



MINISTRY OF STORIES

Experiment with sentences

Giving children the opportunity to experiment with sentences can help them deepen their understanding of what different grammatical structures can do. Here are a few suggestions of activities to kickstart ideas about the possibilities children have when creating sentences.

Handouts for this session can be downloaded from the link on the right.

1. How long can you make a sentence?

Give the children a very short sentence, e.g. *The dog ate the biscuit.*

Then give them two minutes to make it as long as possible, by adding words and phrases in the beginning, middle or end of the sentence. It can work well as a competition to see which group creates the longest sentence.

E.g. The cat sat on the mat.

After eating a huge meal of mice on toast, the giant ginger cat belonging to my sister Elsa sat heavily on the old woollen mat next to my grandfather, who was sighing slightly because he was so full.

Afterwards, you can start a discussion about what sort of words and phrases children have added to their sentences. You could follow it up with a second challenge to add a particular structure to the sentence - e.g. adding a prepositional phrase.

This activity is also an opportunity to discuss the impact of sentence length on the reader - the ones that 'won' this competition might not be the easiest to read. You could give the children a chance to rewrite their sentences as several clearer ones.

2. How short can you make a sentence?

This time, give the class a very long sentence:

Just before the final whistle, the recently-signed Arsenal footballer, who was from Barbados, kicked the incredibly muddy ball with his neon yellow shoes and won a fantastic victory for the team, taking them to the final of the FA cup and causing the fans to burst into hours of cheers and singing.

Then challenge them to remove as many words as they can. How many can they remove and the sentence still make sense? This could lead to a discussion about the essential elements of a sentence.

For an extra challenge, get children to identify the types of words, phrases and clauses they've taken out. Also, if any of the groups 'cheat' by changing a word, you could ask the class why the sentence needed the change of word.

3. What words can you swap into your sentences?

Here's a chance for children to see how different word classes work in a sentence, by showing that words from the same word class can be exchanged.

Give the children a simple sentence and some suggested words to swap with existing words in the sentence. How many new sentences can they create?

After a while, they should be able to suggest their own words and even phrases.

E.g. *"The green parrot bit my little brother."* could become *"The blue parrot pecked my little sister."* or even something very different: *"A feisty singer impressed my skeptical teacher."*