

# Story in a Bag<sup>122</sup>

## Summary

In this process we use a bag filled with a selection of familiar objects to help the child communicate answers to the research questions. The child removes objects from the bag, identifies them and selects any that help them answer the research questions.

There is no one right way to do this process, you can be creative. The objects in the bag are just a prompt to help the child talk or communicate about the questions. Handling the objects can lead to other activities that might be useful such as:

- Collecting objects the child wants to include or talk about,
- The child drawing or writing more about the objects or the ideas they represent to that child.

## Making a Story in a Bag

1. Think about all the areas of a child's life that are relevant to the research question. For example, consider: health, housing, play, social life (friends), family life, food and drink, education, safety, transport, animals, law and order, holidays, work, communicating, culture, spiritual life and religion, money etc. You might also want to look at the Photo Library and think about what objects represent each picture. Objects in the bag may be different in rural and urban areas and will vary according to the child's age.
2. Travel around the local area and collect objects that relate to the research question, (considering a broad range of answers and areas of the child's life), and that are likely to be familiar to the child. Usually these will be everyday objects like a piece of fruit, a drinking cup, a toy or ball, and objects that represent other things, for example, a pen and book, which might mean 'school' or education to the child.
3. Find or make a bag to put the objects in and place the objects in the bag.
4. Make a list of all the objects. Give each object a number and a title (e.g. 1. Pen).
5. Include around 10–15 items for each exercise, taking care to consider the age, circumstances and abilities of the child to be interviewed. (NB. some children have tactile sensitivities, so items selected should not aggravate these difficulties.)

## Process

1. Explain that you are going to ask some questions and that the child might like to use the objects in the bag to help answer them.
2. Explain that to help the child, you have a bag with a number of familiar things in it, such as a coconut.
3. Explain that the child can explore the bag, pull out the objects and feel them, and talk about them if they help them answer the questions.
4. Explain that the bag has only nice/safe things in it, and you think exploring the bag and the things in it will be fun.

## 5. Ask the research question/s

- The child can answer this in any way they want, including telling you the answer. Offer the bag full of objects as an option to help them answer. Explain that the child might want to choose some objects from the bag that help them answer the research question.
- Go through the bag slowly. Remember that the process of feeling an object takes longer than looking at an object. Allow the child to explore the bag and each object freely. For example, if there is a shoe in the bag, they might want to try it on.
- Allow the child to handle the objects one at a time and talk about each one if they wish. The child may want to identify each object (e.g. 'this is a coconut'), and you should agree and affirm this or correct them gently if they are wrong. The child might want to comment on or describe the object (e.g. 'it's hard with hair on the outside, I think this one is ripe'). You should affirm their description and perhaps add a little bit more (e.g. you might say, 'yes, I think it is a juicy one, if you shake it you can hear the coconut water inside').
- After the child has had time to identify and handle the object, ask if the object makes them think about the research question. You may need to repeat the question and ask the child if any of the objects help them answer the research question.
- Take notes of everything they tell you, including which object they are speaking about.
- Tell the child they can stop and talk about as many objects as they like.
- Ask the child if there are other objects they would like to include in the bag. For example: 'If this was a bag of things that told people what was important to you in life, what else would be in the bag?' Or 'Is anything important missing from the bag?'
- Be positive about the child's choices and what they are telling you.
- This activity is a lot of fun. Some children who were blind or vision impaired in our research really enjoyed guessing what the objects were. It's OK for the child to enjoy playing with the bag and the objects. You may want to let them play first, then go through the questions as discussed above (this may have to be at a second meeting).
- You may choose to leave the bag with the child at the end of the interview. However, some children in our research preferred the researcher to take the bag as they associated the bag with the time they spent with the researcher.

## Considerations

1. The bag can be a distraction to the child prior to the Story in a Bag activity commencing. It is therefore best to keep the bag out of the child's sight until it is appropriate to introduce this to the child.
2. Child may become distracted during this activity and may wish to stop the activity to have free play with certain items from the bag.

### Practice example

Toya is a 14-year-old girl with physical, intellectual and communication impairments and lives in PNG. We (the researchers) used the story in the bag and Toya liked the toy car. I asked her what she liked most and she picked the car. She was so happy playing with the car and making the sound while pretending to drive on the ground. I asked her what job she wanted to get in the future. With the help of the mother she mentioned her father and did the sound of the vehicle. I asked her if she wants to be a driver like her father and she said, 'Yes'.