

# HOP INTO STORIES - READING IS POWERFUL



CITY OF  
TURKU

# PREFACE

**Dear reader,**

this booklet is based on a manual produced by the Open the Door for Reading project. The manual was developed by five cities, Gothenburg, Brussels, Bristol, Milan and Turku, during a two-year project funded by Erasmus+. The manual includes ideas and information for European parents and professionals on how to support young children’s linguistic development and engagement in the world of children’s literature.

The Hop into Stories booklet is adapted to Finnish society and culture. The booklet follows the structure of the original manual: ‘Your voice is the most powerful gift you can give to your child,’ ‘Choose the language of your heart,’ ‘Every day, everywhere – share your stories,’ ‘Reading moments – the best moments’ and ‘Opening the door to reading

opens the door to the world.’ Each one of these sections opens up a new perspective on stories in the lives of young children. In addition, each section presents methods and ideas for activities for both families with children and professionals in early childhood education.

Along with the Open the Door for Reading project, the parties involved in the execution of the Hop into Stories booklet were the City of Turku, the culture sector and the IKI project. An active participant in the IKI project has been the University of Turku’s subproject (IKI-TARU). We hope that this booklet will inspire parents of young children as well as those working with children and families.

*Workgroup*

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# STORYTELLING AND LITERATURE BUILD INTERACTION

## STORYTELLING, LITERATURE AND INTERACTION ARE INTERTWINED IN MANY WAYS.

Children's literature is often connected with the idea of literacy. However, the meaning of literature is much broader than mere literacy; for example, reading motivation comes first and foremost from experiences of meaningfulness. Literature provides children with information about humanity and society, comforts children and helps them believe that difficulties can be overcome and things can turn out for the best. Literature entertains, amuses and shows different emotions.

The joint literary relationship between a child and an adult is built on a common, unhurried moment of reading and good conversation. The moment of reading is not just for the child. It is also an opportunity for the adult to calm down, get to know the child, relate and listen. Sometimes things are hard to put into words. Literature works as a bridge when there is something you cannot say.

A shared rhyme helps to create a shared past and a shared story. We all have stories, because our lives are built on stories. It is important to learn to tell the story of your

own life and understand how your own solutions matter. Storytelling is learned from others and from literature.

Sometimes a story is an everyday trip to the store, sometimes a thrillingly exciting story about the first day of school. Some stories are sad or frightening. At these times, it is good to hear that others have similar stories and that these stories can have a happy ending, too. Telling stories is about making your own thoughts visible. Different stories form a shared life. This booklet will give you ideas for building your joint story when your own ideas run out or you need something new.

Remember that even a small step is important.



**First steps** is an easy way to add stories to a child's life regardless of age.



**A leap forward** offers variety to families who have already found their enthusiasm towards reading.



**For professionals** is aimed at adults working with children.

# 1. YOUR CHILD LOVES YOUR VOICE

Verbal interaction is the foundation of a child's development and learning. Interaction situations arise in many everyday situations and do not have to be planned in advance. Interaction is sometimes initiated by the child, sometimes by the adult. Early interaction relationships build trust in other people and one's own ability to cope. A comfortable interaction situation is unhurried and calm. The shared moments experienced as a baby carry far into the future. It is important to be truly present.





## FIRST STEPS

- Play discussing with the baby: listen and respond to their babbling.
- Rhymes are a great way to build interaction. For example, can you remember some rhyme from your childhood games?
- Use words to tell the child what you are doing, what is going to happen or what you are feeling. Describe what you see, hear and smell. Do not worry whether your child understands. They enjoy your voice and gradually learn new words.
- In addition to rhymes, children love to listen to singing: children's songs, lullabies or the adult's favourite song, sung off-key, off-beat, many times a day.



## A LEAP FORWARD

- Help the child relate things by asking open-ended questions and relating similar things yourself. The following are examples of good questions:
  - What made you smile today?
  - Who sat next to you at lunch?
  - What would you want to change about your day?
- Join the child's play. Listen to the child and ask for instructions!
- Search for familiar pictures in books and talk about them. Pictures can also be found elsewhere in your surroundings, such as magazines, advertisements and photographs.
- Many communities have nice activities for small children, for example in libraries and family cafés.

## PLAY WITH THE CHILD

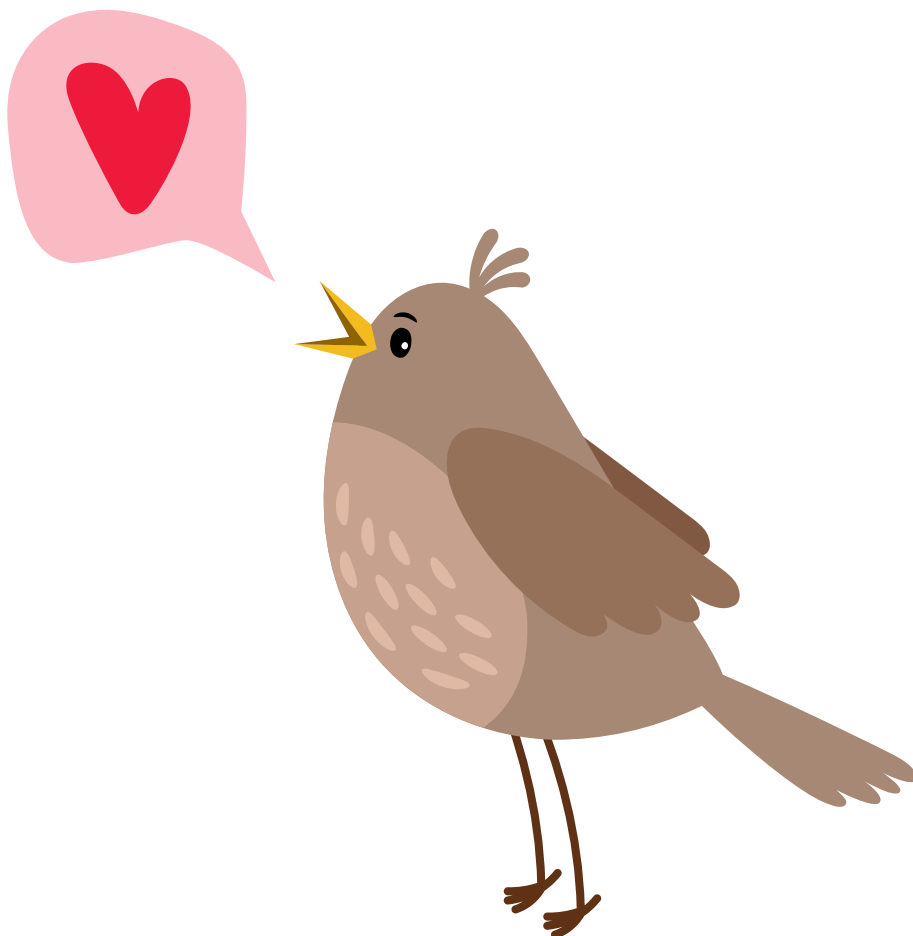
**ROW, ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT  
GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM  
MERRILY MERRILY, MERRILY, MERRILY  
LIFE IS BUT A DREAM**

### PLAY ALONG!

Place the child in front of you.  
Take their hands, and rock  
back and forth with the child.

## 2. CHOOSE THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR HEART

Learning and using one's home language is the basis for learning other languages. The home language is also said to be the language of emotion and thought. For these reasons, it is important that parents use their own home language with the child and that the child is allowed to respond in the same language. Bilingualism and multilingualism enhance the child's ability to learn all kinds of things, but they are particularly helpful with learning new languages. The use of your own home language supports the positive development of the child's identity and appreciation of their own culture.





## FIRST STEPS

- Be proud of your own language and use it whenever possible.
- Share and use your childhood games and rhymes.
- You can tell stories in any language with picture books.
- You can listen to foreign languages even if you do not understand them. It's nice to know how many ways there are to say or write the same thing.



## FOR PROFESSIONALS

- In groups of children, it is important to see and hear different languages, even in monolingual groups.
- Every language is equally valuable. Support the child's use of their home language by showing your interest, for example. What languages does the child speak with their parents or grandparents?
- The parents can come to the day care centre to tell about the family's language or read fairy tales, or record a language sample at home.
- Make library services familiar to everyone. In many countries library services may be subject to a fee, for example.
- Negotiate with your local library for a multilingual selection of books.



## A LEAP FORWARD

- Give your child pleasant moments of reading or storytelling. Ask friends and family to join. You do not always have to read or tell the stories yourself.
- Tell or read the traditional tales or stories of your own culture to your child.
- Ask the library if they have your child's favourite book or other books available in your language.

# SILENT BOOKS TELL THEIR STORIES IN ALL LANGUAGES

Silent, textless or non-verbal books are books in which the stories are told only through pictures. A silent book is not the same as the textless board books for babies. The pictures of a silent book form a clear story. You can interpret the story yourself and tell it in your own language. For example, Sanna Pelliccioni's picture book 'Meidän piti lähteä' (2018) is a silent book.

### 3. SHARE YOUR STORIES AND LISTEN TO OTHERS SHARING THEIRS

Stories shape our lives and identities. We are always surrounded by everyday stories. Learning is also often done through stories. For children, stories are an effective and often the only way to understand and deal with things. Because memories are also stories, they are of great importance to our own identities. It is said that life is a story or a series of stories. Through stories, children internalise the surrounding society and tell about themselves and things relevant to them. Both true and fictional stories are important. For children, they are almost the same thing.





## FIRST STEPS

- There are topics and opportunities for storytelling everywhere. Start with some everyday occurrence, for example.
- Tell stories about your own childhood or when the child was younger.
- Have you noticed that many items at your home have their own stories: where they came from, what they were used for, what they remind you of?
- Listen to the child and encourage them to tell you more. You can also continue the child's story and encourage them to continue the story after your part.
- Place books in the child's everyday environment and let the child play with them.



## FOR PROFESSIONALS

- Many libraries have facilities for organising parents' evenings. The parents' evening can be about introducing library services or reading children's books to parents.
- Provide the parents with memorable reading experiences, for example by creating a fairy tale event with props and activities.
- Give the parents ideas on how to make stories about the day's events and how to discuss on the basis of books.



## A LEAP FORWARD

- For a child, many things are play, and they find it easy to experience situations by playing. Encourage the child to be verbal in their play. You can even write the play down and read it afterwards.
- Collect and read family stories: what is the story behind the child's name, what happened when the child was born, what was the first day of day care like or what happened when the child said their first word.
- Read to the child. You can start with anything you find at home: recipes, advertising leaflets and newspapers contain a lot of material.

## STORYCRAFTING

In storycrafting, a child tells a story that an adult writes down word for word. The adult does not direct the story, but rather the child may tell it freely. After the story is told, the adult reads the story aloud to the child and makes any corrections the child wants. Finally the child can illustrate the story. For more information about storycrafting, visit the Children Are Telling (Lapset kertovat ja toimivat ry) website, for example.

## 4. READING MOMENTS - THE BEST MOMENTS

Reading moments communicate to the child the significance and joy of reading. The child's interest in reading arises even before they themselves can read, and it is easiest to influence their attitudes towards reading in the early years. The interest in reading and books is made up of many factors: enjoyable reading moments, access to interesting and varied reading materials and the way adults read and look at reading and literature. During reading moments, even very young children learn many reading-related things. For example, they begin to understand the meaning of page-turning and reading order, the relationship between images and texts and even to recognise letters and words. What matters most in joint reading moments is being together with no hurry and sharing an interesting experience.





## FIRST STEPS

- There is no right way to carry out a reading moment. Set a goal that suits you. At first, the reading moment can be as short as five minutes, or you can spend several days to read one book.
- Settle down when starting the reading moment. This will also calm the child.
- Think about the best time and place for your family to read. It is easiest if the reading moment becomes a routine. Is the best place and time for the reading moment before going to bed, on a bus, when sitting on the potty or when you are bored?
- The reading moment can only be about reading or it may include activity. Books are also different.



## FOR PROFESSIONALS

- Tell the parents about the child's reading moments in day care: which books the child likes and which characters make them happy.
- Children can play reading with books read by adults.
- Reading visits by older school-children are fun for everyone.
- A story read by an adult can be accompanied by action. For example, you can agree that the children will stomp their feet or clap their hands when they hear certain words.



## A LEAP FORWARD

- Think of alternative ways to carry out the reading moment. For example, you can surprise your child with an audiobook that you listen to together. Many children enjoy watching a film based on a book.
- Encourage older siblings to read to the younger ones. This benefits them both.
- Libraries offer regular story times for children and families.
- Write down the books you have read and the reading experiences.
- Discuss with the child about their favourite books and help them choose interesting books. Take the time to talk about and explore books.

## BEDTIME STORY BOOKSHELF

The bedtime story bookshelf is a collection of books placed e.g. in the hall of the day care centre from which the children can borrow books to read at home. The children can share their reading experiences the next morning when they return to the group. This will make it easier and more motivating to choose a book for the next evening. Libraries will be happy to help with finding suitable books.

## 5. OPENING THE DOOR TO READING OPENS THE DOOR TO THE WORLD

For children, reading or listening to a book is beneficial in many ways. Fictional stories teach children about relationships or allow them to imagine acting in new situations. Empathising with familiar things helps the child identify with others and increases their empathy. Non-fiction books teach them about space, cars, baking and other topics of interest to them.

Listening to imaginative stories enhances children's ability to withstand insecurity and embrace change. After reading or hearing a story about a talking car or a human-like robot, for example, real life challenges seem small.

At best, books give children coping skills, the ability to handle insecurity and feelings of sadness and happiness. Books comfort, surprise and provide security for the child.





## FIRST STEPS

- Read books on topics that are interesting or relevant to your child, such as going to bed, potty training or expecting a little sibling.
- Follow the child during the reading moment. Books interesting to the child are worth reading several times.
- Let the child choose the book from options you have chosen.



## A LEAP FORWARD

- Take a look at the books' illustrations and think about what you are familiar with or what is different in them.
- Pause the reading occasionally and ask the child how the story could continue.
- Explore children's literature and start following a children's book blog, for example.



## FOR PROFESSIONALS

- Sometimes the best place to read is under a table, sometimes it is enjoyable to read with funny voice.
- Think of ways to inspire the children to read at home as well: Reading passports and books easily borrowed home from day care or a reading soft toy that visits homes can motivate children to read.
- Think outside the box and co-operate with outside operators. Examples of these operators include health centres, child health clinics, museums, literary artists, and sports clubs.

# IMAGINATION MATTERS

Reading can help us change the world, because reading develops our imagination and helps us expand our thinking. Albert Einstein has stated that imagination is even more important than knowledge, because with imagination we can prepare for and develop things that we have not yet encountered or on which we have no knowledge. By empathising with stories, we experience completely new kinds of worlds and develop our thinking. Indeed, reading is for the brain what a workout or gymnastics session is for other muscles. Reading helps us notice things that we could change in the world today and makes us believe in the possibility of change. On the other hand, reading can help us forget our everyday worries and help us cope. Sometimes stories can give us solutions to all kinds of problems both big and small. Did you know that it is for this reason that many innovators read fairy tales and fantasy literature? The more we read, the more open-minded and flexible we become.

# BECOMING FRIENDS WITH THE JOY OF READING

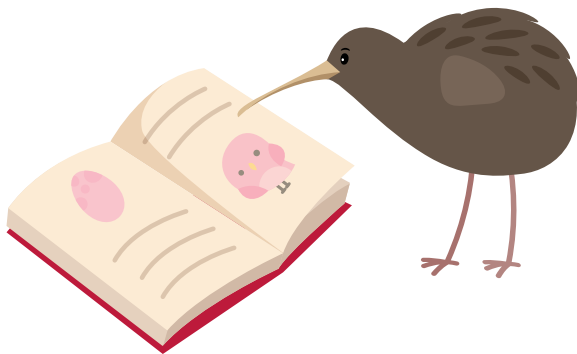
Once upon a time in a faraway land, there lived the Joy of Reading. In the mornings, it munched on board books and built towers out of books. During the day, it read stories, each one more exciting than the last, and dived into the world of princes, elves and gnomes. The Joy of Reading enjoyed the stories but longed for something more. It longed for company. The Joy of Reading wanted to talk to others about the stories it had experienced and see the eyes of others light up.

One day, the Joy of Reading packed along its most beloved books and flew over mountains and forests to find people. It met people in grey offices and read with them reports, reports and hundreds of pages of reports. The Joy of Reading felt its head burst from all the information. These people were too busy to hear the stories of the Joy of Reading.

The Joy of Reading flew out the window, wandered the streets and ended up in a day care centre full of children. The Joy of Reading was amazed. So much energy: happy children, bored children, grumpy children and wild children! The Joy of Reading circled around them, looked at them and studied their noses, cheeks, fingers and ears. Finally, it took out its books.

It turned the pages of its favourite books, whispered little stories, giggled in the children's ears and got carried away by the tales. Little by little, even the grumpiest child's eyes began to shine. What exiting stories the Joy of Reading told! What funny pictures it showed! The Joy of Reading took the children on a trip around the world of fairy tales and used its magic.

When the day care staff called the children to eat and nap, the Joy of Reading went with the children. It listened happily to their conversation at the lunch table about bunnies, dragons and curious events. After the meal, the children yawned but refused to go take a nap. The Joy of Reading asked everyone to lie down to rest and began to tell the tale of the world's smallest giant elephant. It calmed the children to sweet sleep. It went to sleep beside them, relaxed and contented. The Joy of Reading had come home.





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