



Change your story

Creating and using story sacks

A practitioner guide

What is a story sack?

A story sack is a collection of items in a bag or container that can be used to support and extend the telling of a story.



Why use a story sack?

- Story sacks have the power to ignite children's imaginations.
- They can enable children to become immersed in a story, and to play with a story.
- They encourage small world play and role play, which in turn will support communication and language skills.
- Items in the story sack can be tailored to meet individual needs or learning requirements.
- They can encourage creativity and problem solving.
- They can include opportunities for children to learn about the world around them, and about feelings and emotions.
- Story sacks can make stories accessible to everyone, including children for whom English is not their first language, and children with additional needs or disabilities.

How to make a story sack

1. Choose a story. It could be a story based on children's interests or linked to a learning theme.
2. You will need a container, ideally one that your book and all other resources will fit into, for example a pillowcase or fabric bag, a basket or large shoebox.
3. Gather a selection of resources/materials which will support the telling of the story or will extend children's knowledge and thinking beyond the story. You might want to include:
 - A copy of the story book
 - Extra copies of the story, a big book and/or a mini version of the story
 - Small world models/soft toys/dolls/puppets to represent the characters
 - Items to represent important objects/places in the story
 - Activities or games relating to the story. For example, bingo, matching pairs or a jigsaw
 - Some mark-making materials
 - Activity/ideas card
 - Related non-fiction books
 - Related rhyme/poem sheet

Use your imagination, there are no rules! Be creative and include items that will help tell the story. You can add to the story sack over time, but it will need checking and refreshing periodically.

How do you use a story sack?

- Identify your audience first. Consider their age, any specific requirements, group size etc. and then work out what will best meet their needs.
- You can choose whether you introduce the story or the resources first, or both together. If you introduce the resources first you can build anticipation, and let children guess what might happen in the story.
- The aim is to enjoy the story together, so let children get involved and handle some of the materials, but you may want them to listen to the story first.
- If you are loaning story sacks to families, you may want to invite parents to see you model the use of the story sacks before they borrow them to use at home.



But most importantly, have fun!

Top tips

- **You do not need to buy the resources that fill your story sack.** They do not need to be perfect matches to the story. Children have amazing imaginations so be creative and resourceful by making and recycling existing items. For example, decorated wooden spoons make great puppets for story characters. You could visit a charity shop or car boot sale if you have a small budget.
- **Consider using resources that appeal to a variety of senses.** Natural materials like shells or tree bark will broaden children's knowledge of the world. Ziplock bags or tightly sealed bottles can contain messy/wet/scented items (but these will need refreshing frequently). You could include a musical instrument or other sound making object to support the story, for example, a rainstick, or homemade drum.
- **Consider including items with print/text or items that provide an opportunity to write or draw.** For example, name labels for the characters or signs for locations in the story. Mini chalk boards or laminated card and whiteboard pens encourage children to make their own signs/labels.
- **Fabric or large paper in an appropriate colour/s can help to set the scene.** For example, use a piece of blue fabric to create a river or sea. A small blanket or mat will help to contain the story resources.
- **Provide opportunities for children to build on their experience.** If you have a computer or audio device, put the story on for children to listen to or watch independently (and maybe send a link home to parents). Leave some of the resources out for children to use within their play.
- **Consider including role play costumes or materials.** Storytelling items can be big or small. You could include hats, masks, capes,

bear ears, alien antennae etc. to encourage children to act out the story.

- **Include an activity/ideas card.** The activity/ideas card can list suggestions of how to use the sack, to help new staff or parents. For example, suggestions of how to use the materials, open ended questions they could ask, and extension activities such as describing games or 'I spy'.
- **Try making a story sack without a story.** A collection of characters, materials and objects will support you and the children to make up and tell your own story. You could include some large paper in this sack to record some of the children's ideas.