



StoryWorld

ReadingZone reviews the new StoryWorld resource published by Templar. Created by John and Caitlin Matthews, it is described as a 'toolkit for the imagination' and is intended to support children in developing their visual literacy and storytelling skills.

www.templarco.co.uk

The StoryWorld concept is simple. Each StoryWorld pack comprises 40 illustrated cards that provide a starting point for children to discuss and write about. There is also a Storytelling Book that explains how to use the cards. Each set of cards and book costs £12.99.

The cards are about twice the size of normal playing cards and beautifully illustrated by artists including Wayne Anderson, Paul Hess, David Lawrence, Nicki Palin and Tomislav Tomic.

The cards in the set belong to one of four themes, The Everyday, The Land of Faery, The World of Magic and The Realm of the Court, and once you begin to study their detail, you really begin to see the point of the resource.

The main image for each card, a soldier, key or doorway for example, is surrounded by intricate details that beg questions. Why is there a raven by the soldier, what do the keyholes behind the key open to, what are the creatures guarding the door to faery land? And so on.

On the back of the cards is its title ('The Door to Faery Land') and specific questions for children to consider as a starting point for their own stories: 'If you open me, where will I lead you? Who is looking through the tree roots? What do the trees whisper?'

The couple who created the cards have backgrounds in teaching, folklore and history. Caitlin Matthews is a writer and teacher and a world authority on Celtic Wisdom. John Matthews is an historian, folklorist and author, and their combined knowledge is evident in the care and detail provided in each card.

Elizabeth McCotter, an advanced skills teacher in Southwark, was given a StoryWorld set to try out in the classroom to see how the resource can contribute to children's storytelling skills.

She describes StoryWorld as "a very neat package of cards with great visual stimulus". She confirms that the cards have so far been enjoyed by all the teachers in her group and that they have helped to stimulate children to create a narrative. One of the strengths of the resource is its use of cards, she adds. "Because it comes as a pack of cards, children see it as a game which also encourages them to join in. We have been dealing the cards or getting the children to pick a card. You can really get the children excited about them."

Teachers worked with the children in groups of ten so they could become familiar with what was on their cards and other people's cards. Having a prominent image on each card with background detail has worked well, says McCotter. "The illustrations are wonderful and it's good to have one main image as well as lots in the background. Children feel compelled to search for the different clues to answer all the questions."

Teachers have also used single cards with groups of children. "Even using just one card, we have had children producing wonderful stories because each card includes the main elements for a story," says McCotter. "There is the setting, the good and bad characters, and the plot. Everything is in one card."

McCotter found the cards ideal for children in KS2, age seven to 11 years. "Children have to have a basic knowledge of narrative structure and to know about characters," she explains. In addition, she says, "The new Primary Framework puts a lot of emphasis on speaking, listening and drama, but it can be hard to find resources like these that focus on those skills."

While she liked the size of the cards, McCotter would have liked to have seen whiteboard resources accompany the physical cards. "It would be good if everyone could see the same card when we are doing group work," she explains.

A limitation of the cards was the fantasy setting, she says. "The children thought it would be great to have other settings like science or the real world, and not just fantasy."

She would also like the supporting book to be made simpler with a summary of text to explain the cards, although the examples of how different cards had been used together to make a story, was useful.

The total price of the package, at £12.99, was, she felt, "very good value for money". Top-up packs of 28 cards covering other themes, including Faery Magic and Quests and Adventures, are also available for £6.99 each.

Publisher's response:

- Templar will be developing an electronic resource for teachers to use on an interactive white board, which it aims to publish in Spring 2010, and which will include a summary explaining how to use the cards
- Other themes will be created for the cards. Templar has already created cards themed as Christmas and Halloween and other subjects are being discussed such as space and toys.

StoryWorld:

Published by Templar in July 2009, £12.99 per pack