

# Using stories to support early history skills and understanding in the EYFS

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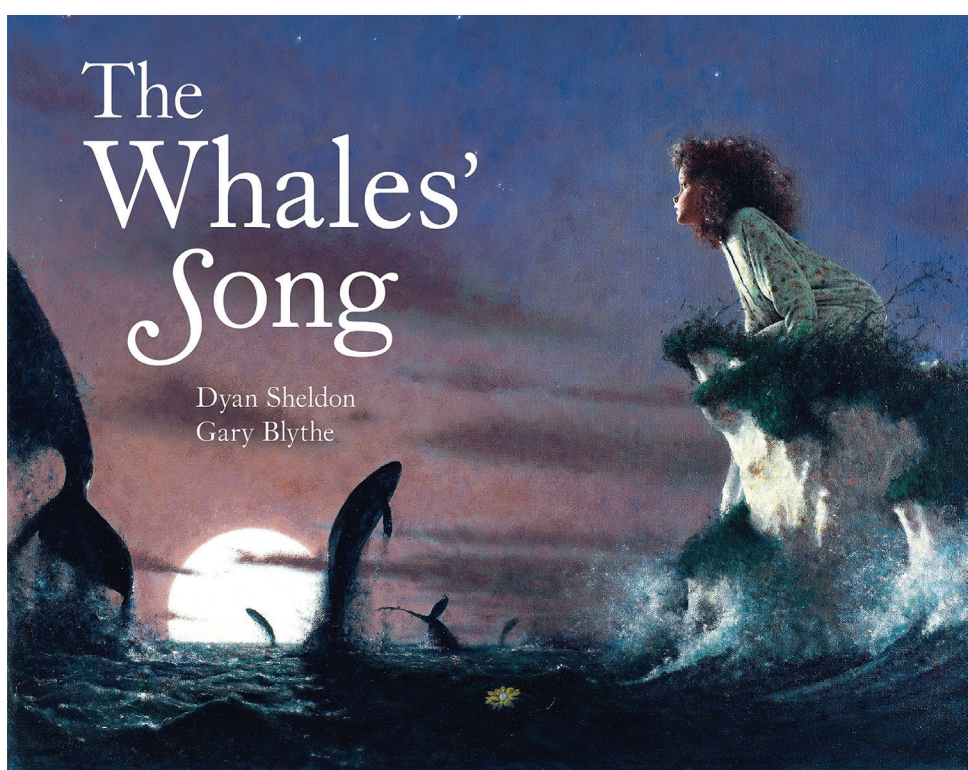
Stories can be used as starting points for planning topics. Activities suggested below relate to 'Understanding the world' including Early Learning Goal 13 – People and communities:

- Children talk about past and present events in their own lives and in the lives of family members.
- They know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions.

DfE (2017)

This article uses some well-known children's books and explores how early historical skills and understanding can be developed. However, many books could be used in similar ways to support historical learning. The words in **purple** identify second-order historical concepts which can be developed.

**The Whales' Song** by Sheldon and Blythe (1990) is a beautifully illustrated book about a little girl, Lilly, who lives with her grandmother and uncle. This provides an opportunity to focus on families. After the children have listened to the story and become familiar with it, 'parents or carers' could be asked to talk about their families with the children at home. Photographs of members of the child's family can be used to



create pictures of displays of the families back in school. While they are making these the children can begin to talk about the people in their family, encouraged by the use of questions. In small groups the children can then talk about **similarities and differences** between their family and Lilly's in the story and then between their family and the families of other children in the group.

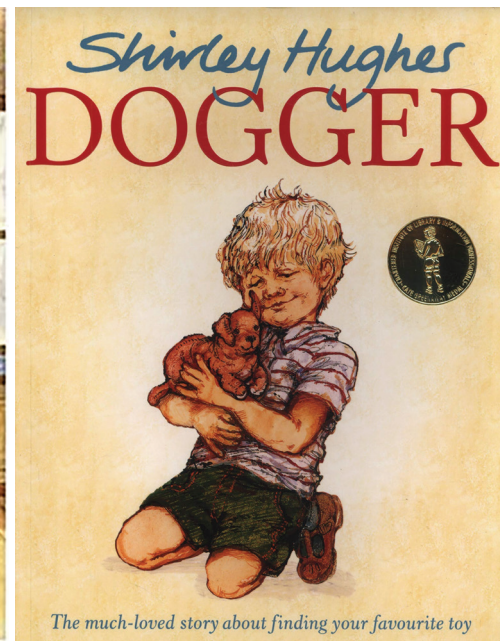
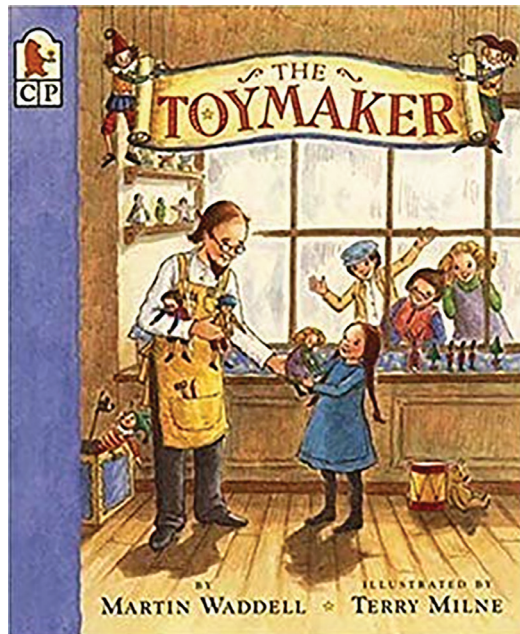
In the book, Lilly's grandmother shares an experience from her childhood. A visitor who is a grandparent, or an older member of the school community, could

come in to speak to the children about childhood experiences. They might bring a photograph of themselves as a child, or a member of staff could do this. The children could identify **similarities and differences** between the photograph, considering for example their clothes, and themselves. The imaginative play area is filled with clothes and artefacts from when the visitor was a child e.g. 1960s or 1970s and children encouraged to play in here to begin to develop their understanding of life at this time. The illustrations from the books, for example the interior of Lilly's home,

could be discussed in small groups with **comparisons** made between their homes and Lilly's. The children could also talk about events in their lives and/or share traditions that their families take part in within their communities and **compare** these.

**The Toymaker** by Martin Waddell (1991) is an engaging story in two halves. Part 1 is set in a Victorian toymaker's workshop. Matthew, the toymaker hand-makes the toys while his daughter Mary watches or plays. The illustrations include children dressed in Victorian clothes playing with wooden hoops and leather balls, fabric and wooden dolls, with some of the dolls looking like the children in the story. Toys could become the focus of learning. Genuine or replica old toys could be investigated by the children and the imaginative play area developed as a toymaker's workshop. Children could talk about **similarities and differences** and then **compare** these to their favourite toy. The illustrations could be used to **compare** the clothes the characters are wearing and/or the games that the children are playing, with the teacher providing opportunities to learn some games and rhymes from the Victorian period. In Part 2 of the story Mary has become a grandmother and revisits the workshop with her grandchild Jane. This provides an opportunity for children to explore **continuity and change**.

**Dogger** by Shirley Hughes (1977) is a much loved text which could also be linked to a focus on toys. Dave, the main character, also has a number of experiences that might be familiar to children such as losing a favourite toy and going to a school fair. Children could talk about events in their life and **similarities and differences** between events. Again, the illustrations in the book invite **comparison** and show an interpretation of life in the 1970s which might be familiar to some of their family members, and memories could be talked about at home and then drawn, painted,



talked about, or recorded in school. The imaginative play area could be developed into some of the stalls from the fair, giving children the opportunity to role play, use money, mark make, be creative e.g. to make signs for the stalls. A range of hats and/or clothes could be provided, and the things needed for the games on the stall could be made by the children.

In all the book, inspired topics and activities, language and vocabulary could be used with children to develop a sense of **chronology**.

## References

- Department for Education (2017) *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Statutory Framework*, London.
- Hughes, S. (1979) London: Random House.
- Sheldon D. and Blythe G. (1990) *The Whales' Song*, London: Random House.
- Waddell, M. (1991) *The Toymaker*, London: Walker Books.

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## Resources

### Why stories? – Hilary Cooper

[www.history.org.uk/primary/categories/7/resource/7478/why-stories](http://www.history.org.uk/primary/categories/7/resource/7478/why-stories)

### The past through toys and games – Helen Crawford

[www.history.org.uk/primary/categories/7/resource/9005/the-past-through-toys-and-games](http://www.history.org.uk/primary/categories/7/resource/9005/the-past-through-toys-and-games)

### EYFS medium term plan – toys and games – Helen Crawford

[www.history.org.uk/primary/categories/7/resource/9312/eyfs-medium-term-plan-toys-and-games](http://www.history.org.uk/primary/categories/7/resource/9312/eyfs-medium-term-plan-toys-and-games)

### Using role play to develop young children's understanding of the past – Lisa MacGregor

[www.history.org.uk/primary/resource/9423/using-role-play-to-develop-young-childrens-unders](http://www.history.org.uk/primary/resource/9423/using-role-play-to-develop-young-childrens-unders)