



# The First Story Ever Told

Author: Griffin Shea

Illustrator: Ilse Erasmus

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Picture Book Shortlist

In the very first village in the world, the children lie awake at night, restless and unable to sleep. Why? Because no one knows any stories. In *The First Story Ever Told*, Mother embarks on a long and magical journey to find the world's first story. Along the way, she encounters a cast of fascinating characters - from a wise sea turtle to the mysterious mermaid queen who guards the secrets of the ocean.

As Mother's adventure unfolds, readers are treated to a vibrant and beautifully illustrated journey that brings to life the richness of African folklore. This enchanting story not only reveals the origins of storytelling but also celebrates the beauty of nature, animals, and the deep magic of the oceans.

This book is a tribute to the power of stories, showing how they connect us, inspire us, and shape our world.

## Teaching notes

These notes have been written by the Otto Foundation to provide teachers and caregivers with ideas to develop reading comprehension and support literacy skills. They encourage deep reading of the text and illustrations, which may happen over a series of reading sessions, not just one sitting.

These notes have been written with Grade R, 1, 2 and 3 readers in mind, but teachers and caregivers will need to adapt them to the age and experience of their readers.

## Themes

- Community
- Family
- Adventure
- Folktales
- Storytelling
- Nature

## Before reading the story

- Open up the discussion by allowing the children to share their initial responses to the front cover of the book. Encourage them to discuss what they see and their responses to it.
  - *What do you notice about the cover illustration?*
  - *What does the cover illustration make you think about?*
  - *How does the cover illustration make you feel?*
  - *What do you like most about the cover illustration?*
  - *How do you think the woman on the front cover is feeling? Why do you think this?*
  - *What is the name of the sea creatures swimming around the woman?*
  - *Look closely at the cover illustration. What other animals can you see?*
  - *Do you think the woman on the cover is on land or underwater? What makes you think this?*
- Explain that the title of the book is **The First Story Ever Told**. Ask the children to share their thoughts about the title.
  - *What was the first story you remember being told?*
  - *Where do you think this story takes place?*
  - *Who do you think the characters in this story might be?*
  - *What do you think might happen in this story?*
- Read the back cover blurb aloud. Explore how your children may change their ideas about the story now that they have more information.
  - *How does reading the back cover blurb change what you thought might happen in the story?*
  - *Where do you think **Mother** might travel to in search of a story?*
  - *Which friends do you think **Mother** might meet on her travels?*
  - *What secrets do you think the **ocean** might share with **Mother**?*

## Reading aloud discussion points

- On pages 1 - 2 we meet a family in their village.
  - *Look at the illustrations on pages 1 – 2. What country do you think **the first village that ever was** is in? Why do you think this?*
  - *How many children did Mother and Father have?*
  - *What type of work do you think Mother did during the day?*
  - *What does Father use to carve animals? What animal is he carving in the illustration on page 2? What animal would you ask someone to carve for you?*
- On pages 3 - 8 night falls on the village.
  - *Look at the illustrations of all the family sitting around the fire on page 3. **They are very happy**. What do you think made the family feel so happy?*
  - *One night **the children could not sleep**. Do you ever find it difficult to sleep at night? What helps you get to sleep?*
  - *Look at the illustrations on pages 5 – 6? How do you think the children are feeling? Why do you think they feel this way?*
  - *What did the children ask for to help them sleep? What stories do you like to listen to when you fall asleep*
  - *Why did Mother and Father not know any stories?*

- What did Father ask Mother to do when the children would not stop crying?
- Which animals can you name on the **necklace** Father carved for Mother?
- On pages 9 – 16 Mother begins her **journey**.
  - What is a **journey**? How do you think the family feel about Mother going on a **journey**? Why do you think this?
  - What is the first animal Mother meets on her journey? What is another name for a **hare**? (a rabbit). Do you know any stories about a **hare**? Share these stories with your classmates.
  - What is the second animal Mother meets on her journey? Are you surprised the **elephant** does not know any stories? Why or why not?
  - What is the third animal Mother meets on her journey? If you were an **eagle**, what story would you tell Mother?
  - Name the three animals Mother met who did not have any stories for her.
  - Look at the illustrations on pages 11 – 16. What do you notice about the different types of environment of the **hare**, **elephant** and **eagle**?
- Mother arrives at the beach on pages 17 – 18.
  - Why do you think Mother was feeling **sad and tired**?
  - Mother almost **gave up** on her journey to find a story. What does it mean to **give up**? Would you have **given up**? Why or why not?
  - How do you think Mother felt when the **sea turtle** appeared? Why do you think she felt this way?
  - What did the **sea turtle** tell Mother she needed to do to find stories?
- Mother swims with the sea turtle to meet the **Ocean Queen** on pages 19 – 27.
  - How does mother travel with the sea turtle?
  - What sea animals can you name from the illustrations on pages 19 – 20.
  - Describe the **Ocean Queen** in the illustration on page 20.
  - What does Mother ask the **Ocean Queen**? Do you think the **Ocean Queen** knows any stories? Why or why not?
  - Do you agree with the **Ocean Queen** that Mother has many stories to tell after her journey? What stories do you think Mother could tell about meeting the hare, elephant, eagle and sea turtle?
  - What does the **Ocean Queen** give mother to carry her stories in?
  - Look at the illustration on page 25. What story of **the land** does Mother tell the **Ocean Queen**?
  - What gift did Mother give the **Ocean Queen**?
  - What is a **mermaid**? Do you think the **Ocean Queen** is a **mermaid**? Why or why not?
  - How does Mother return home from the ocean?
- On pages 28 – 31 Mother returns home.
  - What does it mean to feel **glad**? Why does mother feel **glad** to see her family?
  - What do you think the children are saying to Mother in the illustration on page 29?
  - How does Mother remember the stories she shared with The Ocean Queen?
  - What do you think the first story Mother told her children was about?

## Topics for discussion after reading the story

- Ask your children:
  - What did you like most about this story?
  - What is something you have learnt from reading this story?
  - If you were writing this story, what would happen to Mother and her family next?
  - Who do you think should read this story next and why would you recommend it to them?

## Activity ideas for after reading the story

- Host a storytelling circle with your class:
  - Ask your class to sit in a circle
  - Explain that they are all storytellers and will be telling a story together
  - Begin with “Once upon a time...” and ask each child to contribute one sentence to the story, building on what the previous child has said as they move around the circle in a clockwise direction, each giving their contribution
- Ask your class to draw their favourite animal character from the story (hare, elephant, eagle or sea turtle) and create a display to promote **The First Story Ever Told** in your library using their illustrations
- Ask your class to design their own storytelling necklace:
  - Show them the illustration of the necklace Father carved for Mother on page 8
  - Ask them to draw 4 different characters they would want to be in their story and cut them out
  - Punch a hole in each character so the children can string them onto a piece of string and create a storytelling necklace
  - Put the children into pairs to share their stories using their storytelling necklaces

**Please see the following pages for Grade specific CAPS aligned skills covered in these teaching notes.**

## CAPS skills covered in teaching notes

### Listening and speaking

#### Grade R

- Listen to stories
- Listen and respond to simple questions
- Listen without interrupting
- Talk about pictures
- Participate in discussion and asks questions
- Ask questions
- Give explanations

### Reading

#### Grade R

- Use pictures to predict what a story is about
- Predict what will happen in a story through pictures
- Recognise and point out common objects in pictures
- Interpret pictures
- Make up own story by 'reading' pictures
- Pretend to read
- Make links to own experience when reading with teacher
- Discuss and describe characters in a story
- Describe characters in stories and give opinion
- Answer questions based on the story read

### Listening and speaking

#### Grade 1

- Listen to and express feelings about a story
- Listen without interrupting, taking turns to speak and asking questions of clarification
- Respond to pictures
- Listen to stories with interest and enjoyment, drawing on a picture to show understanding
- Listens for the detail in stories
- Talk about personal experiences and feelings
- Answer closed and open-ended questions
- Participate in discussions

### Reading

#### Grade 1

- Develop book handling skills (holding the book and turning pages correctly)
- Uses book cover to predict what a story is about
- Use pictures in the book for understanding
- Make up own story by 'reading' pictures
- Discuss a story identifying main idea and characters
- Ask questions related to a story told and read
- Recognise cause and effect in a story
- Give an opinion on what was read
- Answer open-ended questions based on text read
- Interpret information from pictures

### Listening and speaking

#### Grade 2

- Listen to stories and answer higher-order questions
- Listen to a story with enjoyment and answer questions related to the story
- Listen to stories for a longer period with enjoyment
- Listen without interrupting showing respect for the speaker
- Use ever increasing vocabulary when answering questions
- Understand and use appropriate language in context
- Ask questions and comments on what was heard
- Talk about personal experience
- Express feelings about a story

### Reading

#### Grade 2

- Read books as a class with teacher
- Use the cover of a book to predict what a story is about
- Use pictures in the book for understanding
- Identify key details in what was read, such as main characters and setting
- Express whether a story was liked and justify response
- Express personal response to a text read
- Give opinion on what was read
- Answer open ended questions based on text
- Answer higher order questions based on text read
- Recognise cause and effect in a story
- Describe main ideas in a text
- Identify key details in what was read

- Answer closed and open-ended questions and justify answers
- Participate in discussions, asking and answering questions and suggesting ideas

- Discuss different cultures represented in a story

## Listening and speaking

### Grade 3

- Listen for main ideas and detail in stories
- Listen to story for cause and effect
- Ask questions for clarification
- Express feelings and opinions about text and gives reasons
- Talk about personal experiences
- Answer open-ended questions and justify answer
- Answer higher order questions based on text
- Participate in discussion
- Engage in conversation as a social skill, accepting and respecting the way others speak
- Listen without interrupting

## Reading

### Grade 3

- Read books as a class with teacher
- Discuss main idea, characters, plot and 'problem' in a text
- Answer a range of higher order questions based on text
- Express whether a story was liked and justify answer
- Interpret information from pictures
- Use illustrations in text to increase understanding