

Where's granny?

One nursery has immersed children in traditional fairy tales by doing much more than simply reading the stories to them, reports *Meredith Jones Russell*

At Juice Nursery in Altrincham, Greater Manchester, children have not just been reading fairy tales, but living them. The pre-school class has been hot on the trail of Red Riding Hood's granny, as well as growing beanstalks for Jack and tasting the three bears' porridge as part of a project to bring stories to life.

The children studied traditional tales as one of their regular four-week topics, and took part in a number of activities, which also included making 'huff puff' paintings by blowing paint through straws, inspired by the Three Little Pigs, baking gingerbread men and playing What's the Time, Mr Wolf?

The highlight of the project was turning the children into detectives to find Red Riding Hood's granny. Pre-school teacher Alex Chiorando says she wanted to finish the subject with a 'live' finale. 'We do a lot of one-off projects like this,' she explains, 'and we really like to have a big finish so the children can see a clear beginning and end product. We try to have fun every day, but we like to have one big extra-special day at the end.'

'There's so much talk about school readiness for pre-school children and, to be honest, that goes against my grain a little bit. It's not just about being able to read and spell; we want to fire their imagination too.'

CUTTING THEIR TEETH

Ms Chiorando was searching for ideas for activities online when she came across early years trainer and consultant Alistair Bryce-Clegg, who was offering nurseries the chance



to create their own project around a prop.

Reading *Little Red Riding Hood* as part of the traditional tales theme had already allowed the children to explore feelings of empathy through the character of Granny, bringing in photos of their own grandmothers,



Children at Juice Nursery searched for 'Granny' with the help of various props

making a list of things to take to an ill person and discussing their own experiences of feeling unwell.

Ms Chiorando jumped at the chance to incorporate Mr Bryce-Clegg's most recent prop into the activity day as something that may have belonged to Granny herself – a set of false teeth, which the teacher could plant as a clue to involve the children directly in the story.

When the children came back into the nursery after outdoor play, they found that the door had been taped off with mock crime scene tape, bought online by the staff. This led to the use of some new vocabulary, from 'crime' to 'detective', 'clue' and 'magnifying glass'.

DEVELOPING SKILLS

Ms Chiorando then explained to the children that someone had gone missing. 'The response from all of them was instantly "I want to help", which was lovely,' she says. 'We gave them all their own torches and a badge to make them feel part of the detective work. They were so excited, it was just brilliant. They worked in groups of twos or threes, which is a skill in itself, deciding who should hold the torch, who gathers the evidence and so on.'

'You realise how well they know everything in the nursery when you

start to ask them if there is anything they notice that is out of place, or whether they can see anything new that wasn't there before?

A variety of skills were drawn on as part of the activity. Each child had to write their name on an individual evidence sheet. One clue they found was a pair of slippers and, when trying to decide whom they might belong to, the children had to use mathematical language to describe the size, concluding they must belong to an adult. Finding the false teeth then led to internet research to find out who might wear them, and discussion on teeth brushing and personal care.

FINDING GRANNY

At the end of the day, the children were sitting down for a story when they heard knocking from a cupboard and ran to open it to find Red Riding Hood's granny inside. Ms Chiorando says, 'It was brilliant because, even in



a nightie and a shower cap, they knew it was me, but they stayed in character the whole time, asking if I was OK and giving me lots of cuddles. They wanted to believe it, so they did. It was like Father Christmas. It's all about having the adults really engaging and believing what they're doing to help the kids do that too.

'I've always liked dressing up and getting into a character. Children love that too, and they like to go to the theatre and to see books and stories they know getting put on the stage.'

TELLING TALES

The children were read two versions of *Little Red Riding Hood* (published by Miles Kelly and Ladybird – see box, below). Ms Chiorando explains that she often reads them different versions of traditional tales.



FURTHER READING

Visit *Nursery World's* website for more on the importance of stories and role play in the development of children's communication, language and literacy skills:

Michael Jones investigates children's preference for acting out and putting themselves in a story at: www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1095446/learning-development-imaginative-play-world-story

He also explores the conflict between fairy tales and superhero play in exploring imaginative worlds at:

www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1096775/learning-development-superhero-play-super-girls-boys

Helen Moylett discusses the importance of narrative and storytelling at: www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1096086/learning-development-communication-book

Linda Pound discusses the contribution of the imagination to cross-curricular learning at:

www.nurseryworld.co.uk/nursery-world/feature/1093732/eyps-practice-about-imagination

'I think it's great for them to understand that there are lots of different ways to tell a story, and that's OK,' she says. 'It helps to explore how a story works and how it has been structured, and I think that it helps them to be able to make up their own versions too.'

The children had also been encouraged to think about different versions of the same story when Ms Chiorando came into school dressed as Goldilocks for World Book Day.

'They came up with the idea that Goldilocks should apologise to the bears, so we planned a tea party together and then baked cakes for it. It was great to explore empathy and to try to understand why all the characters did what they did. That kind of thing is very important for pre-school children who are like the big fish in a small pond at nursery. It's good to help them explore friendship groups, especially for the girls. They stopped seeing Goldilocks as a baddie and started to understand her.'

Ms Chiorando says the fun of the 'live' day at the end of the project was as important as the skills the children picked up over the four weeks.

'It's a bit of silliness in an otherwise boring world, really,' she says. 'If you can't have this kind of fun when you're three, when can you? And the great thing is that there were so many other benefits to it as well.' ■

FAVOURITE TALES

CLASSIC VERSIONS

Ladybird First Favourite Tales: *Little Red Riding Hood* by Mandy Ross

Miles Kelly Little Press Story Time: *Little Red Riding Hood* by Belinda Gallagher

Lift-the-Flap Fairy Tales: *Little Red Riding Hood* by Stephen Tucker

Flip-Up Fairy Tales: *Little Red Riding Hood* by Jessica Stockham

Little Red Riding Hood by Lari Don

RETELLINGS

Red Riding Hood and the

Sweet Little Wolf by Rachael Mortimer. Little Wolf doesn't want to be a big bad wolf. She dreams of being good and kind, but struggles when she is sent out to catch dinner and meets Red Riding Hood.

Little Red by Lynn Roberts. In this retelling, Red Riding Hood becomes Little Red, an 18th century boy who takes a basket of food to his grandma. Wolf reaches her cottage first and gobbles her up, but can Little Red outwit him using only the ginger beer in his basket?

The Wolf's Story by Toby

Forward. This version of the tale is retold from the wolf's perspective, explaining how a series of misunderstandings and accidents have led to his vilification.

The True Story of Little Red Riding Hood by Agnese Baruzzi. When Wolf writes to Red Riding Hood, begging her to teach him how to be good, she jumps at the chance to help.

Honestly, Red Riding Hood was Rotten! by Trisha Speed Shaskan. The wolf's side of the story, written for older children.