



Accessible Arts & Media Resource Guide

Sensory Stories

www.aamedia.org.uk



About Accessible Arts & Media

We're a charity based in York and we've been running inclusive arts and media learning projects since 1982. We're a small charity with a big heart and our work's built around the belief that everyone can learn, everyone can be creative, and everyone can connect with and contribute to their local community.

We run a range of fun, inclusive creative learning programmes, from singing and signing choirs to specialist sensory activities that support wellbeing; accessible music making groups; creative media projects; and creative sensory activities including fabulously glittery arts and crafts, messy play, sensory stories and music and movement.

A lot of different people take part in our projects. From disabled adults and young people, to older people with dementia and memory loss and people with mental ill-health. We also work with schools, community groups and local businesses.

Our work is centred around co-production - we level the playing field by providing everyone with the support and space they need to have an equal say. And we make sure that everyone has a lot of fun along the way!

If you've downloaded and used any of our resources, we'd love to hear more about how you've been using them, you can drop us an email at info@aamedia.org.uk or tag us on social media.

If you've enjoyed using our resources and you'd like to make a donation to support the cost of creating them, you can [donate via our website](#). As a small charity, we really appreciate your support.

The Accessible Arts and Media (AAM) approach to Sensory Stories

A sensory story is a short simple story that's told using multi-sensory props. Within each story there are around 10 items that get used alongside the words of the story. The items could be things to feel, smell, taste, see or listen to. Sensory stories work to engage all of the senses at some point in the story.

Who are sensory stories for?

Sensory stories are designed for people with severe learning disabilities and complex needs, or those at an early stage of language development. At AAM we believe everyone needs more sensory stimuli so these activities really can be enjoyed by people of any age or stage of development.

Repetition

Sensory stories work well when told numerous times to the participant. People with severe learning disabilities or complex needs need time and repetition to process and develop. Repeating the story regularly helps develop turn taking, confidence with handling props and experiencing new senses. It can also encourage people to learn new vocabulary and concepts. Once a participant knows the story well, you can experiment with leaving gaps in the sentence so they can help tell the story with you.

Sensory props

We use sensory props throughout our stories to create an activity that engages all the senses. The props we use are all household items that are easy to get hold of. Sometimes we use a prop that you have to make or collect things for. This can be a really fun activity for you and the participant(s) to do before telling the story e.g., going to the beach to collect sand or making a rocket out of a paper tube.

Each sensory item is used by all participants, you can use hand-over-hand and Total Communication (see below) to encourage engagement. Sometimes the story uses a prop that can be tasted. This can be tricky for participants who are nil by mouth or who have allergies. In the stories we always give an alternative to taste, often this is to smell the item instead of tasting it.

Using Accessible Arts and Media's Sensory Stories as a storyteller

What the resources contain

Each sensory story comes with a PDF, and two videos.

The PDF contains the story narrative along with the prompts and resources needed for each part of the story.

In video one we'll explain what props you'll need to tell the story and how to make them.

In video two we demonstrate the story. It's useful to for you to watch this video first to get an idea of how the story is told. Then you can either watch it with the participant, with you exploring the props together. Or, if the participants need more time or you have more than one participant, you can use the PDF to enable you to become the storyteller.

How to Tell a Sensory Story

You can tell a sensory story with just one participant or with a group. We wouldn't recommend having more than seven participants in a group as the story can take too long and participants may lose attention and become disengaged.

Make sure you know the story well. Practise using the props yourself, and make sure you know the sentences.

Make sure your props are close by and placed in the right order for the story. This helps make sure there's a smooth delivery once the story begins.

When telling the story, say the sentence and demonstrate how to use the prop on yourself so that participants know what's going to happen. Then repeat a short bit of the sentence, using the prop, with each participant.

Each repetition should be the same. The same words said, and the same prop used in the same way. This way, the participant knows exactly what's going to happen each time. This is especially important if you're working with a group. Try not to add in extras, such as 'oo look at the colours' or 'doesn't that feel nice?'. The words of the story are enough.

Allow time for each participant to explore the props and keep repeating the line as you explore the props together.

Total Communication

Total Communication means using as many types of communication as possible and is always user-led. This means using speech, signing, body language, facial expression, and tone of voice. Where appropriate, and if the participants can use them, you could also use additional objects of reference, or choice cards, communication aids and touch.

Observation is the key communication method used by a facilitator. This is especially the case if it involves the use of touch as you will need to observe how the participant responds to this.

Interaction and Intensive Interaction

Throughout the story, it's important to stay focused with the participant and always interact with them. Their engagement with the story will improve if there is constant focussed interaction.

Intensive Interaction goes back to the basics of communication - enjoying small interactions, celebrating eye contact, facial expressions and taking turns in vocalising. It's about going to the participant's world, rather than making them come to yours.

Allow time

When working with children or adults with learning disabilities or complex needs, it's important to allow time to enable the individual to process what's happening. Don't be afraid of silence or stillness, wait for them to process and then engage.

Really take your time with each element of the story and use all the senses where possible. Explore the senses - feel the props with your fingers, look at the different colours, what different textures can you find? Take time to explore the object, does the prop make a sound when shaken or touched, what does it smell like?

Hand-over-hand

Sometimes using physical touch is necessary to help someone get engaged in an activity. The activity might initially seem strange or scary to the person you're working with. You could try demonstrating using the prop yourself and then using hand-over-hand, or hand-under-hand, to help them experience the object with you. Then once you've experienced it together, you can work to encourage independence and try and get them to do it themselves. Again, it's important to use the skills of Total Communication to observe how the participant responds to touch.

Further development

Don't be afraid to deviate from the props that we've suggested. You know your participant's likes and dislikes and how to engage with them. If you need to act out some of the story to encourage engagement, then do it! Don't be afraid to use your imagination to help bring the story to life.

Once you've got comfortable telling these stories, you could turn your favourite stories into sensory stories, or write an original story with your group, deciding on the props together.

Most importantly - have fun! If you're having fun, so will the participants.

More Information

Below is a list of websites with more information on sensory stories, and other web-based resources you might find useful:

Bag Books -

<http://www.bagbooks.org/>

The Sensory Projects -

<http://www.thesensoryprojects.co.uk/the-sensory-story-project>

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Accessible Arts & Media's Sensory Stories

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If you have any questions, require any additional training or support, or would like us to run taster workshop with your group to get you started, please contact:

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