



Series 1. Episode 17
Turning *Little Stones* show notes
Sensory Stories
with Leanne Strange

Episode 17
Making SENSE of the
World (3):
Sensory Stories

This podcast is the third in a series, where we consider how young children use their senses to understand and make **SENSE of their World**. We'll drop into the series regularly and you may want to listen to earlier Turning Little Stones podcasts (episodes #4 & #6; Series One). In this episode, Leanne shares how **Sensory Stories** help make stories accessible for *all* children.

60 Little Months

Leanne's professional background has involved from working in Health Visitor Teams, Children Centres, supporting early years practitioners, teaching staff, parents and carers across schools, settings, home visits and family groups. She now offers consultancy for carers with a range of specialisms (baby massage, sleep consultancy, weaning advice etc.).

Leanne's has a degree in Special Education Needs and Inclusion. It is from this professional background and training that '*60 Little Months*' emerged. Its engaging strapline is *Professional Head, Mother's Heart*'.

What are Sensory Stories?

Sensory Stories are simply a way that transforms the telling of a story into something that children can "get lost in". Simply drawing out a few simple sensory experiences offers listeners the opportunity to connect with the story more deeply. It has uses for all children (as well as older people).

Some examples

Leanne explains how the 5 senses of hearing, touch, sight, smell, and taste can be unlocked through the telling of Beatrix Potter's 'Peter Rabbit' adventures. Stretching up to pick blackberries, seeing and feeling them change as little hands hold and squash them brings the story alive. Reaching up to pick blackberries involve other important movement senses (TLS #7 & #8). These rich sensory experiences capture the imagination for all children. And for those with additional needs, they can be supported and included as they connect with the story through one or more senses.

How do we start?

Leanne suggests that we choose a simple story or poem that we LOVE. As we take time to think how the story might be embellished with a couple of sense experiences...

- the shake of some card to mimic heavy rain
- the smell of vinegar for the 'fish and chip ending' to a beach story
- a concertina paper fan for experiencing a soft wind

Leanne advises us to know the story well enough to put the book down to allow children to connect with the sensory experiences we are offering.

We can also make stories up when out and about or collect resources for our next sensory story (twigs, pinecones, leaves for Little Red Riding Hood)



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Ideas for inclusion in practice

Leanne uses the example of the classic 'Gingerbread Man' story. This lends itself to:

- The *smell* and *taste* of gingerbread...
- The texture and *feel* of squishing dough...
- Hearing the *sound* of splashes and *seeing* the other characters involved in the chase...

For some children, simply holding the dough and quietly handling it while listening to the story may be enough. Children with other needs, such as visual impairment or deafness can engage with the whole story even if they cannot see the pictures or hear the story teller clearly.

And... children will want to evolve the story into many, many possible follow-on play experiences.

Knowing our children

Leanne explains that sensory stories can be skewed to fit our children – what is their dominant sense at present, what is their schema, their learning style? (ref. *Turning Little Stones Delving a Little Deeper, Getting to Know You*) Learning to do this can help us to meet a child's needs 'in the moment'. Simply putting the book aside to focus on one or two related sense experiences can enrich the whole story.

Things to avoid...

In some settings, story time is often prefaced by a set of commands:

"Sit still, look this way, listen..." For many children, this is too much.

Often circle times are placed at the end of the session when children are tired, hungry, anticipating going home. Again, too much!

And so, we need to consider when the best time is for sensory stories. Instead of reading a book in a controlled way, we can know book well enough to put it down. As carers, we need to be ever mindful that we are sharing the book with our children for them to love the story!

Final takeaways...

We will let you know when Leanne's put up the short videos onto her youtube channel, in the meantime, try making your own...

1. Take a simple story (one of your favourites) and practise!
2. Ask yourself which senses can be connected to the story.
3. Find a couple of resources that you can introduce when you next read it.
4. See what works and add more next time...Keep going!

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

*Turning Little Stones **Delving a little Deeper** (see website for details)*

*& **60 Little Months** (www.60littlemonths.com)*