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# Reading Differences

## Teaching sequence for *Tales Told in Tents*

written by Sally Pomme Clayton, illustrated by Sophie Herxheimer  
Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 2004

### About the book

This is a rich collection of travelling tales from Central Asia: Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. There are twelve retellings of stories that include trickster tales, stories of magic carpets and mountain spirits. Sally Pomme Clayton is a storyteller who is 'interested in the nomadic cultures of Central Asia because of their rich storytelling traditions', as she tells us in the storyteller's tale that begins the book. She spent time in these countries, learning about ways of life and the variety and distinctiveness of their stories. In between the stories are riddles, folklore and proverbs from this vast area and vignettes from the storyteller's own experiences. The paintings that accompany the stories evoke the rich colours and culture of the places and the tents the people live in.

### Structure of the teaching sequence

The teaching sequence focuses on several stories from the book and some of the sayings and riddles. It covers 10 sessions and includes a range of different activities: whole-class and shared reading, choral reading, drama and art. Depending on the interest of the class, the sessions may be adapted and other stories chosen, but the aim should be to ensure an in-depth engagement with the book and its context.

### Links to the national curriculum and the primary national strategy (PNS)

The work relates to the requirement in the English national curriculum programme of study for reading: *a range of literature drawn from a variety of cultures and traditions; myths, legends and traditional stories* (8e and 8f).

It also connects with specific teaching objectives in the *PNS Framework for Teaching* for years 3 and 4 to do with reading and responding to texts from different cultures.

### Anticipated outcomes

As a result of reading and discussing this book, children will:

- learn about the social importance of storytelling traditions in nomadic societies
- appreciate some of the connections between sayings and riddles familiar in many countries and those from Central Asia
- appreciate how characterisation matters in stories where specific settings are less important.

### Resources and preparation

- Colour photocopies of relevant pages.
- Map showing the area and the route of the Silk Road.
- Artefacts, pictures and information books about Central Asia.
- Fabrics for artwork, including for making a dasturxan.
- British Library website ([www.bl.uk](http://www.bl.uk)).
- Information from the *Thinking scripts* website ([www.thinkingscripts.co.uk](http://www.thinkingscripts.co.uk)). The 'Readers' Theatre' section is useful for sessions 8 and 9.

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# Teaching sequence

## A Whole Brain

### Session 1: Thinking about stories and retelling

Read 'A Whole Brain' as a way of introducing this collection. What do the children like about this story? Collect ideas and responses to what the story tells us. What does the title mean?

Introduce the class to the teller of these stories by reading the introduction aloud. Discuss some of the important aspects of nomadic life that the introduction describes. Focus on aspects like the food and the yurt and particularly on the dasturxan (story mat).

Begin work on a simple dasturxan for the children to sit on when telling and talking about the stories. This can be made in separate art sessions.

Ask the children to draw a picture in their reading journal that shows the story of 'A Whole Brain' inside an outline of a jug as in the book. Then the class retells the story orally, with each child telling part of it.

## Blue Sky, White Wing

### Session 2: Choral performance

Using photocopies of these two pages (colour if possible) read the text aloud. Discuss what these sayings tell us. What can we tell about the beliefs or ways of life of these people from these sayings? Read and talk about the note at the end and the saying from Central Asia.

In this shared reading activity the focus is on the use of expression and voice for effect. Divide the class into five groups and give them one 'leaf' per group to read chorally in whatever way they decide. The technique of choral reading involves teaching children to read aloud in unison as a group. To do this effectively, they need to listen carefully to one another and decide how they want their presentation to sound, paying attention to speed of delivery, volume, pitch and expression in relation to the overall meaning. This work may be extended in the context of music lessons by introducing some simple instruments to accompany the choral reading.

Keep two leaves, those beginning with 'Father Blue Sky', to read in an agreed way as a whole class. Allow time to rehearse and then perform the reading.

## The Carpet of Dreams

### Session 3: Story maps

Read this story aloud and map it out together using the flipchart, showing the 'bones' or key moments by drawing and annotating the scenes. Ask the class to retell the story in pairs, using the story map to help them. Share some of the retellings. Which parts of the story were easiest to tell?

### Session 4: Visualising and creating a tableau of a scene

Look at an enlarged version of the part of the text that describes Arif's first journey on the camel and the arrival at the caravanserai, and talk about the images. Ask the children to look in the glossary for the meaning of 'caravanserai'.

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Ask the children to create a tableau of the caravanserai. Half will become merchants from different lands, selling goods including silk, china, jade, carpets, spices, perfumes, robes and jewellery. Half will be innkeepers, customers, cooks and serving people. Decide on the exact roles and on how the merchants will set out their goods and call out their wares while the other actors go about their work. Create the tableau, first as a silent scene and then with the sounds of the market and the inn.

Extension activity: the class could draw a picture of the caravanserai using bright jewel colours.

### **Session 5: Research and maps, retelling the story**

Read the note at the end of the story and talk about the Silk Road and the places that are described in the story. Use the map at the back of the book, and where possible access the internet (for example the British Library website listed in resources), to show where this road was. Find out what the Silk Road was for and gather facts together. Plot on a map Arif's journeys as a merchant through Afghanistan, China, India and Samarkand in Uzbekistan. Display this map.

End this session by retelling 'The Carpet of Dreams' as a class, with each child telling part of the story.

## **The Girl who Cried a Lake**

### **Session 6: The background of a story**

Read the story aloud. Discuss what it tells us about the people it comes from. Make a list with the children of what they have learnt from it about these aspects of traditional life in Kyrgyzstan, for example:

- the clans – their way of life, where they lived
- marriage customs – how young people met and marriages were arranged, what brides wore
- feasts and celebrations – what people ate and drank
- landscape – what the landscape and climate were like, how the landscape is 'made of stories'.

Ask the children to retell the story in pairs, beginning with the quotation 'The mountain looked into the lake and the lake gazed up at the mountain.' One child should speak as the lake (the transformed Khan's daughter) and explain how she came to be a lake. One should speak as the mountain (the hunter) and tell his side of the story. Ask some pairs of children to share their retellings.

## **The Bag of Trickness**

### **Session 7: Drawing the setting of a story**

Read the story aloud and discuss how the trickster tricked the rich man.

Locate Kazakhstan on the map. What is this place like? How do we know? Talk about what it looks like and what the climate is like, and refer to parts of the story that tell the reader these things.

Ask the children to make a detailed drawing of the setting of this story, showing the steppe, the yurt and the characters. Review the pictures of the setting and talk about trickster tales. Do the children know any more tales like these?

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## Sessions 8 and 9: Readers' Theatre

Explain to the class that you are going to adapt the story into a script (like a radio script), marking up the story, rehearsing it and performing it for the class. In each group of six there will be both characters and narrators.

Do a scripting activity as a class, with the text on an overhead transparency. Decide what the narrators will read and what the characters will say, and mark up the text accordingly. Narrative passages can be divided between more than one reader. The decisions made in making the script are important as they bring the text to life and make children more aware of how the story is made, the roles of the characters, what people say and what they mean.

Once the text is marked up make copies and give them to each group, so that they can indicate each reader's lines with a highlighter. Allow time for the groups to work out who reads what and to rehearse their readings.

An example:

*Narrator 1: Just then, the rich man burst into the yurt.*

*Rich man: "This coat doesn't work!"*

*Aldar-Kose: "Oh dear."*

*(Thinks: I'll have to think fast but he is easy to trick.)*

*Narrator 2: He scratched his head, as if he was really puzzled for a while.*

*Aldar-Kose: "I've just remembered, my grandfather said the magic would only work for me."*

Each group in turn performs their reading for the class. Invite feedback on each group's interpretation of the story. Ask the children what the reading showed them about the characters or the story, and what they think about each other's performances.

## Session 10: Overview and finale – common patterns and themes

Think about the stories that have been read from this collection, what has been learnt from them and what they have in common. Put children into groups to talk together. Did they notice any patterns or connections?

Children should talk about the characters and events in the stories, the ways of life and customs that they describe, and the ways they are told. They should reflect on the context in which the stories originated, and how this affects their style and meaning. As children share their thoughts you should note them, grouping them under relevant headings.

Finally, repeat the choral performance of 'Blue Sky, White Wing'.