

## A schedule for the Weaving Webs of Stories meetings series plus activities for the children:

Developed by Zinev Art Technologies, Bulgaria

**Initial meeting for interested teachers: Spa session for the teacher's soul** – a gift by the project to the teaching staff (those willing and interested to participate) – a suggestopaedic performance by Ina Petkova in order to demonstrate how learning can be greatly facilitated by stories, delivered in a carefully designed package (use of words, use of voice, use of images and appropriate clothes, use of classical music).

**As a second meeting for the teachers or at the end of meeting one, the teachers and the facilitator/s go through:**

– a discussion on the topic of what we would like to do with the children in the framework of the Weaving Webs of Stories project – approaches we propose and approaches, which the teachers can come up with.

- a discussion on how we are going to work – rules we need to observe when communicating with the children, which may influence also the work that the teachers do on a regular daily basis.

**On a weekly basis the meetings with the children may progress as follows:**

**Meeting (week) 1: 1hour or more depending on the size of the group. 8 participants are fine with 1 hour.**

An hour long meeting about creating an ensemble out of the group of children (the groups having from 8 to 16 participants) who do not necessarily know each other and need to discover each other in a different light.

**Activity 1:** Each child as well as each facilitator obtains a sheet of paper with some pre-done drawings on it and a small blank card. Each child writes on the small blank card its own name. The A4 sheet of paper has 3 predefined spaces – one for a card with the name of the child – on top of the sheet – then a space for a self-portrait and at the bottom a space for favorite books and literary characters.

The free space around those three rectangular boxes is for drawing and righting things that present who we are: pets and/or favorite animals, favorite foods, favorite subject at school, favorite music or sport or game, anything, which the children love.

Here below you can see one of the self-description cards of a member of a WWS group.



After the children are done drawing and writing. The facilitator collects the small name cards and mixes them. Then each child draws a card from the pile and has to present the descriptive A4 of the child whose name is on the card. This way the children present other children's descriptors and not their own. A great exercise for getting to know each other and bonding with the group.

At the end of this meeting the children are encouraged to think of common grounds, on which the work in the work should be based on. We decide not to call them rules, but to use the word "contract", because contracts are and will be a part of our lives, we need to be used to them, and are also something that we are a party to and not just something that someone else has drawn for us and imposed on us.

The facilitator/s collect all the descriptive cards for further reference and building a repository of favorite books and characters to use further on.

### **Meeting (week) 2: 1.5 – 2 hours**

**Let's prepare a nice working corner** – with a blanket, cushions and a fire in the middle, a crown or other symbol for the one who reads or tells a story, and group rules.

Materials needed: cushions, shape-cut paper-faced foam board, a blanket, paints, pastel coloring materials, a box for all the materials, a black marker and a large sheet of white thick drawing paper. (we provide the materials)

#### **Activity 2: Work with visual materials – how to prepare our work/meeting space**

The children go through a workshop for working with paper-faced foam board and elaborate the materials (fires, crowns, light bulbs, etc.).

There is a nice music background during the time of this first meeting or, while the kids work, there may be a story played to them – e.g. "The little prince" as an audio story or other recorded stories.

While the kids work, they may be asked to further discuss the contract for group work, fixing the points, which will be observed by everyone in the group. The contract points will be summed up and will be connected to the materials they have been creating (e.g. when you have an idea you do not interrupt your friend, but grab the light bulb so that everybody becomes aware that you have an idea and will give you the floor when the speaker is done).

### **Meeting (week) 3: 1 hour**

#### **Activity 3: Read as if...**

The facilitators bring a children's book to the meeting. In our case it was the *Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson.

The children in the group were encouraged to read small parts of the text "as if" they were a tiny bird, an elephant, Santa Claus. The group did not press those members who felt reluctant to read. The book passed from child to child and everyone read and the others cheered and enjoyed. Those who refused to read were left to simply relish what the others were giving them. The facilitators read on an even par with the children.

The activity achieved enjoying a story together, reading using artistic approaches and generally having a lot of fun with a single shared book.

### **Meeting (week) 4: 1 hour**

#### **Activity 4: Understanding what makes a good story.**

This meeting has the purpose of telling the children what it means for a story to be "catchy", interesting for other people and how this is achieved.

##### 1. Give your story a dramatic content

"They shook hands and made friends" is not really compelling. There is little in it. While "They shook hands and made friends, but that was only in Robert's mind. Actually Manny had a completely different idea for their month together in school." – there is a promise there. Something will be happening between these two and one of them is totally oblivious.

So, what are the key elements of a story that is properly dramatic?

There is some kind of **conflict**. If the characters all love each other and are bound to live happily ever after this means that your story ended before it even began. You know how most fairytales end with "And they lived happily ever after". Why? Because there is nothing else to add there. Now "They lived happily the next 10 years, until something unexpected happened." Is a completely different thing. It add the second element – **tension**! Something is about to happen and we are apprehensive. Usually what happens is not something that we would have expected. There is a **surprise** to it. The first person lives with an idea about the other person, which is obviously wrong. So he/she is in for a big surprise.

If we want our readers to remember our story, our **characters** need to be extraordinary or they need to behave extraordinary. The second one, that shakes the hand and gives a smile behave in a way, which is not acceptable for an adversary.

Usually, both good and evil characters have **controversial** moments or do controversial things. That brings an extra dimension to your story and makes it interesting, because the characters are not boring. They leave us dubious. Thus for example the first character,

regardless how positive and shiny he/she is at present, must have done something improper in the past in order to turn the other character against him/herself.

Last but not least, if you manage to insert some **mystery** and **suspense** in your story, you are ready to go to the publisher. And that is something yet to expect from the story.

## 2. Make your characters memorable

It could be a unique facial expression, a booming and very high-pitched voice, one leg shorter than the other, hence a slightly twisted walk, a patch on one eye, nails that are always freshly polished in different colors, desire to win an impossible marathon or to build a plane for two passengers from scratch. If you just describe your character by age or eye color that will not be enough. Imagine what it would take you to remember someone in the shop that you stand in line with for not more than 15 minutes.

## 3. Make the important parts of your story effective

When you make your great intro you need to keep it real and evolving by making each part of the story effective. This means that this part of the story will be used in some way further on in the story. What you can do is you can introduce new characters to help or to bother, hinder your primary characters. You can explain why your characters have the goals you establish at the start of the story and of course why they act the way they do.

## 4. Think about the setting.

It is not just the characters and the action they got themselves into that is intriguing. The setting also needs to be immersive. It is not enough to say that the house is painted yellow and has two floors. Think about it from other perspectives. Is there enough light? Is there a screech in some of the wooden staircase boards? Is there a specific smell? Has there been a room that no one went into for some reasons? If your characters grow up in your story, change something in the setting as well. The house must be screeching more and there could be a leak on the ground floor where the bathroom is, etc. etc.

## 5. Create a captivating beginning

The beginning is what elevates a good story to become a great one. For a good beginning you can describe a character doing something unexpected (A boy sitting alone in a damp house with shutters down, putting on a huge fake beard). Introduce something that needs to be explained (From somewhere above kept coming muffled bird shrieks). Introduce others with suspense (The boy had just placed the huge beard on his face, when someone knocked three times on the door. The bird upstairs grew silent.)

## 6. Last but not least, deliver unique endings

A good story ending resolves the primary conflict of the story without being predictable.

The facilitator can ask the children about examples on these from the books they have read.

### **Meeting (week) 5: 1 hour**

#### **Activity 5: Create a story together (version 1)**

The activity starts with a welcome of the children. Then each child needs to think of 3 things, which they like or love to do. The children that shares first gets encouraged with its 3 things by others confirming that they also like to love to do the same. When the child is done presenting, its points the next one to share and so on.

Depending on the group size, the children are divided into smaller groups of 4 or 5. Together in their groups they need to create the following:

- Group 1 – creates the hero of the story. What he/she looks like, his/her name, where is he/she from, etc.
- Group 2 – creates the core of the story – what is happening to the hero.
- Group 3 – creates the whole story, putting the activity and the hero together and reaching a closure.

### **Meeting (week) 6: 1 hour**

#### **Activity 6: A suggestopedic performance – a children’s book by the Greek author Stavroula Pagona is presented to the children.**

**The suggestopedic performance includes a telling of a story in a very specific way, supported by appropriate clothing and music background.**

Materials needed: cushions, shape-cut paper-faced foam board, a blanket, paints, pastel coloring materials, a box for all the materials, a black marker and a large sheet of white thick drawing paper. (we will provide the materials and will bring them to the first meeting even if we will not use all of them immediately)

### **Meeting (week) 7: 1 hour**

#### **Activity 7: Create a story together (version 2)**

What could be the continuation of the story of the little black spot presented via the book used in the previous session? The characters can be the family of the little black spot, characters from the book or newly created characters.

Try to figure out who, where, what, why, how and reach a story ending, which is accepted by the whole group.

**Meeting (week) 8:** Can be 1.5 - 2 hours

**Activity 8: Getting to know each other through the OH cards** – first demonstration to the children. We all tell our stories through a card we associate ourselves with. The facilitators are the ones who begin.

**Activity 9:** OH cards are drawn at random by the children. The facilitator can decide whether it will be 1, 2 or more cards per child. The children will have 10 minutes to consider a story connecting their cards.

**Possibilities to do during summer breaks or corona virus isolation**

**Activity 10: Characters or moments from favorite books**

The facilitator/s create the beginning of the story, which includes characters from all the favorite children's books, which were given at the beginning of the group work. The story does not have to follow anything related to the separate books, but can put the existing literary characters into a completely new situation, which is common for them all.

Then the children from the group are invited to try and recognize which character/s from their book they are able to recognize. When all book characters are recognized, the children are organized in a succession and the first one has to continue the story in whatever way he/she likes following the rules that make a good story. When he/she is done with his/her continuation, it is passed on to the whole group and the one who is next in line needs to continue with his/her part, following the logic of the first continuation and observing the rules that make a good story. Then this new continuation is shared with the group so that everyone reads and the story is continued by the next in line. The last child in the group will propose a closure to the story.

The entire story is then video recorded by the facilitators and shared with the children as their common product.

**Activity 11: Record your favorite part from your favorite book for the others to hear**

The children are invited to pick a favorite spot from their favorite book and read it to the others through an audio recording.

**Activity 12: The facilitators record on audio or video parts or whole books to share with the children during the time of no physical contact.** The facilitators can give tasks related to comprehension and imagination/creativity related to the stories that are being presented.

### **Meeting (week) 9: 1.5 hours**

#### **Activity 13: A story around the fire**

Materials needed: the cushions, the fire, the blanket

Activity description:

The meeting starts with everyone sitting around the fire and brainstorming about a new story.

The children's suggestions are recorded.

The facilitator then has the task to create a proposal for a story for the children in the group, based on their recorded suggestions.

### **Meeting (week) 10:**

**Activity 14: Your story returns to you** - The facilitator brings back the story to the children in the form of a suggestopaedic concert session. The children recognize the elements and parts of their stories included in the big thing.

### **Meeting (week) 11:**

**Activity 15: Others' stories** - The stories created by other groups from other schools visit the group and the group has to read them together and discuss.

**Next meetings** – will continue with reading and story making. The topics will be decided by the facilitation team depending on the interest and feedback from the children.

The final product of the project will be a common story for each country, created by all involved groups and supported by visual materials (drawings for example) and audio materials (recordings of voices), which will be included in a large book at the end of the project. Each child who participated in the project will receive a personal book and all children's names will be in the book – as authors of the stories. The schools will also receive such books for their libraries.