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★ Outcomes for this workbook

Listening and speaking

- Explain how strong oral language lays the foundation for literacy.
- Explain why we need to invest early in building children’s language.
- Describe the difference between the language we use for everyday interaction and the language of books.
- Describe the characteristics of a Grade R learner with strong oral language.
- Describe how Grade R teachers can create a rich language learning environment and support oral language learning opportunities across the daily programme.
- Give examples of how teachers can support interaction during **Show and tell** and **Fantasy play** activities.
- Describe different ways of using stories to build oral language: telling stories, sequencing pictures and role playing.



1

Understanding more about the importance of language for literacy

We have a crisis in education in South Africa. The recent PIRLS study found that 78% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning (<http://pirls2016.org/pirls/summary>). We know that being able to read for meaning depends on oral language abilities – the ability to speak, listen and understand. Oral language abilities begin developing from the earliest days in a child’s life – long before they go into a classroom. Our Grade 4s are failing, not only because of the quality of teaching reading in Grades 1–4, but because they missed out on critical early learning experiences from birth to six years of age.

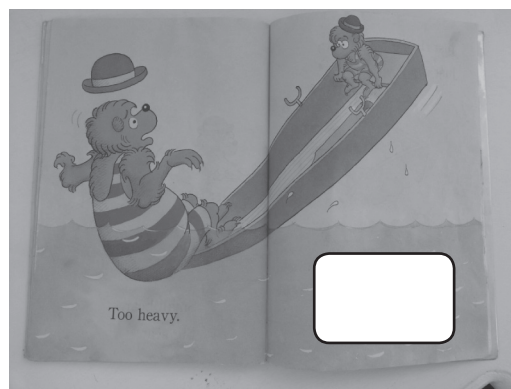
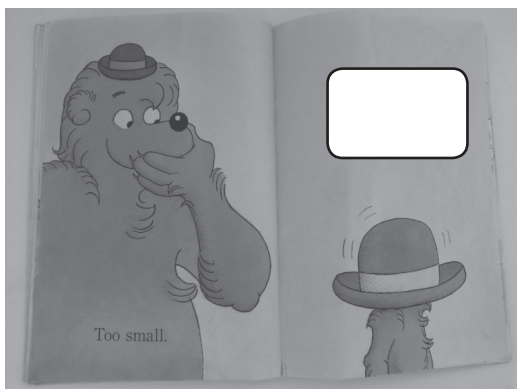
Learning to read and write builds on a child’s oral language skills ... it follows that children who enter school with poor oral language are at high risk of educational failure.

(Nag et al, 2014)

Activity 1.1 How a good vocabulary supports early reading

On your own:

Look at these extracts from a well-known book.



- 1 Fill in the missing text on the right-hand pages.
- 2 How did you know what words to write?

Young readers use their understanding of words and pictures, and their knowledge of the world, to make predictions about what comes next in a text – just like you did. So, by building children’s vocabulary and experience of the world, we are building readers!



Activity 1.2 Why good vocabulary is important for reading comprehension

Work in the big group:

- 1 Ask for volunteers to read the following extracts and then discuss the questions that follow.

In a study of language development in homes, researchers in America recorded interactions with children between 9 and 36 months of age and found large variations in the amount of speech directed at them. The researchers estimated that by the time they were three years old, children of professional parents had heard 48 million words addressed to them, while children in families with less resourced homes had heard 13 million words. Significantly, the amount of talk children heard correlated with differences in their vocabulary, with children who had heard more words achieving higher scores on vocabulary tests at age three and better vocabulary and reading comprehension results at age nine.

(Wordworks Learning Brief based on Narrowing the Literacy Gap, 2012)

In order to read for meaning, children need to understand the meanings of words. Studies have found that children in Grades 3, 4 and 5 who scored poorly on reading comprehension had the lowest language assessment scores at 2, 3, 4 and 5 years of age.

(Justice et al., 2013; Sénéchal, Ouellette & Rodney, 2006; Tabors, Snow and Dickinson, 2001)

- 2 Pretend that the principal and teachers at your school are having a discussion about what needs to be done to improve the reading comprehension of Grade 4 learners at your school.

- a) Use the extracts you have just read to help you explain to the Principal and SGB how you are building strong language foundations in Grade R that will support reading comprehension in later years.

- b) Nominate someone in the group to present your case to the big group.

Activity 1.3 Language is more than words

Work in pairs:

- 1 Read through the examples below. Think about the use of words and sentences in each example. Underline where you find:
 - descriptions and explanations
 - abstract ideas (like feelings)
 - unusual and more difficult vocabulary
 - longer and more complicated sentences.

Notes

EXAMPLE 1:

The family looks on as their dog seems to be choking on a bone:

Child points at dog and shouts: *Look! Help! Bone stuck!*

Dad: *I'll get it out!*

Mom: *Let's give him some water.*

EXAMPLE 2:

Child and mother discuss the event some time later.

Mom: *Do you remember when Daddy gave Spot that chicken bone left over from Sunday lunch?*

Child: *Yes, Spot was so excited, and he ate so fast!*

Mom: *You do that sometimes too, don't you?*

Child: *Only when it's a chocolate!*

Mom: *And then Spot choked on the bone and he was making awful coughing noises.*

Child: *I know, and I was so scared ...*

Mom: *Shame, darling, were you?*

Child: *Yes, I thought Spot was going to die! I was sad.*

(Mom gives Child a squeeze)

Mom: *But then Daddy saved him! He opened his mouth and took out the bone, didn't he?*

Child: *Yes, and then we gave Spot water and he drank lots! Then he was fine.*

Mom: *What a relief! And now, we don't give chicken bones to him anymore, do we, just the soft gristle.*

EXAMPLE 3:

Mother reads a book to child.

Mother reads: *It was a stormy evening and the family were cleaning up the dishes after supper.*

Father scraped the dishes, piling chicken bones into a heap in the dog's bowl. He whistled for the dog: "Here Spot, you fortunate dog. Good things come to those who wait! Sunday dinner for you too!" Spot bounced around Father's feet, panting excitedly.

Mother points at picture: *Look at how excited Spot is! Can you make a face like that?*

Child sticks out his tongue and pants, laughing.

Mother carries on reading: *Father put the bowl on the ground and within seconds, Spot was devouring the scraps. Suddenly, Spot was making strange choking sounds.*

Child: *Oh no!*

Mother: *How do you think they can help Spot?*

Child: *Pat him on the back? Or maybe try and get the bone out?*

Mother carries on reading: *Father grabbed Spot and prised open his mouth, pulling the bone out of his throat.*

Mother points at picture: *You were right! He got the bone out of Spot's mouth.*

Mother carries on reading: *As Spot lapped water with happy splashes and a waggy tail, Mother came out of the house, wiping her hands on her apron. "Maybe that will teach us not to give the dog chicken bones. The vet told us they splinter into sharp pieces and are really dangerous." She gave Ben a hug and Father a high-five for saving the day.*

2 Look at the descriptions of different types of language and draw a line to connect them with the statements on the right-hand side.

Example 1

We use this language to talk about the 'here and now' – something that is present or that is happening at that moment.

This kind of language has:

- few words
- simple and common vocabulary
- short sentences.

Example 1 uses this type of language.

Example 2 uses this type of language.

Example 3 uses this type of language.

Children tend to manage better at school if they hear this type of language at home.

Most children hear this type of language every day.

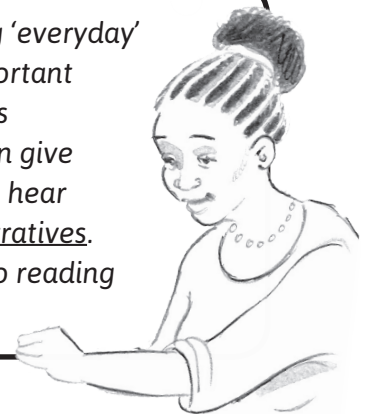
Example 2

We use this language to talk about things that happened in the past or that are planned for the future. This language is used for explanations, in descriptions, pretend play, in oral stories and in books.

This kind of language includes:

- more words
- unusual and more difficult vocabulary
- longer and more complex sentences.

Children use language to communicate every day. They grow up using 'everyday' language. Written language is not like everyday language, so it is important to give children experiences of the kind of oral language that supports reading and writing. As parents and teachers of young children, we can give our children language-rich environments, with lots of opportunities to hear and to use new vocabulary, more explanations and more complex narratives. By giving them these opportunities, we are setting them on the path to reading and writing.

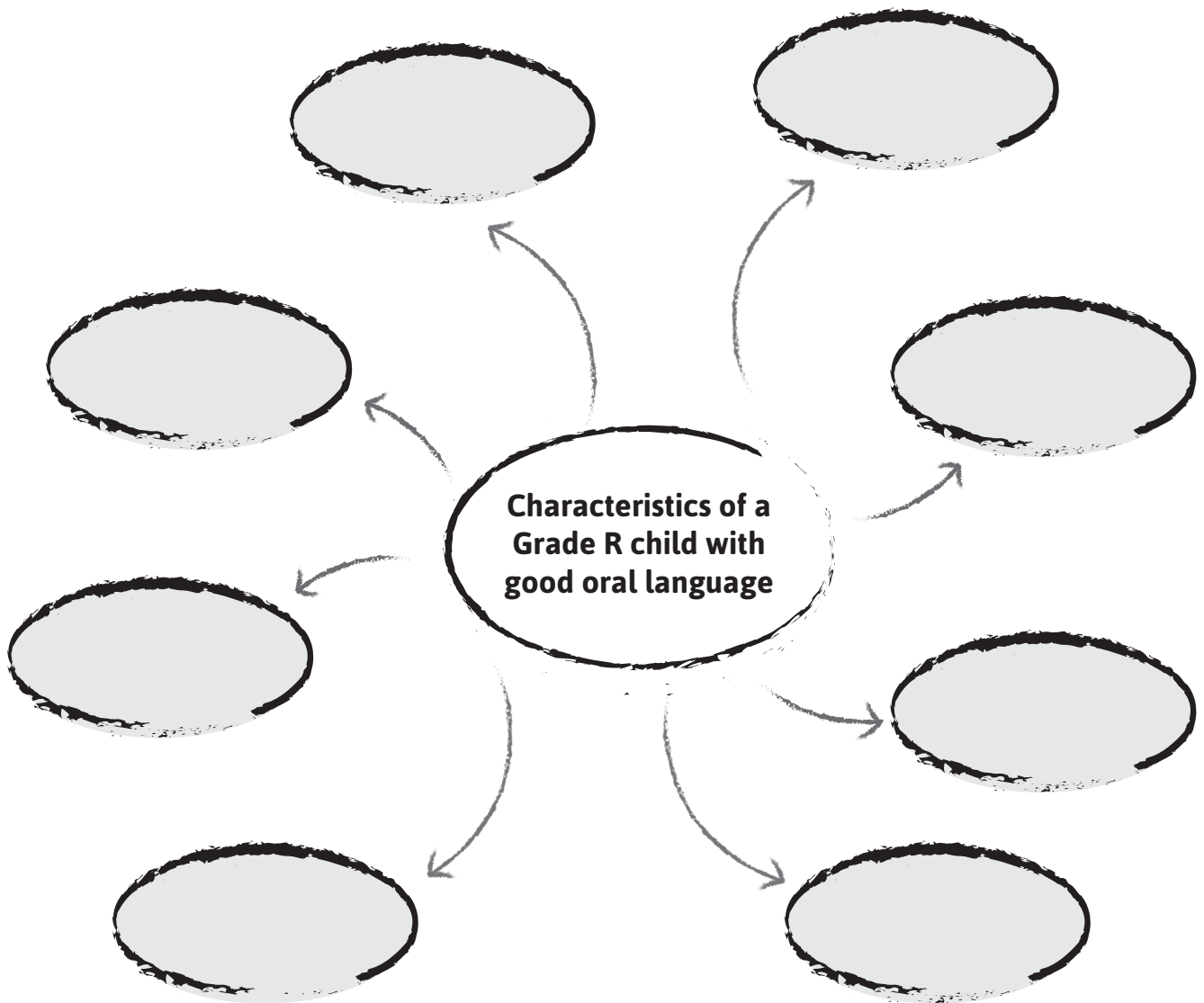


Activity 1.4 The characteristics of a child with good oral language

Work in the big group:

- 1 Think of children you have taught. Are most of the children's language skills fairly strong or fairly weak when they begin Grade R?
- 2 Think of children you have taught that have strong oral language. What did you observe that told you their language was strong?
- 3 Brainstorm ideas as the facilitator completes a mindmap on flipchart paper. Complete your own mindmap below.

Notes





2

Creating oral language learning opportunities across the daily programme

Research has shown that high-quality early childhood classrooms are those where the teacher is responsive and creates an environment that supports interaction and communication. In a Grade R classroom, there are many opportunities to build oral language throughout the day, and not just during the Home Language lesson. It is so easy to give instructions and expect our children to be quiet, but this is not how young children learn language. Young children learn through interaction so it is really important that we are conscious of how we engage with children.

The entire school day should be viewed as possibilities for enhancing literacy learning; either because of the direct intervention of the teacher, through planned mediated moments, including teacher-guided activities or because of the numerous incidental learning opportunities that occur during the day and enable the teacher to promote learning through utilising the 'teachable moment'. (CAPS, p. 20)

Activity 2.1 How do I support communication and interaction in the classroom? (self-reflection)

Work on your own:

- 1 Look at the following table and tick the boxes that describe your teaching practice at the moment. When you have completed the exercise, share some of your thoughts in the big group.

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT COMMUNICATION	EXAMPLE			
		HARDLY EVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
1 I show children I am actively listening to them.	<i>Mmm, oh!, yes..., really?</i>			
2 I pause expectantly during interactions with children to encourage them to participate.	<i>After packing up, it's time for ... your favourite ... (stories!)</i>			
3 I get down to a child's height when interacting and listen with interest.	<i>Can you say that again? I really wanted to hear your story so I have come to sit next to you for a bit.</i>			
4 I use unusual words and explain word meanings.	<i>That pie looks very tasty... mmm delicious!</i>			
5 I ask open-ended questions that extend children's thinking (what, when, where, why, how questions).	<i>I am going to keep this container because I am sure we can use it for something. What could we use it for?</i>			
6 I encourage children to tell their own stories.	<i>Last week Aaliyah's mom had a new baby. Would you like to tell us what happened when your mom brought the baby home, Aaliyah?</i>			

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT COMMUNICATION	EXAMPLE			
		HARDLY EVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
7 I repeat what a child says and then add some more information, rephrase or elaborate to expand the language, while being careful to affirm the child's message.	<i>CHILD: I did go to the beach. TEACHER: Oh, aren't you lucky ... you went to the beach. And was the water warm enough to swim?</i>			
8 I comment on what is happening or what children are doing.	<i>You are making a very tall tower with those blocks today!</i>			
9 I create a safe space for children to ask questions and give them plenty of time to think before responding when I ask them a question.	<i>That is a very good question, Devlin. Who thinks they might know the answer? Don't worry, take your time to think of what you want to say.</i>			
10 I use gestures or actions to show children what I mean and illustrate what I am saying.	<i>Please hang your bag on the hook next to your name (while demonstrating how to do this).</i>			
11 I talk about things that have happened and things that are going to happen in the future.	<i>Remember last week when there was a fire on the mountain? There was a lot of smoke when we got to school and we could hear the sirens from the fire engine. Weren't those firefighters very brave?</i>			
12 I explain and describe how things work or why we do things.	<i>That heavy stone sinks when you put it in the water, but the feather is light so it floats.</i>			
13 I follow children's interests and have conversations with them.	<i>CHILD: Look, teacher – a lizard! TEACHER: Good spotting. That looks nearly the same as a lizard – in fact I think it is a gecko. Why do you think it is running so fast? CHILD: Scared ... TEACHER: Yes, I think it is running away to hide because it is scared of all the big children.</i>			
14 I think aloud and describe what I am busy doing or thinking.	<i>I'm cleaning the paint off these brushes so that they are clean for our next art lesson.</i>			
15 I affirm children's listening skills by praising specific behaviours.	<i>Thando, I could see that you listened very carefully when I asked you to pack away your toys because you put them in the big basket where they belong!</i>			

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT COMMUNICATION	EXAMPLE			
		HARDLY EVER	SOMETIMES	OFTEN
16 I use symbols, pictures and props (objects) to reinforce and illustrate language.	<i>The hungry lion was very grumpy because he had no food to eat (while holding up a lion puppet with his head bowed down and making a grumpy face yourself).</i>			
17 I explain my thoughts and feelings (and the thoughts and feelings of others).	<i>I can see that Sipho is very excited today because we are going on an outing.</i>			
18 I have informal, individual and small group conversations with learners.	<i>CHILD: Why do you have a plaster on your finger teacher? TEACHER: I was cutting tomatoes and the knife slipped and cut my finger. CHILD: Was it bleeding? TEACHER: Yes, it was bleeding quite a bit so I put a tissue on it and held it tightly.</i>			

(Dockerell et al, 2012; Justice et al, 2008)

Activity 2.2 My own ideas to support classroom interaction

Work in small groups:

Look at the table below and select five strategies that you would like to use more in your classroom. Fill in the last column for these five.

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT INTERACTION	EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU MIGHT DO THIS	MY OWN EXAMPLES
1 I repeat what a child says and add more information using the opportunity to re-phrase their wording.	<i>CHILD: I did go to the beach. TEACHER: Oh, aren't you lucky ... you went to the beach. And was the water warm enough to swim?</i>	<i>CHILD: I did it by my own. TEACHER: I am so proud of you! You did it by yourself!</i>
2 I ask open-ended questions that extend children's thinking (what, when, where, why, how questions).	<i>I am going to keep this container because I am sure we can use it for something. What could we use it for?</i>	
3 I comment on what is happening or what children are doing.	<i>You are making a very tall tower with those blocks today!</i>	

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT INTERACTION	EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU MIGHT DO THIS	MY OWN EXAMPLES
4 I talk about things that have happened and things that are going to happen in the future.	<i>Remember last week when there was a fire on the mountain? There was a lot of smoke when we got to school and we could hear the sirens from the fire engine. Weren't those firemen very brave?</i>	
5 I use unusual words and explain word meanings.	<i>That pie looks very tasty ... mmmmm delicious!</i>	
6 I explain and describe how things work or why we do things.	<i>That heavy stone sinks when you put it in the water, but the feather is light so it floats.</i>	
7 I explain my thoughts and feelings (and the thoughts and feelings of others).	<i>I can see that Sipho is very excited today because we are going on an outing.</i>	
8 I think aloud and describe what I am busy doing or thinking.	<i>I'm cleaning the paint off these brushes so that they are clean for our next art lesson.</i>	
9 I encourage children to tell their own stories.	<i>Last week Aaliyah's mom had a new baby. Would you like to tell us what happened when your mom brought the baby home, Aaliyah?</i>	
10 I follow children's interests and have conversations with them.	<i>CHILD: Look, teacher a lizard! TEACHER: Good spotting. That looks nearly the same as a lizard – in fact I think it is a gecko. Why do you think it is running so fast? CHILD: Scared TEACHER: Yes, I think it is running away to hide because it is scared of all the big children.</i>	
11 I have informal, individual and small group conversations with learners.	<i>CHILD: Why do you have a plaster on your finger teacher? TEACHER: I was cutting tomatoes and the knife slipped and cut my finger. CHILD: Was it bleeding? TEACHER: Yes, it was bleeding quite a bit so I put a tissue on it and held it tight.</i>	

(Dockerell et al, 2012; Justice et al, 2008)

Activity 2.3 Creating oral language learning opportunities during show and tell

Work in the big group:

- 1 Discuss whether you do **Show and tell** in your classroom. Share how you conduct these sessions?
- 2 Open your *Teacher's Guide* on page 6. Look through the steps outlined there. Now, participate in the **Show and tell** demonstration lesson.
- 3 Use the table below, and discuss what strategies were used to create language learning opportunities during the demo lesson.

Notes

STRATEGIES THAT SUPPORT COMMUNICATION DURING SHOW AND TELL	THE 'TEACHER' USED THIS STRATEGY
The teacher affirmed the child's choice of object for show and tell.	
The teacher got down to a child's height, made eye contact and listened with interest.	
The teacher repeated what a child said and then added some more information, rephrased or elaborated to expand the language, while being careful to affirm the child's message.	
The teacher asked specific questions and listened to the children's answers. She made a point of asking open ended questions that extend children's thinking (what, when, where, why, how questions).	
The teacher gave the children plenty of time to think before responding when she asked them a question.	
The teacher showed children she was actively listening (with responses like "Mmm, ok, yes, really?").	
The teacher affirmed the other children's listening skills and created a safe space for them to ask questions.	
After the children spoke about their objects, the teacher asked the other children some questions about what they had heard and new things they had learnt.	
The teacher explained her thoughts and feelings (and the thoughts and feelings of others).	

- 4 Put a star next to three strategies you would like to try during **Show and tell** to enrich children's oral language.

Show and tell is a unique opportunity for children to bring something of their own into the classroom, to prepare and to speak for a sustained amount of time about something special to them. It may be better to begin with a small group. This is a valuable assessment opportunity.



Activity 2.4 Creating oral language learning opportunities during fantasy play

Work in pairs:

- 1 Look at the following cartoon.
- 2 Discuss the teacher's role in facilitating the development of oral language during **fantasy play**.



Too much direction usually means less interaction.



When you join in and play, the interaction takes off.

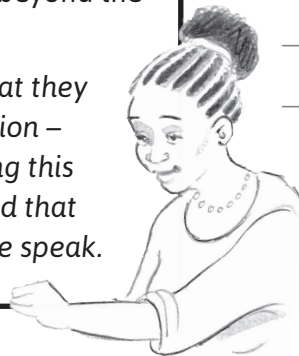
Adapted from Weitzman, E & Greenberg, J (2002)

- 3 Take out your *Teacher's Guide* and find the page for **Fantasy play** in the **Rotation groups activities**. What opportunities can you see for encouraging oral language during this activity?

4  **Fantasy play**

*In the Stellar two-week cycle, we have included **fantasy play** as one of the **rotation group activities**, but children could also choose to go to the fantasy corner to play during any free time. Fantasy play can be noisy, but this kind of play builds children's ability to understand and use language which goes beyond the here-and-now, beyond their own personal experiences and beyond the real world.*

They have to negotiate roles and explain what they are doing. They also learn about representation – that one thing can stand for another. Grasping this difficult concept will help them to understand that the writing on a page stands for the words we speak.



Notes



3 Story-based oral language learning opportunities

Many children in South Africa do not have books in their homes, so when they start school they have not experienced the type of language that you find in books, such as:

Once upon a time there was a greedy lion who was also very lazy ...

In the previous activities we learnt that the way we interact with children throughout the day can build strong oral language. Another way to build strong oral language is through oral storytelling, which helps to bridge the gap between spoken and written language. Oral stories can lead to many activities that consolidate and build on the language of the story.

Activity 3.1 Telling a story using puppets

Work in the big group:

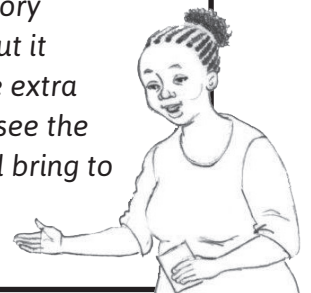
- 1 Listen to the facilitator tell you one of the Stellar stories.
- 2 Now turn to the teacher next to you:
 - a) Discuss what you enjoyed most about listening to the story.
 - b) Share which words best describe how you feel about yourself as a storyteller in your classroom.

Notes

self-assured bored enthusiastic
 happy **positive** insecure
 uncomfortable **unprepared**
apprehensive purposeful
 confused **shy** excited
 confident prepared
focused **embarrassed**

- c) Take out your *Teacher's Guide* and turn to the story-based activities. Go through the steps for Monday's activity in **Week 1: Storytelling and building vocabulary**.
- 3 Discuss whether you think your facilitator followed these steps effectively?
- 4 Will these steps assist you to tell stories with your children?

Telling a good story takes practice, but it will be worth the extra effort when you see the pleasure you will bring to the children in your class!



Activity 3.2 Role-playing a story



Role play

Work in pairs:

- 1 In your experience, how do young children benefit from role playing stories?
- 2 Write your ideas in the space below.

- 3 Discuss how you plan for and manage role-play activities in your classroom.
- 4 Write down the challenges and solutions for doing role-play activities in your classroom.

CHALLENGES OF USING ROLE PLAY IN MY CLASSROOM	GOOD IDEAS FOR DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF ROLE PLAY IN MY CLASSROOM
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- 5 Share some of these ideas in the big group.

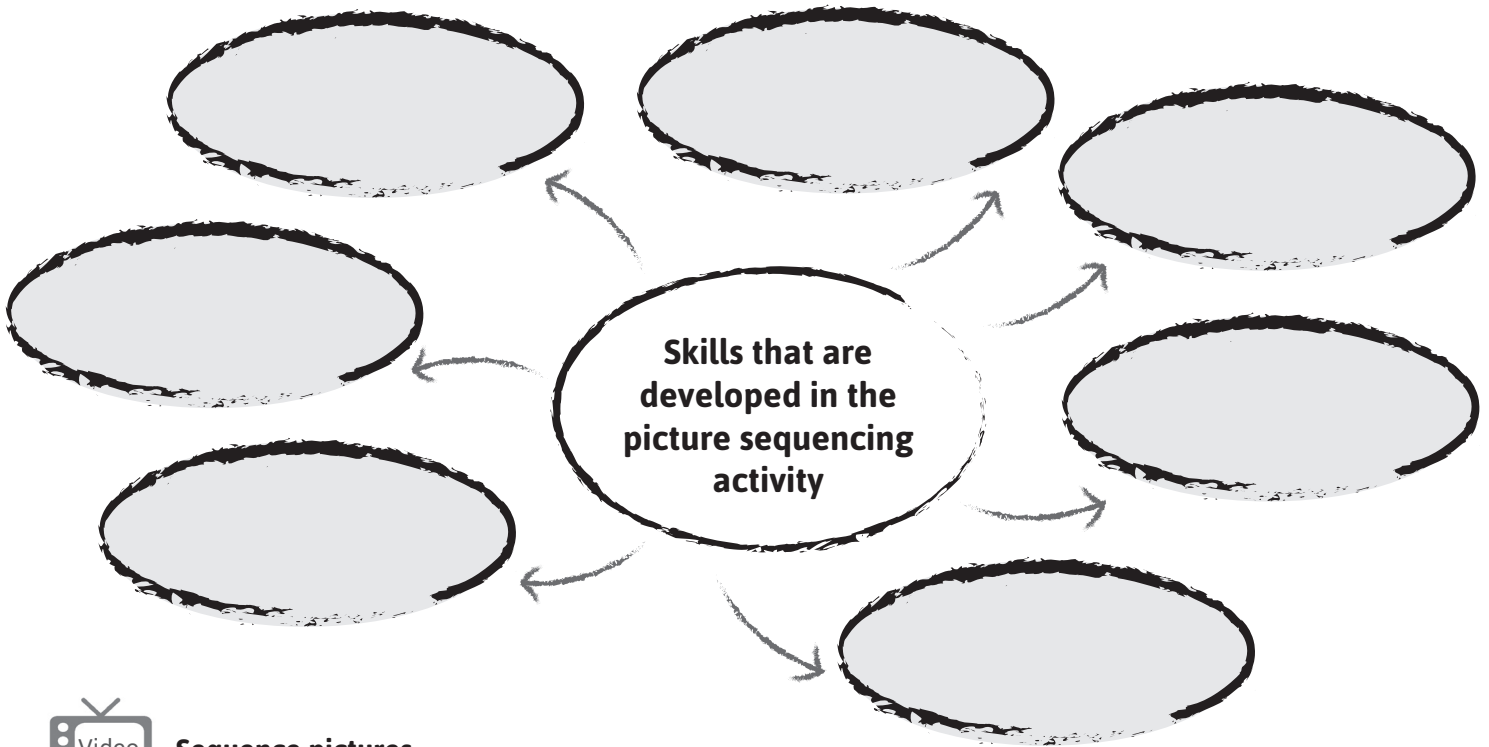


If you have never organised a role play before, don't be concerned if it is difficult to manage the class at first. Children are usually very eager to participate. They need to learn to take turns and to show respect to those acting. In your role as narrator, you can carefully guide the role play, especially in the beginning. It is important not to put learners on show in front of others unless they volunteer. In Grade R, young children might find it easier to begin by dramatising a story together as a whole class in a drama ring.

Activity 3.3 Telling a story using pictures in a sequence

Work in pairs:

- 1 Take your sequence pictures from your story pack, put the cards in the correct order and then tell the story together.
- 2 Talk about the skills that you used and complete the mindmap below.
- 3 Share in the big group as the facilitator creates a group mindmap.



Sequence pictures

Work in pairs:

- 4 What did you notice about how the sequence pictures were used in the video lesson? Compare the lesson in the video with your own classroom experiences of using sequence pictures.
- 5 Turn to the whole class activities in your *Teacher's Guide*. Discuss what is different about the sequence picture activity in Week 1 (Thursday: **Sequencing pictures**) and the sequence picture activity in Week 2 (Monday: **More sequencing pictures**).
- 6 How could you use the Week 2 activity to assess children's sequencing abilities?
- 7 Make notes of any new ideas you want to remember.

When children sequence a story, they use their ability to predict, anticipate, make links and comprehend. These are all important skills for reading comprehension.



Activity 3.4 Listen and do

Work in the big group:

- 1 Brainstorm activities you have used for developing young children's listening skills while the facilitator writes these on newsprint.

Work in small groups:

- 2 Look for the **Listen and do** in your *Teacher's Guide* (this is a story-based activity on Friday of Week 2).
- 3 Ask someone in your group to volunteer to be the teacher leading the listening activity. The rest of the group will role play participating in the activity.
- 4 Look at the following strategies for supporting and encouraging good listening and put a tick next to those that you already use and a star next to ones that you would like to try to use.

STRATEGIES FOR SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING GOOD LISTENING	TICK OR STAR
Praise good listening.	
Ensure children look at you and can see your mouth clearly before you speak.	
Give instructions in a calm, clear way and repeat gently and clearly.	
Do not give too many instructions at once.	
Try to reduce background noise when children need to listen well.	
Give picture and object prompts along with what you say.	

★ Conclusion and wrap-up

Congratulations! You have now completed this Workbook: *Listening and speaking*. Page back in your Workbook and tick if the following statements are true or false.

STATEMENT	T	F
1 We need to start building oral language at the same time that we start teaching children to read and write.		
2 Many children don't often hear explanations, descriptions and the kind of language that is found in stories. This makes it difficult to understand the language of books.		
3 High quality early childhood classrooms are those where the teacher is responsive and creates an environment that supports interaction.		
4 Grade R learners shouldn't be expected to share thoughts and ideas or narrate personal stories.		
5 Role play helps children to identify with the characters in a story and their feelings.		
6 Sequencing pictures to tell a story is a simple process.		
7 When you tell a story in the Stellar programme, you should prepare carefully so that you know the outline of the story, but still use your own words and make the story your own.		
8 Show and tell is an ideal opportunity to build language through listening actively, commenting, added some more information, asking open-ended questions and elaborating to expand the child's language.		
9 During fantasy play, a teacher can help build children's language by directing the play and telling children what to do.		
10 When children first learn to read, they sound out each word, so knowing the meanings of words won't help their reading.		