

## Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Traditional fairy tales can be a great way to develop the skills needed for P4C with young children, 4-7. Vivian Paley (2004), a kindergarten teacher of 38 years in the US endorses traditional fairy tales because young children can engage with the abstract concepts embedded in these stories:

*By the time the children are four they can identify and debate many of the issues hidden in these age-old plots.*

Children are powerful thinkers and to build on their ability to think they need immersion in high quality stories, they need to listen to them, re-tell them, act them out and create their own. If this happens they will acquire the language, ideas and imagination necessary to become highly literate and creative writers and intelligent readers of stories. If they have teachers who ask higher order questions they will be enabled to explore the depths of stories and in so doing develop greater understanding of characters, plots and scenarios. The language of story combined with the language modeled by the teacher and their classmates will shape children's thinking and extend their vocabulary. We all know that P4C is a great vehicle for developing such skills, but teachers of 4-7 year olds also know they have to plan to build these skills. I have taken **Goldilocks and the Three Bears** as an example of a traditional story that is ideal for P4C with 4-7 year olds.

### Binary opposites

Most often fairy tales present abstract concepts in binary opposites. Children are able to engage with such concepts because they are presented in a story that makes human sense to children. In P4C we can begin by identifying the concepts in stories as a way to help us plan our P4C work. I therefore began by thinking about what binary opposites were embedded in Goldilocks. Some of them linked to children's understanding of the physical world, for example, big / small; hot / cold; up / down; inside / outside; animal / human; sturdy / fragile. But the binary opposites I was really interested in are those linked to the 4Cs: common, central, contestable and linked to our experience. I came up with the following:

Obedience / disobedience; respect / disrespect; starvation / gluttony; belong / not belong; confront / compromise; risk taking / safety; give / take; pride / shame; friends/ enemies; right / wrong; powerful / weak; fair / unfair; friend / foe; peace / war; forgive / blame; careful / careless; trusting / suspicious; timid / bold; naughty / good.

Any of these concepts could be explored after reading the story and may well come up in enquiries with the children.

Having thought about the concepts I planned a set of activities to help children explore the story, develop the skills they need to do P4C well and explore one set of binary opposites: naughty/good.

### **Activity 1: Share the story**

Either tell the children the chosen story orally, or read a version of it to them. Ask the children to take some individual time to reflect on the story and ask them:

*What were you thinking about when you were listening to that story?*

Ask them to share their ideas in pairs and report back to the class.

### **Activity 2: Thinking about the characters in the story**

Ask the children to reflect on the characters in the story:

- *Were there things you liked about how the characters behaved in the story?*

*What things were they?*

- *Were there things that you didn't like about how the characters behaved in the story? What were they?*

Children can share their thoughts in pairs or small groups before feeding back to the class.

### **Activity 3: Thinking about questions**

In this activity children think about different types of questions that could be asked about the story. At age 4-7 we need to help children understand the different kinds of questions that can be asked about the story. Using Philip Cam's question quadrant that is shown in the Level 1 handbook, children were asked to decide which quarter of the quadrant the following questions could be placed in. I use two skipping ropes to form the quadrant and read out each question in turn and asked the children to stand in the quadrant they think the questions fits and give reasons for their answers: this questions has one right answer you can find in the story; this question has one right answer but we will need to look it up; this question could have many answers and we will have to use our imaginations to answer it; this question could have many answers and we will have to think very hard to answer it.

*How many bears were in the story?*

*What do bears eat?*

*Why was Goldilocks afraid of the bears?*

*Was Goldilocks brave going into the bears' house?*

Alternatively give groups of children working in fours a mini-question quadrant and the four questions. Each question should be read out and they should decide where to put it.

### Activity 3: Concept lines - Yes or No

To help the children explore the binary opposites of fear/bravery rephrase the third question as a statement that children can respond to. Use one of the skipping ropes to create a concept line and put a card saying **Yes** on one side and **No** on the other:

- *Goldilocks was afraid of the bears*

Once children have made their choices encourage children to say, “I think Goldilocks was afraid because...” or, “I don’t think Goldilocks was afraid because...” As children give their opinions and justify them by giving reasons, you can promote counter-factual thinking by asking *What if?* questions to help the children consider and re-consider their responses in more depth:

- *What if she hadn’t known the bears lived there - would she have been afraid then?*
- *If she did know it was the bears’ house and went in anyway does this mean she was brave?*
- *Do you have to be scared to be brave?*

Try a second statement for children to decide where to stand.

- *Goldilocks was a coward when she ran away from the bears. Yes or No*

Teacher questions:

- *What if the bears had eaten her?*
- *What if the bears only wanted to be friends?*

In this way children are invited to think about the abstract concept of fear and bravery that is embedded in the story of Goldilocks and consider alternative and contestable interpretations of her behaviour. They will need to give reasons to support their opinions and be prepared to change their minds when listening to other well-reasoned views.

### Activity 4: Binary opposite concepts: Naughty/Good

To help children explore these concepts I devised a ‘naughtiometer’. To carry out this activity you need five pictures from the story printed out for the children to see. The skipping rope is laid in a straight line and now becomes the ‘naughtiometer’. Children are asked to rank the pictures according to the degree of naughtiness they think Goldilocks displayed in the story:

Picture 1: Goldilocks going into the forest without her mother’s permission.

Picture 2: Goldilocks eating the porridge.

Picture 3: Goldilocks breaking baby bear's chair.

Picture 4: Goldilocks sleeping in baby bear's bed.

Picture 5: Goldilocks running away when the bears find her in the bed.

Lay the pictures around the skipping rope and invite children to place a picture on the line. Encourage them to say, "I'm putting this picture here because..." Children can disagree with each other and move a picture to a different part of the line. Encourage them to say, "I disagree with ... because..." As children decide in what order to place the pictures they may well end up exploring the concepts of disobedience, stealing, criminal damage, invading someone's personal space and failing to face up to the consequences of our actions.

The teacher's questioning skills are very important to encourage the children to explore the concepts. When trying this out with a Year 1 class the children offered all sorts of opinions and justified them with reasons. One six year old, moving the picture of breaking the chair below that of eating the porridge, justified the move because 'breaking the chair was an accident'. The teacher asked the children if they agreed that accidental damage was not so bad as deliberate damage and asked them to respond by saying, 'I agree with Ewan because...' or, 'I disagree with Ewan because...'. Most agreed it was not so bad, then one child raised an important issue: 'yes, but the chair was still broken' and her comment led to some discussion about the outcomes of actions and their relationship to intentions. A third child said, 'breaking the chair isn't as bad, as it can be mended', thus distinguishing between permanent and repairable damage. A child suggested, 'Goldilock's daddy could mend the chair.' Moving on, another child, demonstrating his understanding of cause and effect, argued that disobeying her mother was the 'most naughty' because all the other things happened as a consequence of that. That led to some discussion about obedience and disobedience. The teacher asked, 'should we always do what we are told?' Most children seemed to think they should, but this could have been an opportunity to consider examples of occasions when it is better not to do what we are told. Another child asked a question, 'was the cottage door locked or open?' The clear implication being that breaking in to the cottage would make it much worse than just walking in through an open door. The teacher asked, 'would that make a difference to what we think about her going into the house?' Children thought it would. One child said the bears would be to blame if they left the door open. One child argued that eating the porridge was the second most naughty thing Goldilocks did, 'because it was like stealing'. The teacher asked her, 'What if she was really hungry?' The children decided she wasn't really hungry as she had tasted two other bowls before eating the one that was 'just right' so she had chosen to do it and that was worse than breaking the chair. Discussion continued for twenty minutes and clearly indicated how important motivation and intention behind the actions of Goldilocks was to the children if they were to accurately judge her behaviour.

This account of children responding to the naughtimeter makes use of the important skill of ranking and has a lot of potential for promoting the exploration of concepts. Exercises such as this are great for developing the skills the children need for philosophical enquiry. Hope you enjoy using them.