

IN ReSiDENCE

Storied Away



Hello! My name is **Frances Stickley** and I'm a published picture book writer and the 2020 Author in Residence for Inspire: Culture, Learning and Libraries.

As a writer, I spend so much of my time thinking about language. I write in rhyme too, so every word – the way it sounds; its meaning and its rhythm – has to count. Poets do a lot of experimenting with words and sounds, and today I'm going to share with you a couple of my favourite activities for words and sounds.

Squelchy Storytelling

One type of really fun descriptive language is onomatopoeia, which is just a really long word for *words that sound exactly like those things in real life*. Words like...

Squelch, Plop, Pow, Smash, Achoo, Ahem, ARGH! Splosh, BOOM, Whoosh! Moo! Baa! Click-clack, Trip-trap.

These words are amazing because they sound ridiculous and musical and they're so expressive. The great thing about onomatopoeia is it gives you so much scope for coming up with your own nonsense words, which is particularly useful for making up silly sensory stories or poems, and you can do it from absolutely any age, right from being a babbling baby!

Psst: Author's Aside...

Onomatopoeic words are used a lot in stories and rhymes for very small children. They're quite funny sounding so I can see why. Here are some of the picture books you might know that make really good use of onomatopoeia.

We're going on a Bear Hunt / Old McDonald had a Farm / What the Ladybird Heard / Dig, Dump, Roll

Squelchy Storytelling

Here's a game that I love for developing new onomatopoeic words. Anybody of any age can play this, even babies (in fact, babies love this one) but the ways in which you use the language will be different.



You will need: A blindfold. Another person to help. A tub.

What to do: Firstly, you need to hunt around the house (with the permission/ help of an adult) to get the materials you need. Anything that makes an interesting sound when you squish it or bash it or roll it or shake it will work brilliantly. *

Here are a few of the things I like to use: rice pudding, ripe tomatoes, raw spaghetti, brown bananas, marshmallows, flour, shaving foam, shower gel, spoons, toothpaste, sandpaper - almost anything will do! Again, it's important to have an adult to decide what's safe and okay to use.

Once you've found all your sensory-sound stuff, it's time to put on the blindfold! Have your partner present you with something squidgy or squirry or scratchy that you chose from around the house and try your best to describe it from the sound that it makes.



Is it oozy or scritch-y or crum-ply or dim-ply?
Does it thunk? Does it clunk? Does it clunkety-clunk?

Don't worry about getting the word right. Nonsense words are fantastic for this!



Toddlers' turn: This is a great activity for really young children because it allows them to use all of their senses to learn about the world around them. This is optimal for babies and toddlers, and adults can scaffold and support here by using lots of rich language to describe texture and sounds and even smells.



Adults: You might want to use some of these new words that you create with your child to make up a nursery rhyme or a song. You could even make a recording of it accompanied by the different sounds and rhythms from your play session! Babbling babies come up with some great expressive language and it's so lovely to listen back when they're a little bit older to their amazing emerging language skills.



Poems for the page: Older children might want to note down the new and exciting language they've come up with to create their own stories or poetry. Onomatopoeic language does lend itself very well to poetry and rhyme because the sounds within the words are so wonderful.

*Not the cat.

If you enjoyed learning about onomatopoeias, you can find out more at www.inspireculture.org.uk/inresidence