Using electronic books to engage young readers

Electronic books offer a fun, interactive, multimedia rich approach to sharing stories with children. Although teaching reading has traditionally focused on using conventional printed books, there is a growing shift towards interactive reading approaches, some of which use smartphone apps and digital media. Accompanied by a variety of interactive features such as animation, sound effects, hyperlinked vocabulary, hidden hotspots and gradual revelation of text – e-books have the potential to further involve young learners in the reading process. While some studies highlight the impact of using electronic storybooks for independent learning purposes (e.g. Moody, 2010), this article explores ideas on how teachers can create and use electronic storybooks with a whole class using the shared reading approach. E-books have the potential to be motivating, challenging, and a colourful visual resource in the primary school classroom – use them to increase children’s interest, involvement and understanding of stories.

What is an electronic book?
In addition to the written text and drawings that can be found in a conventional printed book, a digital media equivalent, often referred to as an e-book, CD-ROM storybook, interactive e-book or e-book employs multimedia effects. Accompanied by written text and sometimes audio, background music, sound effects, animations, hyperlinks, related activities and games, e-books can become more lifelike and appealing. As such, they represent a reading format that combines video, sound and narrative with written text and the option to act on these possibilities (Shami & Kyle, 2005). These interactive features of e-books are also a possible medium for supporting young children’s literacy (e.g. Moody, 2010), this article explores ideas on how teachers can create and use electronic storybooks with a whole class through the shared reading approach. E-books have the potential to be motivating, challenging, and a colourful visual resource in the primary school classroom – use them to increase children’s interest, involvement and understanding of stories.

Why use electronic books in the primary school classroom?
Traditional simplistic notions of literacy as involving only the reading (decoding and comprehension) and writing (encoding and communication) skills are far removed from the interactive, supported by multimedia modes that provide visual and sound representations (Grimshaw, 2007, Moody, 2010). In order to take advantage of the interactive features of electronic books and their ability to establish a context or promote a mood, the teacher can engage young students in shared reading of the story with an entire class (Labo & Kuhn, 2000). A projector can be used to enhance the image onto a screen while the teacher reads the story aloud. This digitized book can provide the teacher with dynamic visual interfaces to represent parts of the story, high-lighting text or vocabulary while the story is being initially read aloud by the teacher or narrator (Lefever-Davis & Pearman, 2005). By pointing using a laser pen, the teacher can track each word/sentence and encourage children to join in where possible, while gradually revealing the text. Unlike a conventional shared reading experience with a high-book, the teacher’s arm is not blocking illustrations or additional text. Games

Common hotspots can be activated which elaborate on the illustrations, characters, setting or vocabulary. For example, when the teacher clicks on a character, the figure may start to talk or clicking on a glowing word might give the children an explanation of the word. More advanced learners might discuss which story elements the reader can infer from visual features and which are stated in the text itself. This sharing of an electronic book with an entire class has the potential to foster children’s understanding of the story events, increase their vocabulary knowledge, phonological awareness and story recall abilities (Chera & Wood, 2003). Subsequent re-readings can occur with individual students in the class to increase their understanding. The use of e-books has the potential to increase the way e-readers in Ireland primary school classrooms is emerging. However, if e-books are an additional, rather than an alternative means of providing a fun, interactive reading experience in the primary school classroom, then more possibilities exist for embracing their potential. Their lively and attractive features, including dynamic visuals, voice and sound are a powerful means of supporting children’s literacy development. What better way to enjoy reading with young primary school learners, than through sharing e-books?

How to use and incorporate electronic features into a shared reading lesson
The same interactive elements of e-books that support children’s literacy (e.g.

Data projector + online story + animation activities = e-book!


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Electronic version of Fiction Book E.g. The Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle

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<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Pre-Shared Reading</th>
<th>While Shared Reading</th>
<th>Post-Shared Reading</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Electronic version of Fiction Book</strong></td>
<td><strong>E.g. The Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle</strong> <a href="http://www">http://www</a>. cebel.com/docs/ 3925238 The Very Hungry Caterpillar book</td>
<td><strong>Demonstration</strong> The teacher reads the story aloud. The pace should be lively with few stops. Point to new text as you read to reinforce left-to-right orientation, using a laser pen. <strong>Participation</strong> Allow the children to join in where possible. Ask the children to dominate.</td>
<td><strong>Remind children’s favourite parts.</strong> Remind direct speech with expressions. Highlight key words and children can suggest suitable alternatives.</td>
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<td><strong>Audio/C.D. ROM</strong></td>
<td>Listen to the beginning of the story and predict the storyline.</td>
<td>As a whole class, listen to the story and read along.</td>
<td>Individual children can listen to the story during extension time. Make their own audio recording of the children reading using your mobile phone.</td>
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<td><strong>Sound Effects</strong></td>
<td>Introduce each character with a different sound effect e.g. using Microsoft PowerPoint</td>
<td>Where appropriate, introduce sound effects throughout the story e.g. to remind students of a key word.</td>
<td>Re-read the story in sequences using sound effects to represent main characters.</td>
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<td><strong>Games</strong></td>
<td>Complete an online puzzle of the front cover of the story – then guess the title.</td>
<td>Some online stories have accompanying games e.g. reorder the story; bingo, word searches, information gaps.</td>
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<td><strong>Graphic Animation</strong></td>
<td>Some online stories have graphic animation. Introduce and describe main characters by clicking on the animated icon.</td>
<td>When the teacher clicks on a character, it starts to talk.</td>
<td>Describe the character, based on the animated icon.</td>
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<td><strong>Hotspots</strong></td>
<td>Some online stories have hidden hotspots which can be activated to introduce the setting or character.</td>
<td>To recall parts of the story, that can be searched automatically.</td>
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<td><strong>Hyperlinks</strong></td>
<td>Introduce key vocabulary or target language by clicking on hyperlinks.</td>
<td>Step throughout the story and highlight/click hypelinks highlighted words.</td>
<td>Place appropriate, introduce sound effects throughout the story e.g. to remind students of a key word.</td>
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<td><strong>Extension Ideas</strong></td>
<td>Whole school e-book buddy reading project e.g. 6th class students complete the same e-books using Microsoft PowerPoint or <a href="http://www.storybird.com">www.storybird.com</a> (adding audio, animation, sound effects and background design), targeting ICT and literacy skills. Presented on to younger class.</td>
<td><strong>Performance</strong> Re-cast student to act out the story. Each line is re-cast by one acting the laser pen.</td>
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Example electronic book resources
- www.startall.com
- A variety of well-illustrated online books with a phonics approach to reading.
- www.maplekeys. com/books
- Example children’s storybooks online www.storybird.com
- Create your own story using short, art-inspired stories to draw, read, and print. By reversing the process of visual storytelling, start with the image/ theme and write the story.
- learningenglishkids.com/my-own-ebook/story-maker

References available in the InTouch section of the HEDT website

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