
Adventures In Storytelling

Long ago (in what our kids would call 'the days of the dinosaurs'), before we had technology to entertain us indefinitely, children would be left alone to play (inside or outside) and they would just know what to do – how to play. Nowadays, a lot of children, if told to go and play outside, would find themselves thinking, 'Ok, now what do I do?'

It's the difference between needing to be entertained by others and being able to entertain yourself.

And that doesn't mean giving your kids 'things' – like water pistols or footballs – and expecting them to be able to amuse themselves. That's lunacy. The instant gratification of digital media has meant that children have never needed to think imaginatively about how to entertain themselves, so whatever item you give them isn't going to amuse them for long. To make them successful we first need to teach them how to play.

And one of the best ways to do that is through reading...

To play you need to engage your imagination. And contradictory to certain beliefs, yes, every child has one. Some are bigger and broader than others, some are more abstract, and some more functional, yet they all exist.

The problem is that a child's imagination is like a fire that's just started to burn, it needs to be tended, stoked and fuelled, or it will dwindle. But once that imagination is activated, it becomes a blaze that is near impossible to snuff out.

'Whenever you read a good book, somewhere in the world a door opens to allow in more light.'

- Vera Nazarian

It's in books that we discover new worlds, new perspectives and new ways of thinking. Ideas that we can take from the page out into reality.

This is none more true than with children's literature. Take Winnie the Pooh, Alice in Wonderland, or Harry Potter for instance, they all tell stories that can live beyond their books. Stories that are rooted in places and situations that we can relate to, yet which evolve and take us beyond them. They show us how the ordinary things in the world around us can actually be extraordinary.

'Hundred Acre Wood' could be any woodland you come across. There are plenty of 'Rabbit Holes' that little girls named 'Alice' could fall down. And I've been to London loads of times, surely one of those turnings hides the entrance to 'Diagon Alley'.

Stories like these are the key in transforming the way children play.

When they're exposed to this kind of thinking, they're more likely to act out their own stories.

Where they might have been bored playing with a ball in the garden before - now they are playing 'Quidditch' or have even invented their own game!

'A good book has no ending.'

- R. D. Cumming

Truer words have not been said. A good book lives on in the reader. It changes them. It inspires them. And it teaches them new things.

A child who is able to play, will be more comfortable being alone and with friends.

Remember, play is subjective. Not everything has to be fairies and fantasy. Even simple things like timing your running with a glow-in-the-dark watch.

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