



# World Language Storytime Best Practices

[www.hclib.org](http://www.hclib.org)

**Families who speak languages other than English have significantly less access to formal storytimes. World Language Storytimes are an opportunity for these families to gain the early literacy benefits of storytime.**

Hennepin County Library (HCL) supports families who want to provide learning opportunities for their children in a native language. HCL provides World Language Storytimes to promote early literacy and language development for children who are English language learners.

The main goal of World Language Storytimes is to demonstrate to parents and caregivers how to effectively share books with children and to support families as they help their children with early reading success. Parents will be given information about how to support early literacy in their native language at home. Home learning activities like book reading in any language help children develop skills that transfer to English literacy and school success (Neuman and Dickinson 2002).

World Language Storytimes can be done for babies, toddlers, preschoolers and their families, in any language the library's collection supports. Families attending library programs with children of various ages benefit from Family Storytime methods that include books and activities accommodating a wide range of ages. Best practices for storytimes in English also apply for World Language Storytimes. Use those best practices in combination with the information in this document. Also refer to the HCL document "Components of a Successful World Language Storytime" for details on presenting the six early literacy skill areas for these storytimes.

The librarian will present World Language Storytimes together with a community partner who is a native speaker of the target language and who has had training in HCL storytime best practices. The librarian provides knowledge of the library's collection and early literacy resources and serves as a storytime coach for the community partner. The community partner provides in-depth knowledge of the language as well as cultural practices that enrich the storytime

experience. The community partner is the link to the target families and culture. The librarian models early literacy best practices and becomes a trusted source of information about the library and its services.

Use these Best Practices as guidelines, as each community is unique.

World Language Storytimes can accommodate native speakers and immersion audiences:

## **Native speakers of target language**

Families speak the target language at home, and they may also speak English or be learning English.

*Our goal: To model early literacy techniques and to teach the target language group (e.g., families who speak Spanish, Hmong or Somali) about library resources.*

•World Language Storytimes, in this case, will be promoted to families who speak the target language at home and will be promoted as "Spanish Storytime," "Hmong Storytime" or "Somali Storytime."

*Publicity example for Spanish:*

### **Cuentos y Canciones**

Para niños de 2 años en adelante y sus familias.

Ayúdele a su hijo/a a prepararse para leer.

Presentado en español.

(This would be advertised in *Spanish only*. Translation: "Stories and Songs. For children age 2 and older and their families. Help your child get ready to learn to read. Presented in Spanish only.")

•The entire story, dialogue and follow-up activities will be presented by the native-speaking partner 100 percent in the target language, including the early literacy tips. The librarian may use some English to welcome families, to introduce the storytime, to describe library resources and to assist and coach the native-speaking partner.

- The librarian's presence is essential to building relationships and trust with these families, and to become their connection to the library and its services.

- The parents' role as their children's best teachers will be reinforced. Messages may include, for example, reassuring parents that their children will learn English at school, but that parents are giving their children something that no one else may be able to—their native language and culture. Research shows this supports healthy self-esteem and academic achievement (Duran 2006).

- Encourage parents to read aloud to their children in their native language at home, but also to constantly talk with their children, as oral language is the most important part of early literacy development (Passe 2005).

- Special efforts should be made to thoroughly explain library services and resources, for both adults and children. Emphasize that library resources, programs and computer usage are free.

### Special Considerations

- In many cultures, reading is not done “for fun” but more for gathering information. Use nonfiction books as part of the storytime. Families may be more likely to respond to books that provide “real” information about insects, cooking, going to the doctor, family life, etc.

- In many cultures, libraries are either non-existent or a resource for academic use only, so many families may not be familiar with an American public library's services, especially services for children.

- Since many families who speak a language other than English have not had formal literacy support, the librarians may need to be more directive with these families and children. For example, parents and caregivers may need to be encouraged to participate and given clear explanations as to why their participation is important to their children's success. Use activities that are generally culturally acceptable for the target group. Start with these and then build on them during your storytime sessions. Be careful not to start with activities that seem so out of the ordinary to culturally diverse families that they feel uncomfortable attending the storytime sessions. Use culturally connected community partners to assist you in planning activities.

- Use books that have high context for the target culture. For example, use stories and props that the families may be able to identify with. Ask your community partner about culturally familiar objects or topics that these families might talk about in their everyday lives.

- Use books that have simple concepts and very literal themes. Look carefully at the illustrations. The illustrations need to support the text. If children can see the illustrations and

understand the context of the story, this will allow them to really listen to the vocabulary and enjoy the story. If the language in the book is too complex, and the illustrations are not clear, you may lose the audience quickly. Poetic stories will be “lost in translation,” so you may want to avoid them.

### Native Speakers of Target Language-Case Study

The Youth Services Librarian at the Oxboro Library offered a Spanish storytime. Here are some learning experiences she had:

- “When choosing storytime books, I looked for books with repeating themes, so I chose *Mama, do you love me?* by Barbara Joosse. It was not a good choice because my community partner did not know many of the animals described. She did not think that most of the parents would either.”

- “I also learned to be very careful regarding books that were published in Spain. Most of the storytime families are from Mexico or other countries of Central and South America. One of the books I suggested contained repeated verbal phrases that were particular to Spanish spoken in Spain. This is something my community partner explained to me.”

- “Be careful of translations for songs found on the Internet. I made the mistake of printing off the words for *Ten little dogs*. I didn't have time to check them with my community partner, and I found out that they did not match the CD at all, and there are many different versions of this song.”

### Immersion audience

This storytime may have a mixed audience. Some parents do not speak the target language, but rather English is their first language, and they want their children to be exposed to a second language. Some families may have one parent who speaks the target language and the other parent who doesn't. Native speakers also may decide to attend this storytime.

*Our goal: To introduce literature in the target language and to model early literacy techniques.*

- This type of World Language Storytime will be promoted as “Bilingual Storytime,” and the publicity will be in both the target language *and* English.

*Publicity example for Spanish/English:*

#### **Spanish Storytime: Experience the World in Other Languages**

Para niños de 2 años en adelante y sus familias.

Cuentos y canciones en español e inglés.

For children age 2 and up and their families. Stories and songs in both Spanish and English.

- The librarian will lead the discussion and the native-speaking partner will read the stories and lead the songs and other activities.

•Dual language education indicates that children learn two languages best when they are kept separate (Cloud, Genessee and Hamayan 2000). Here are some examples of different ways to present a storytime for immersion audiences:

-Read the book entirely in the target language and then discuss the book in English, if everyone at the storytime also speaks English.

-Summarize the book in English before reading the story, letting adults and children know that you want them to listen to the sounds and rhythms of the language you are using. Have them guess what the book is about. Then have the native-speaking partner read the book entirely in the target language.

-If you are targeting Spanish learners, for example, have the native-speaking partner read the text in Spanish and use English at key points throughout the story to summarize. For example, “On this page Carlito found a (English noun) and he \_\_\_\_\_ (English verb), didn’t he?” This way you are reinforcing comprehension, but not translating word for word, which can get tiresome, and in terms of language acquisition is *not* a best practice (Duran 2006). This also demonstrates summarizing to parents, which is a technique used to foster early literacy development.

-Even when using books with bilingual text on each page, do not read the story that way (i.e., reading *both* languages aloud). Stick with the target language throughout the entire book, as mentioned above.

•As previously noted, poetic stories will be “lost in translation,” so you may want to avoid them. It is best to use books that have literal themes.

•Using themes for these storytimes may make it easier to highlight new vocabulary words and allow families to have further conversations about the theme when they are at home.

### Special Considerations

•At the beginning of each storytime, be clear about what will happen and highlight the beauty of hearing different languages all around us. You may say something like, “Today we are going to listen to stories read in Spanish. Do you know anyone who speaks Spanish? There are many people in the world who speak different languages, and many people speak Spanish. Today we will hear some stories about...and I want you to see if you can follow along.”

•Part of learning another language is learning about the culture, so try to include culturally traditional stories or songs, not just books that have been translated.

•Refer to the HCL document “Components of a Successful World Language Storytime” for ideas about how to label the environment without mixing languages.

### Immersion Audience-Case Study

The Youth Services Librarian at the Ridgedale Library has built a relationship with a teacher from a Spanish immersion school in her community. Here are some learning experiences she had:

- “I didn’t speak any Spanish prior to the Spanish storytime, but I used the library’s Spanish Language Collection and then worked with my community partner to choose the best stories to use.”
- “The keys to success were planning ahead of time and working with a community partner who was a regular storytime mom as well as a teacher, so she was comfortable with children in a learning environment.”
- “I was able to build relationships with families who didn’t attend traditional storytimes. I also met some parents who were native speakers, and my community partner translated important information about library services for them.”
- “A real benefit I see is that students in an immersion school are getting an opportunity to absorb the language and practice their comprehension skills outside of school.”
- “I learned some Spanish throughout the session, including basic greetings I can now use whenever these families visit the library again.”

### Contributions and References

- Cloud, N.; Genessee, F.; Hamayan, E. 2000. *Dual language instruction: A handbook for enriched education*. Boston: Heinle.
- Duran, L. 2006. Presentation for Hennepin County Library (Minnetonka, MN) on appropriate practices to support early literacy development in young English language learners.
- Duran, L. 2006. Early literacy consultant to Hennepin County Library (Minnetonka, MN) for the World Languages Storytime Project.
- Passe, A. 2005. Presentation on creating literacy environments as consultant to the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA).
- Passe, A. 2006. Early literacy consultant to Hennepin County Library (Minnetonka, MN) for the World Languages Storytime Project.
- Tabors, P. & Snow C. E. (2002). Young bilingual children and early literacy development. In S.B. Neuman & D.K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of Early Literacy* (pp.159-178). New York: The Guilford Press.