask questions or prompt them, to encourage them to express their thoughts. Watch again and invite the children to have another go at joining in with the rhythm. Simon and Gecko recommend pause points, but do pause whenever works for you.



Main activity:

Read the poem, *Earthworms* (pg. 62, or at the end of this resource) aloud, notice the children's responses. As above, ask or prompt the children to share their thoughts: What do they think about the poem? What do they like about it? Did they learn anything new? Enquire about the children's understanding of new concepts introduced in the poem, such as the reason the air needs '*space down there to move around*'.

Invite the children to tell you something they already know about worms. Scribe a fact list, prompting them to contribute as needed:

Where do worms live?

What do worms look like?

How do worms move?

Consider watching a clip of a real worm (see suggested links below), or exploring a non-fiction book about worms together. You may choose to do this before creating a list, to enable all children to contribute.

[Ranger Hamzas Eco Quest - Series 2: 8. Earthworms - BBC iPlayer](#)

[CBeebies - Teeny Tiny Creatures, Facts about Earthworms | Ferne & Rory's Teeny Tiny Creatures | CBeebies](#) (animation)

Closing activity:

Watch video 1 together again. Encourage the children to join in with clapping the rhythm and singing the words.

Explain to the children that you're going to begin to write a story poem tomorrow. Finding out about earthworms was 'author research,' in preparation for writing a story together.

Session two:

Begin creating characters

Starter:

Watch video 1 or read the poem, *Earthworms*. Invite children to join in with the clapping and repeated refrain, 'wriggle, wriggle, dig, dig ...'. Explain that you're going to write your own bug story poem together. Decide whether your lead character will be an earthworm or use the bug illustrations to help you choose a different lead character.

Resources:

- Simon and Gecko video 1
- Large paper and pens for scribing (or Worm Fact List from Session 1)
- Paper
- Pencil
- Crayons/pens/watercolours

Main activity:

Find out what the children already know about the bug they've chosen for the lead character and repeat yesterday's activity, recording information the children already know and doing a little more research (or re-visit the worm facts list you made yesterday).

Invite children to chat to the person sitting next to them about the bug, then, working as a whole group or class – invite them to share ideas and act them out together. Support them as needed:

- How does a worm move?
- Can worms make a noise?
- Do they move fast or slow?

Explain that the story poem you're going to write together will be fiction (Take this opportunity to check children's understanding of fiction and non-fiction). However, tell the children that we can still use some of the facts we know about bugs (for example, that worms live underground) in our stories, but we will also use our imaginations!

Closing activity:

Invite children to pretend to be the bug again, and this time, think about its character. For example, decide how the character is going to be feeling in the story: scared, happy, sad or excited?

Is it going to wear anything? Invite children to pretend to put on a bug accessory or item of clothing, see if their friends can guess what it is. Maybe it will be x-ray glasses, super-pants or just a cosy hat or scarf!

In continuous provision or working in small groups:

Invite children to draw their own design of a bug character (let children choose whether they draw the bug character for your group story or make up their own), encourage them to add labels if appropriate or scribe for them. For example: long wiggly body, 100 legs, super strong antennae.

Session three:

Setting the scene

Resources:

- Character designs from Session 2
- Simon and Gecko video 2
- Selection of art and construction materials
- Large pieces of paper (or wallpaper roll) with a simple pathway drawn on
- Large paper for scribing

Starter:

Invite children to share their character designs created in Session 2.

Watch Simon and Gecko video 2.

Explain to the children we're going to work on the beginning of our story today.



Main activity:

Discuss where Worm or your bug character might live? Make a list of the children's ideas – Remind the group that their story is going to be fiction, so the character can live in a real place where a real worm might live or somewhere completely different.

Move on to begin to identify other characteristics of your bug. Think about a special talent or superpower? Or something the character really likes? (Maybe it can fly, maybe it's very kind or maybe it loves to eat peas!)

Next, think about a place your bug might visit in the story. It could be a place they visit every day, like the vegetable garden, work or school or, somewhere new and exciting, the top of a mountain or a shop that sells many different flavours of peas!

Now consider the 'voice' of the bug, what would they sound like? Can they talk or do they make noises? And what might they say? For example: The water is dripping on my head! The earth tastes disgusting! Encourage the children to experiment with their voices or use musical instruments and sound making tools to create voices for their bugs.

**You may choose to just focus on one or two of the options above in greater depth or to spread this activity over several sessions.*

Closing activity:

Begin to tell your story together.

You may choose to tell your story orally, recalling it together each time you work on it. Or you could begin to record a story path; (or a method of your choice to record the child's story) leaving the first space empty, represent the character, then its home and then its character traits.

Session three: Setting the scene

In continuous provision or working in small groups:

- Invite children to make characters using their designs and a selection of materials, for example, socks (puppets), card, clay, construction sets, reclaimed materials etc.
- Prepare a large piece of paper with a pathway drawn on. Begin to tell a story together about a worm or another bug. Use prompts and questions to support the children's imaginations:

"Where is Worm going?"

"Then Worm meets and together they find"

"Worm is feeling "

"Eventually Worm ..."

- Encourage the children to add detail and bring the path to life, using pictures, labels, collage and small world materials.



Session four:

Word patterns

Resources:

- Simon and Gecko video 1
- Character traits list from Session 3
- Story path from Session 3

Starter:

Share the characters the children have begun to create with the group. Re-watch Simon and Gecko video 1, focussing on the repetition of words “*wriggle – wriggle – dig! Wriggle – dig – dig – digger!*”. Have another go at joining in and singing/chanting the rhythm.



Main activity:

Review the list of characteristics from session 3, and identify some key words or think of some new ones, to provide a repeated refrain in your story poem.

Experiment with different words, sounds and rhythms, using Simon and Gecko’s example as a starting point. For example, *Wriggle-wriggle-dig! Wriggle-dig-dig-wriggle!* Try wriggling your body and pretending to dig with a spade. Then try some of your own, such as *flap-flap-flap your wings or scuttle-scuttle-tap-tap-hush*.

Experiment with using clapping rhythms, body percussion or actions to model the words or sounds you use.

Practise some different word patterns and actions ... you could even record them and play them back, for the children to help decide which ones are their favourites to include in your story.

Closing activity:

Ask the children if they remember where the Wriggle-wriggle-dig pattern was in the *Earthworms* poem? Re-read the poem to remind them. Then add your chosen word pattern into your story.

Retell the story so far orally or add your word pattern to the beginning and end of your story path, before the drawing of the character. Then tell the story so far, together, using your plan.

Let the children know that tomorrow you’ll need to finish the story, encourage them to think of ideas, remind them of the characters traits and likes and explain there will need to be a problem or challenge for them to overcome.

In continuous provision or working in small groups:

Encourage children to use their own characters to build on the work you’ve done together e.g., suggest they experiment and think of their own word or sound patterns.

Session five: Story dilemmas and storytelling

Resources:

- Simon and Gecko video 2
- Story path from Session 4

Starter:

Tell or read and recall your story so far, chanting the word pattern at the beginning of the story together.



Main activity:

Review Worm's likes and character traits or superpowers, and ask the children for suggestions of a problem or challenge to overcome. For example, remember that Worm said 'the earth tastes disgusting!' Encourage the children to consider what it would be like to only ever eat one food that you found disgusting. Invite the children to share ideas about what Worm could do to fix this problem, such as trying lots of other foods to see what they like, going on an adventure to taste the earth in different places etc. Record the children's ideas to solve your bug's problem and work together to decide which one to use (consider doing a tally chart vote if it's tricky to choose!).

Either retell the story or add on this next part of the story to your story path and re-read the story so far together.

Work with the children to decide what happens next, is the problem/challenge solved or not? Does something funny, scary or sad happen? Add this to the plan.

Then decide on your story ending together. For example, '*Worm was tired from digging his new home, but was happy to have met a new friend.*'

If you are recording it, add the story ending and yesterday's word pattern to the end of the story and retell or read it together with the children, using actions or rhythm for the repeated refrains.

Closing activity:

Ask the children how they'd like to share the story with their grown-ups at home? And begin to agree how you will do that. Let children know they will be taking home an information sheet for their grown-ups, that tells them a little about what they have been learning this week and shows them where they can watch Simon and Gecko.

Retell or re-read your story again together.

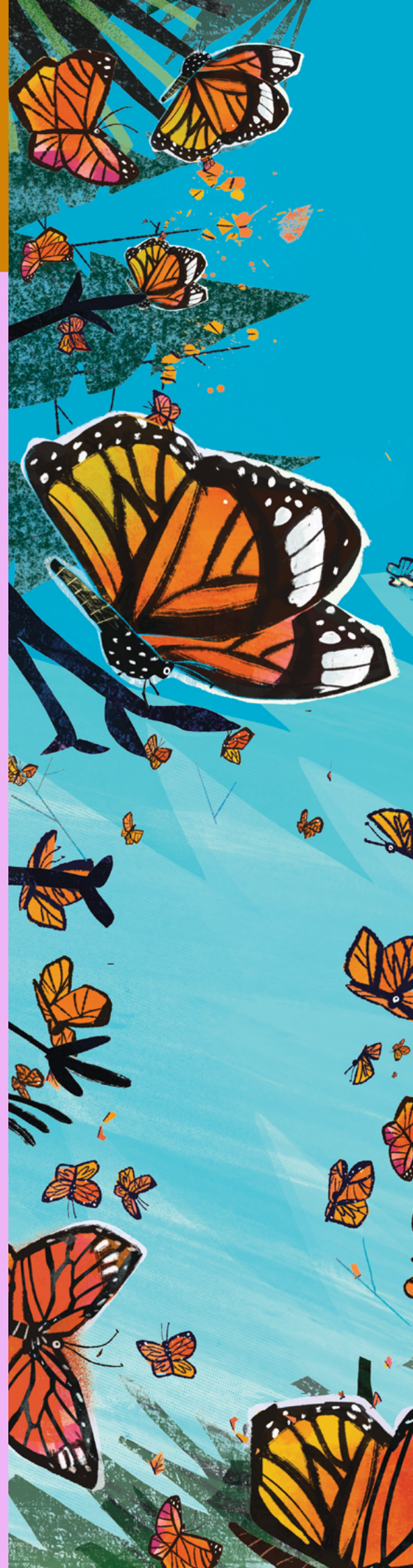
In continuous provision or working in small groups:

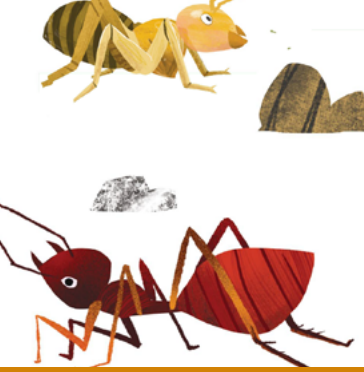
Encourage children to think about a problem or challenge for their own character and an ending to their story too.

What next?

Additional activities to supplement the session plans

- Use story time to spark children’s imaginations, share stories and non-fiction texts about bugs, to get children thinking creatively.
- Explore other poems from the collection, and watch Simon Mole perform some of his poems ([**A First Book of Bugs – YouTube**](#)).
- Explore bug homes through poetry by reading Simon Mole’s short poems about ant hills, spider webs or worm tunnels. Or read the *Woodlice* poem aloud and focus on the repeating pattern “*Just How We Like It!*” Discuss what makes each home special and unique. Talk about children’s own homes and what they like about them. for example, “*my soft blanket, the smell of pancakes or my dog’s waggy tail.*”
- Encourage children to re-visit your story poem and the children’s individual storytelling. Ensure there are ongoing opportunities for group or class sharing and storytelling play within continuous provision. Consider presenting the children’s stories for parents on paper, via a video recording or in-person.
- Fill a jar with words and phrases that describe bugs, pull them out and guess which bug they refer to.
- Create a no-book story sack, to encourage and support storytelling.
- Build a bug hotel. You can use an upturned rock or a pile of leaves and sticks. Invite the children to tell stories about who might live there and what they do each day?





Continuous provision



The role of the practitioner in children's storytelling play is essential to extend children's learning and language development by:

- extending children's thoughts, ideas and vocabulary through the use of sensitive prompts and open-ended questions.
- enabling, enhancing and supporting children's ideas by providing additional props and resources.
- documenting children's stories and supporting them to document their own stories, using video, photography or scribing and supporting children to share their stories.
- following the children's lead. By providing open ended materials and listening to children's ideas, you will empower them to shape the direction of their own stories.
- modelling or teaching children the skills they need, to enable them to use the resources in the environment effectively to support their play and learning.

Small world/construction:

Enhance the small world and construction area with open-ended and natural resources to support imaginative play.

Add "mini-me" characters and plastic (or images of) insects and minibeasts for the children, so they can include themselves and their friends in their small world storytelling.

Offer mark-making equipment alongside small world and construction areas, such as clipboards and sign making materials.

Provide new or represent familiar resources in a different way or in an unexpected place.

Role play/imaginative play areas:

Enhance the role play area with a selection of open-ended resources, such as fabric, boxes, bags, hats and scarves.

Offer unusual objects to spark imaginations, such as a foil survival blanket, natural materials and other interesting items.

Project inspiring backgrounds onto the wall or using a large screen. For example, a woodland, grassland, under the ground etc.

Provide mark-making materials on a large and small scale.

Provide mirrors for children to observe their transformations, movements and facial expressions.

Provide opportunities for children to perform their stories/story poems to the group or class.

Outside area

Provide both large and small props and materials to support storytelling, such as crates, pipes, tyres, clipboards, blocks, chalk and natural materials. Enhance existing provision with new and surprising objects to inspire storytelling.

Create a storytelling space or stage using large fabric or furniture.

Create a bug station; encourage children to research their bug characters (just like a real author) by setting up a research station, including: magnifying glasses, bug boxes, non-fiction books, tablets or cameras for taking pictures and mark making materials for recording their findings.

Create a bug storytelling space on the grass in a tuff tray or large planter, include natural items such as a log, bark, leaves and sticks. Add “mini-me” characters and plastic characters or images of insects and minibeasts for the children, so they can include themselves and their friends in their small world storytelling.

Book corner

Provide a bag or basket of storytelling props.

Enhance the book corner with puppets, soft toys or dolls to use with a small theatre (or cardboard box theatre).

Display poetry, fiction and non-fiction books to support storytelling (see book list) both in the book corner and throughout the learning environment.

Creative area

Provide materials to support children to create their own characters, model making materials, air drying clay, watercolour paint, pens, socks, card, paper scissors, tape and glue. Display magnified images of a selection of bugs to enable children to see the detail and consider how best to represent their chosen character.

Provide a range of materials to enable children to create homes or props to support their stories, such as large paper, boxes and tubes, fabric, pens, paint, tape, scissors, string and glue etc.

Writing area (outside and inside)

Provide large paper for children to create their own story paths.

Book making materials and/or pre-prepared simple folded booklets or concertina books for children to use to create their own visual stories.

Book list



***A First Book of Bugs*, by Simon Mole
Illustrated by Adam Ming
Walker Books**

From beetles to butterflies, spiders to scorpions, meet the most bizarre bugs ever to walk the Earth! Simon Mole turns fascinating facts into poems full of humour and heart.



***The Big Book of Bugs*, by Yuval Zommer
Thames and Hudson Ltd**

This lively, fact-packed book introduces children to the amazing world of bugs through fun themes like bug life cycles, nighttime critters and backyard discoveries.



***Mad About Minibeasts*, by Giles Andreae
Illustrated by David Wojtowycz
Orchard Books**

This book invites young children to explore slithery snails, buzzing bees, wriggly worms and more; each page features a fun read-aloud rhyme.



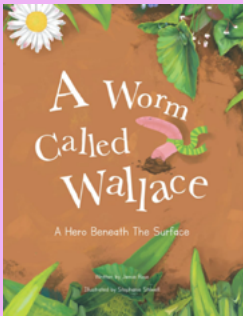
***The Little Gardener*, by Emily Hughes
Flying High Books**

Meet a tiny gardener whose love for his garden is boundless, even though he feels too small to make a difference. Through perseverance, his efforts inspire unexpected growth and transformation.



***Luna Loves Gardening* , by Joseph Coelho
Illustrated by Fiona Lumbers
Andersen Press**

Luna visits her local community garden, where each plant tells a story, from her family's Jamaican callaloo to seeds from around the world.



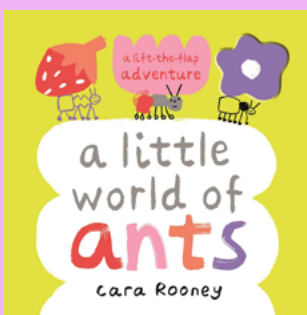
***A Worm Called Wallace*, by Jamie Rose
Illustrated by Stephanie Stilwell
Independently published**

Learn about the natural world with this fascinating rhyming story about worms! It explains the importance of worms and soil in our eco system.



***Slug in Love*, by Rachel Bright
Illustrated by Nadia Shireen
Simon & Schuster Children's UK**

Doug the slug, is on a quest to find someone to love. When he meets Gail the snail, sparks fly in this charming story about self-acceptance, friendship and finding love.



***A Little World of Ants*, by Cara Rooney
Two Hoots**

Learn about ants and how they live in this colourful, lift-the-flap adventure, encouraging exploration and a deeper understanding of these intriguing insects.

Further support and links:

[A First Book of Bugs - YouTube](#) – Watch Simon Mole perform some of his other poems from *A First Book of Bugs*.

[What are narrative poems? - BBC Bitesize](#) - This BBC Bitesize article offers a helpful overview of narrative poems.

The background is a dark brown soil with green and yellow brushstrokes representing grass and tree roots. A large, pink and white striped earthworm is shown in the foreground, moving through the soil. The text is written in a bold, pink, sans-serif font.

EARTHWORMS

Wriggle-wriggle-dig! Wriggle-dig-dig-wriggle!

Big up all the worms – whether big or little!

All plants need water and air to grow,

and these little pink squiggles

wriggle-dig-dig tunnels in the ground,

so the water drip-drips ... trick-trickles ... deep down,

so the air has space down there to move around.

And the plants grow taller, quicker, bigger.

Wriggle-wriggle-dig! Wriggle-dig-dig-digger!

Tips for storytelling at home

This is available as a separate download [here](#).



Storytelling together is a great way to support your child's early speech, language and communication skills.

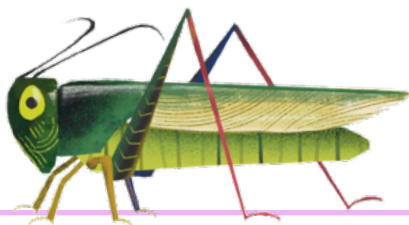
We've been learning about storytelling and making up stories about bugs. You can continue these stories at home or make up your own. Try to find little moments throughout your day to share and tell stories together.



Turn your journey home into a story. Ask your child to point out things they notice. Talk about them together, and maybe make up a story about them. *"I see a slug on it's way to..." "The spider is hiding ..."*



Join the library. It's free! You can visit together to look at and borrow books, or join a story and rhyme session, or author event.



Share a story. Try to find a little time every day to look at books or tell stories together. When you read their favourites, it makes it easier for children to join in and get involved with the story telling. Children love reading the same book again, and again.

More storytelling tips



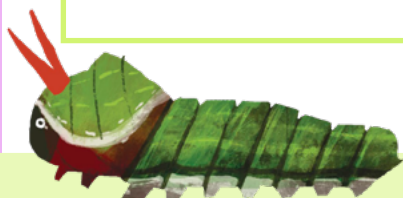
Watch this video together, of author Simon Mole, with Gecko, performing their bug songs and poetry.

Now you've watched the video, why not try creating your own stories about bugs together? Here are some ideas to get you started:

Create your own characters. Ask children to draw or build their own bugs (try using pens, bricks or playdough). Have a chat about what their bugs might look like. Ask your child about their shape, colour, or whether they have a superpower.

Go on a bug hunt. Search for bugs together, in the garden or at the park. Look under rocks, piles of leaves and sticks. Try making up a bug story together, encourage your child to help: *"Tell me about its friends..."* *"Tell me about where it lives..."*

Learn about bugs. Visit the library to borrow a book about bugs, or have a look online together. They might inspire you to make up stories, drawings, or even some wiggly movement!



Storytelling supports your child's language development, and builds key skills for reading and writing. Find more storytelling tips here: wordsforlife.org.uk/activities/telling-stories-at-home

National Literacy Trust

Change your story

About the National Literacy Trust

Literacy changes everything. It opens the door to the life you want. It's the key to knowledge, confidence and inspiration. It's better results at school, and better jobs. If you grow up without the tools to communicate, without books to read or opportunities to write, it's harder to get where you want to go.

We're a charity helping people overcome these challenges and change their life chances through the power of words – reading, writing, speaking and listening. From first words, through school days to training, jobs and beyond.


Together, we're helping people change their stories.

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