

# EDUQ&AS:

## DRAMA

**CONTACT:** ROUTLEDGE **VISIT:** ROUTLEDGE.COM **CALL:** 01235 400400

Spark children's storytelling imagination with **Trisha Lee's** *Princesses, Dragons & Helicopter Stories* from Routledge...

**TP: How does Helicopter Stories work?**

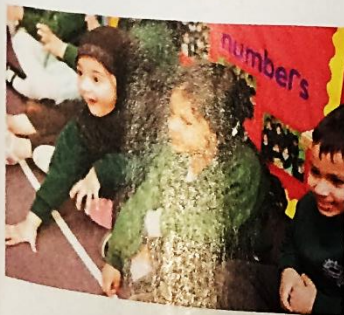
Helicopter Stories is, in theory, a simple approach. The teacher or workshop leader, sits next to the child and scribes her story word for word. There is no need to lead or ask questions, the teacher simply records the story as accurately as possible. When the story is finished, it is read back to the child so she can decide which character she would like to become. Once several stories have been collected the class gather around a makeshift 'stage' (simply marked out with masking tape) and act the stories out. The other characters are selected in turn from around the stage, so that all children have a chance to be involved.

**Where did the name come from?**

In 1998, I was handed one of Vivian Gussin Paley's books, *The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter*, and asked to work it up into a project. My passion for this approach began the moment I read the first page. As a theatre practitioner, it was important to check that I was allowed to incorporate this into my work. I contacted Vivian in Chicago and was fortunate enough to meet with her in London, and later visit her in Indianapolis. Since then, we have become close friends. The work I developed in the UK was initially nicknamed the Helicopter Technique, after Vivian's book, and the name stuck. More recently my social enterprise, MakeBelieve Arts, renamed the approach 'Helicopter Stories: Letting Imagination Fly'.

**Why do you think telling stories is so important?**

Stories are the tools we are born with to make sense of the world. They give us our sense of self, and help us look beyond the walls of the known to try to make sense of the mysteries outside our own environment.



Children start developing stories from a very early age. A two year old who holds a dinosaur in one hand and a truck in the other, and makes a screeching sound as she crashes them together, is doing story. She is taking two disconnected objects and finding a narrative to bring these together in the same space. We empathise with characters, feel their heartbreak, their anger, their injustice, their success. And there is evidence about the important role that story plays in developing emotional intelligence and the ability to see the world from differing viewpoints.

**Does every child always have a story to tell?**

Vivian Gussin Paley talks about the novels inside children waiting to emerge "as so many unbound streams of consciousness". All children have a story to tell. A four year old told the following story: "Once there was a woman who liked to cook, she liked to cook everything." That was the end of her story, but contained in those few words was the beginning of a novel. After a boy in Vivian's class told the story 'Fredrick', the children accepted it easily. So, she asked them: "Can one word be a story?". One of the group told her that it wasn't one word, it was one character. Of course, one character is a story. The story of a two year old, 'Mummy', contains a multitude of

novels waiting to emerge. As long as there is a character, there is a story, and often the acting out will show us more than the one word might initially reveal.

**Does your book give teachers everything they need to introduce Helicopter Stories into their own schools?**

The idea behind *Princesses, Dragons and Helicopter Stories* was to ensure that teachers had clear guidance to begin incorporating the approach into their schools. The book comes in two sections. Section 1, The How, goes through each stage of the approach, step-by-step. Section 2, The Why, explores in greater depth the importance of this approach and some of the ethos behind it. So, with the book, a roll of masking tape and some sheets of A5 paper, everyone should be ready to begin. And if you need extra support, contact me at MakeBelieve Arts ([makebelievearts.co.uk](http://makebelievearts.co.uk)) and we will be happy to arrange training.



**Trisha Lee's book, *Princesses, Dragons and Helicopter Stories: Storytelling and story acting in the early years*, is out on 17 August from Routledge.**