

## **The Little Boy – Sue Lyle**

Once there was a little boy and when he was four it was time for him to start school. Each day when he went to school the teacher would tell him stories. He loved the stories – stories about dragons and knights, about giants and wolves, witches and fairies. Stories about goodies and baddies, about brave people and cowardly people, about greedy people and generous people. Stories of love and hate, jealousy and cruelty, friendship and loyalty, betrayal and trust. His imagination was full of places and events, of people and animals that peopled his dreams and his play.

Every morning he looked forward to arriving at school because the teacher would ask him to choose where to put his name card – would he choose a witch or a dragon, a castle or a ship, a story or a poem? And each day he would think about it and put his name card beside his choice and the teacher would ask him – why do you like dragons best, or story or castles? He would think about his answer and tell her. He learnt to give reasons for his choices.

Then the teacher would ask all the children to sit on the carpet and talk about their choices. He liked hearing the ideas of the other children in his class and sometimes after he had listened to them he changed his mind and made a different choice. All together they would think of ideas for stories and then he would go and play the stories – he would dress up and play being the monster or the hero, he would take small figures of dragons or witches or Fireman Sam and create a story, he might use puppets as characters in his games, he might make props and characters from playdoh. And after he had played the teacher would bring the class together again and read some of their stories that she had written down while she watched them play.

Then one day the teacher set up a story-telling table and said anyone who wanted to tell her a story could come to the table and she would write the story down. The little boy was excited – he had lots of ideas for stories so he went to the table and he told the teacher a story and she wrote it down. His story had a dinosaur and a boy and Fireman Sam – it wove together ideas from all the stories he had heard and played. And the next day the teacher read his story to the class and invited the children to act it out as she read it again. And the little boy looked at his words and was happy. He liked acting out his story with others in his class.

Then the little boy was five and he had to move to another classroom and another teacher. This teacher didn't ask him to make any choices at the beginning of the day, she just read out the names from the register and asked him to listen for his name and say 'Yes, Miss Jones' when she called him. He missed his old teacher and wondered what the children in her class were doing.

Then his teacher said, 'today we are going to have new books for you to read'. The little boy was excited – he loved to hear stories and was eager to see the new books. The teacher called him up and gave him his reading book. It didn't

look very exciting. She slowly read the book to him. It didn't have many words and the teacher stopped to sound out the letters in the words. It wasn't a story like he had had before where he could imagine himself as a knight or a giant slayer or a big bad wolf. The little boy was disappointed. He missed the stories he had had in his old classroom. He didn't want to take this book home to read, he longed for his old teacher who wrote his own stories down for him to read.

Then one day the teacher said, 'today we're going to write a story'. 'Oh good' thought the little boy, he loved to write stories and he picked up a pencil and began to draw his story. 'Wait' said the teacher. 'I haven't told you what to do yet.' The little boy was full of ideas but he stopped what he was doing and listened to the teacher. The teacher gave out a sheet of paper with pictures on it. She told the children to look at the pictures and write the words to make the story. The little boy looked at the pictures – he didn't like the story they told about a boy who walked along the road to the shop to buy some something. His mind was full of tales of castles and knights, magic and mystery, but the teacher didn't ask him about his ideas. She sat all the children down and asked each of them to tell the story to go with the pictures. The little boy wondered why they all had to write the same story, but he didn't say anything. He sat there and looked at the pictures, but he didn't want to write the story.

And pretty soon the little boy stopped telling his own stories and learned to do what the teacher asked him to do. He stopped looking forward to having his stories written down for him, he forgot how he loved to act out his stories with his friends; he got used to the reading scheme and learnt to do what the teacher asked. He read the books in the reading scheme and wrote what the teacher told him to write about.

*This story was inspired by the work of the late Patrick Whitaker, a wonderful educator, Sara Stanley, an inspirational early years practitioner and Vivian Paley, the renowned American kindergarten teacher, now retired.*