

H2.1

General tips before you start

The tips listed here do not refer to reading or creating stories, which are discussed in details below. These tips refer to the group you will be working with and how to make the best out of it as far as devotion to the and observance of its rules is concerned, focus of attention and bringing the best possible outcome for each individual group member. Therefore, these tips are transversal and provide hints on what you need to consider besides reading and creating stories when working with a group of children.

Based on experience, this list of tips may grow. Feel free to be among the contributors because we are certain that once you start weaving those webs of stories, you will come across numerous other tips for us and for your colleagues.

Tip: If you want to work with a group of children, even if they come from the same class, you may wish to approach them as if they are meeting each other and you for the first time. Start with:

- activities and games that would help them reveal their interests, talents, dreams, fears in a safe and empathic environment
- build trust by sharing with the children who YOU are
- help them create their own behaviour contract made up of rules for treating each other – you or another team member should be a watchdog that observes that the contract is abided by at all times and by all members – this will insert a feeling of being safe within the environment of the story-weaving group



Tip: Create a pleasant atmosphere in class: know your students' names and their interests, provide positive encouragement and support, show enthusiasm in what you do, build respectful & trustworthy relationships with students (learning takes place only on/is promoted by positive relationships).

Tip: When you shape up a group of children try to make sure it is not homogenous – if you want to help children develop a love for the process of reading and creating, sharing stories, you better use their peers.

There is nothing as powerful as the admiration, interest and passion that one child sees in another child's eyes. Peer learning is a powerful instrument and it better be used as profusely as possible. You need all types of kids in your group – those who have trouble reading, those who are not interested, those who can read but struggle and are shy to read, those who love to read and are ready to read with and for others. Setting up a homogenous group would be less efficient and may leave the children with a sense of being picked out due to a certain characteristic. The other students, who are not a part of the group, may observe it as the group of those who can't read or the group of the book-worms, the nerds. Neither is attractive and the group members may quickly develop a strong wish to leave the group.

Tip: Before you start working with the children, you may wish to meet and work a bit with their teachers, so that you become acquainted with the school team and with the personalities, teaching the children on a daily basis. Get to know the school too – who is its patron, when was it set up, does it have anything peculiar about it, what is the team proud of.

If you know where the children study and whom they interact with daily, you will not be considered an outsider. You will be insightful and as you get to know the daily routine of the children better, you will also be better at picking your exercises and games.

Tip: When organising workshop sessions, make sure they are not too long – children’s attention and interest can be held within an hour or slightly longer. Make sure to keep the regularity of the workshop sessions in order to build a habit with the children and to create a weekly event that they look forward to.

Tip: Use a variety of activities in each workshop session – combine music with activities for the hands (drawing, making various designs and compilations, creating 3d figures and objects) and activities for reading or creating stories together.

Use hand gestures and facial expressions as they play an important role in helping children learn and remember. There are numerous such activities described in the programme with weekly suggestions.

Tip: When you use stories, try to pick ones that have a child character or characters in them, so that the group members can relate to them and empathize.

Tip: Create a sense of ritual by shaping up your working environment in an appealing way. Whether it would be cushions to sit down around a fire cut out of foam, image boards for the walls with characters from the stories the children are working with, objects that are connected to the stories. Those can be different toys and figures or again objects cut out of foam and drawn into objects like mirrors, crowns, etc.

Tip: Present the children with various books and stories. Expose them to as many stories as possible and make them see that a) imagination is unlimited and b) you can make a story out of everything.

Tip: Create possibilities for playing.

Make the children do funny things during the reading story-weaving workshop. Ask them to read or tell a story with funny voices. Ask them to put their bodies into the story and demonstrate how they believe a character behaves or walks or talks. Human beings learn and bond so easily through playing. Adulthood is wrongly considered as a no-play time but there are very few human beings that refuse to “play” when they are given the opportunity to do so.

Tip: If you have a child or children in the group who are shy and refuse to read, never push them and never allow the others to push them or at least not beyond the healthy point after which continued interaction becomes uncomfortable.

Those who refuse to read should be left to simply relish and observe the experience that the others provide. Let them move at their own pace; try giving them a job or a role. They will become more and more tempted and intrigued and at one point will ask willingly to join in the reading part.

Tip: As your group evolves and grows together, make sure you make their tasks more and more challenging.