

# Closing the word gap in the early years

Jean Gross CBE, 2020

# We will look at ...

- ▶ What's happening nationally in communication and language
  - ▶ Practical strategies for developing communication and language
    - ❖ A place to talk
    - ❖ A reason to talk, at home and school
    - ❖ Support for talk: developing vocabulary
- 

# Stark differences



**Vocabulary at age 5 has been found to be the best predictor of whether children who experienced social deprivation in childhood were able to ‘buck the trend’ and escape poverty in later adult life**

# Have a guess



At five, how far are children brought up in the most disadvantaged families behind those brought up in the most well-off families in their vocabulary?

# Numbers appear to be rising

- ▶ Nearly three quarters of health visitors report that they have seen a significant growth in numbers of children with speech and communication delay over the past two years
  - ▶ Recent survey of headteachers found that concerns about lack of school readiness have increased, with 97% of respondents identifying speech, language and communication needs as their greatest concern
- 

# No shortage of theories



# TV as background noise



Roulstone et al , 2011  
*Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes,*  
Research Report **DFE-RR134**

The amount of time television (adult and child programmes) was on in the home when child was under two predicted achievement at school entry. As this time increased, so the child's score at school entry decreased.

# What about screens?



# Getting it...

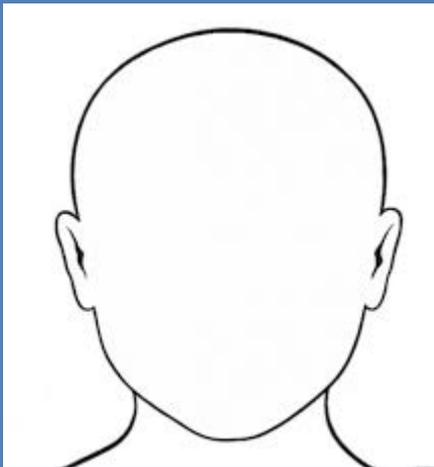
“That is why I am putting early language and literacy, closing the word gap, right at the top of my to do list.”



# Government commitment



“More than a quarter of children finish their reception year still without the early communication and reading skills they need to thrive. My ambition is to cut that number in half over the next ten years.”



# Assessment

- ▶ New baseline assessment at four to include spoken language
- ▶ Revisions to communication and language ELGs to ensure there is a sufficient focus on increasing depth and breadth of vocabulary



Have a look at the new  
proposed ELGs

What's different?



# Ofsted framework

“Listening and talking to children, introducing new words all the time and encouraging them to use them. Rewarding curiosity about language. Reading then comes more easily when children do start school.

But while vocabulary can be picked up through activities and in every day conversation, there will always be some words that need to be taught quite explicitly. This is especially relevant for those children who come in with fewer words.”

# Government social mobility action plan

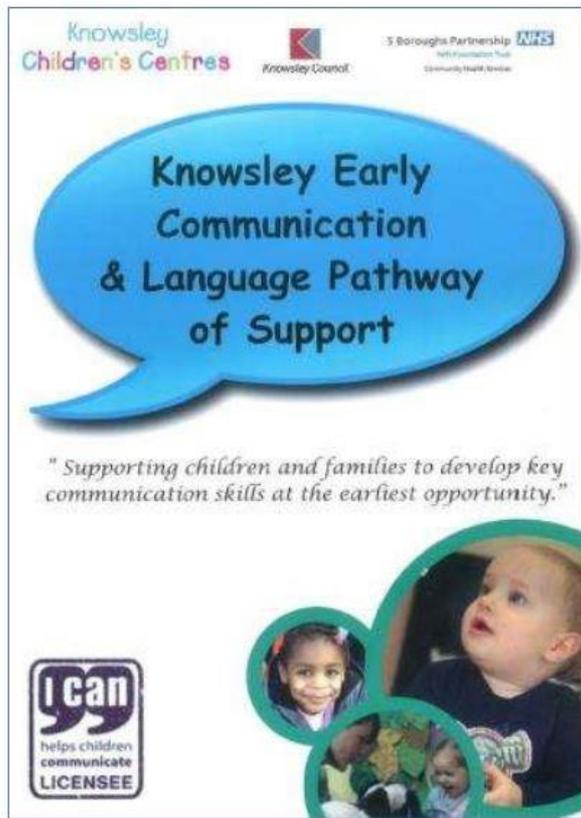
- ▶ Health Visitor training on early language
  - ▶ Public Health England are piloting a new tool to assess children's language at two – ELIM
  - ▶ A model 'Pathway' of how different agencies can work together locally
- 

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## Research questions

- Does the ASQ identify children with SLCN in the 24-30 age range measured against a gold standard language assessment using standard productivity figures (sensitivity and specificity etc.)?
- To what extent is it possible to enhance the accuracy of this process by introducing a second stage identification process for SLCN?
- What is the acceptability of using the combined procedure from the practitioner and parental perspective?
- Can the findings be readily transferred into accessible intervention resources acceptable to both parents and professionals?

# Pathways



- Describe what settings, schools, SLTs, health visitors, children's centres etc provide at universal, targeted and specialist levels for different age groups

# Hungry Little Minds



I love it when you read to me.  
Say popcorn again!

Crispy bread  
milk  
big round bread  
pop  
chicken dumplings  
bars of soap  
soup

Kids love it when you read with them.

It all goes in. Every single word.

From a book, a magazine, even a shopping list.

And every little thing you read with them will help set them up nicely for school.



Search Hungry Little Minds for simple tips and activities.



HM Government

- ▶ Many little things light up hungry little minds. Kids take everything in, and even the smallest things you do with them can make a big difference.
  - ▶ They love it when you chat, play and read with them, even when they're too young to understand everything. Whatever the time and wherever you are, you can turn almost anything into a game.
  - ▶ And every little thing you do together will help set them up nicely for the day they start school.
- 

**Government**



Businesses



Charities



Early years settings



Voluntary & community groups



Public services



Media



We're building a spaceship.  
With a window.  
And an astronaut...  
... What's an astronaut?



Search Hungry Little Minds  
for simple tips and activities.



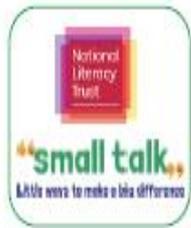
Search Hungry Little Minds for simple tips and activities.



I hardly understood a word, but I'm so glad we had this chat.



Search Hungry Little Minds for simple tips and activities.



**changing the conversation about language**



**early years alliance**

Hi! and welcome to the first Weekend Talk Tip... Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this exciting project.

**Scouts**

**Early Years SEND**

**Parent Champions National Network**  
October 2018 – March 2019

- 100 Parent Champions
- 6200 Conversations with families
- 1900 families signposted to home learning activities
- 44 Parent Champions schemes
- 1500 2 year olds in early years education

**coram** Family and Children's Services | **Parent Champions**

**Childminders can offer government-funded places**

Enjoy some time for yourself, or learn a new skill while your child makes new friends.

Check your eligibility for 2-year-old funded places.

**pacey** #notababysitter

**Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry or savour their songs.**

**Without language, we cannot talk to people and understand them; we cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry or savour their songs.**

**PLAY TOGETHER READ ALOUD**

**CREATE A GREAT HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

# TINY *Happy* PEOPLE



# We will look at ...

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- 

# Three components

- ▶ **A place to talk**
  - ▶ **A reason to talk**
  - ▶ **Support for talk**
- 

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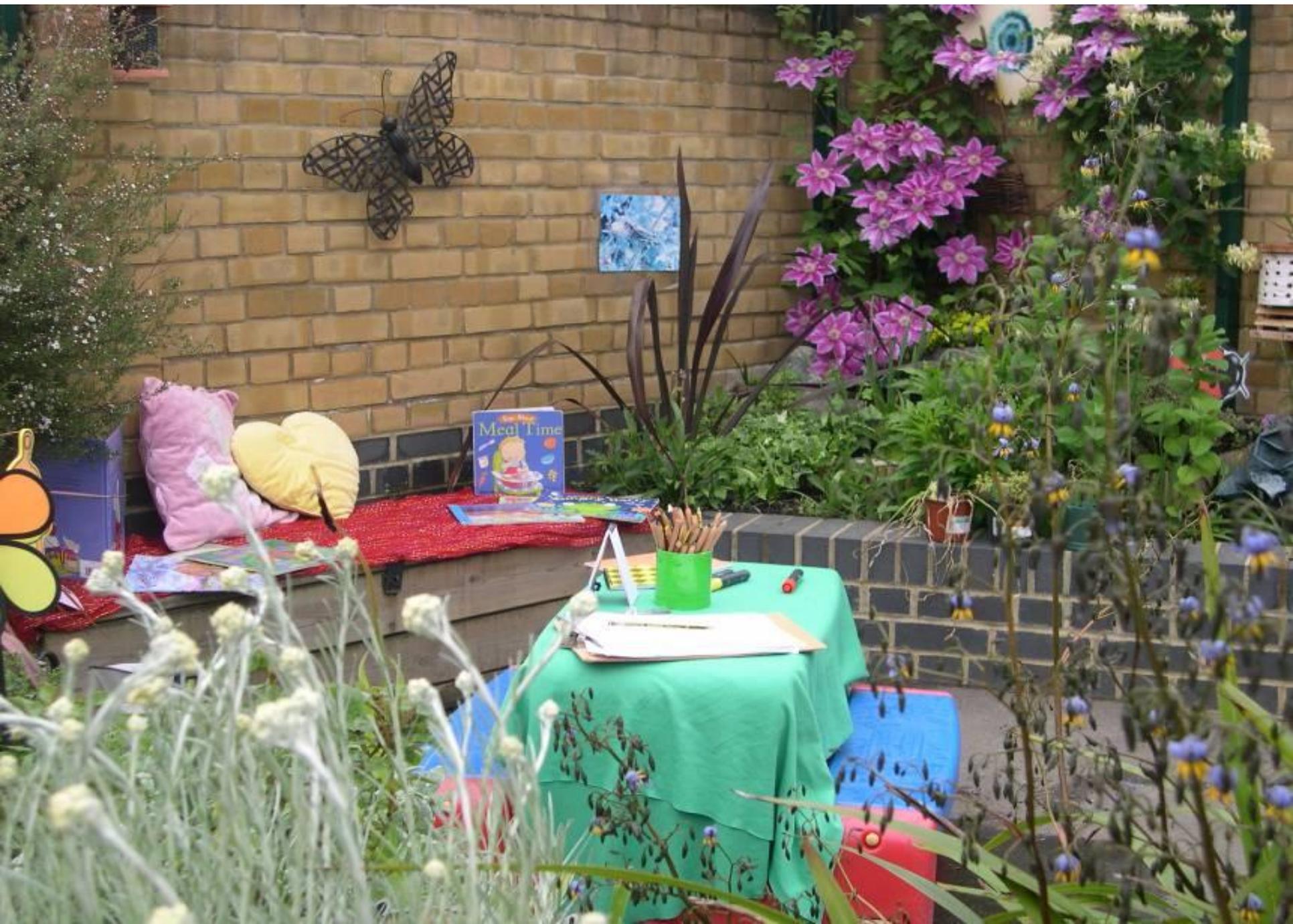
# Enabling, communication supportive environments



# Enabling environments











# It doesn't have to be expensive





# Natural environments



- Compared talk in city park and indoor play area
- Parent-child communication found to be more connected and responsive in the outdoors

# The importance of pretend play

Elicits more conversational 'turns' and more frequent and longer episodes of joint attention (Kidd, 2016)



# Baby Clinic

Please help me

My baby is sick.

hello can I help you?

open  
9:00 - 11:00  
1:00 - 2:30

Reception  
Please take a seat.

The doctor or nurse will see you as soon as they can.

Hello Namaste Hola Jamba wing



Welcome to our setting

Bore da	Ni hao	Bonjour	Sat-Sri-Aka
Welsh	Chinese	French	Polish
Welsh	Chinese	French	Polish

What is the matter?

Where does it hurt?



Medical examination area with a white table, a blue basin, a scale, and a sink.

Reception desk with a blue table, a yellow telephone, a red tray, and a sign that says 'closed'.

Area with several baby dolls lying on a bed with a pink and white patterned blanket.



Welcome to our set

Bore da  
Welsh  
(BOH-ray DAH)

Ni hao  
Chinese  
(Nee HoDW)

Bonjour  
French  
(Bohn)

What the letter?

can I listen your heart?



10  
9  
8  
7  
6  
5  
4  
3  
2  
1



# Three components

- ▶ A place to talk
  - ▶ **A reason to talk**
  - ▶ Support for talk
- 

# Conversations in the setting

- ▶ Study of two and three year olds found a positive association between a teacher talking and children's language development – but only when that teacher talked to the child in a back and forth conversation, rather than just talking to the child with no opportunity for the child to respond

Perry, P. (et al 2018) A year in words, PLOS One

# Commenting

Oooooo....

What's that?

I hope he's not  
hungry....

What colour  
is it ?

I'd love to  
stroke him but  
...

What noise  
does it make?

I wonder what  
he likes to eat  
...

Where does it  
live ?



# Commenting



Let's talk!

That's really interesting!

Wow!

You've used lots of

a lovely.....

I wonder how you fixed this bit together....

Wonderful!

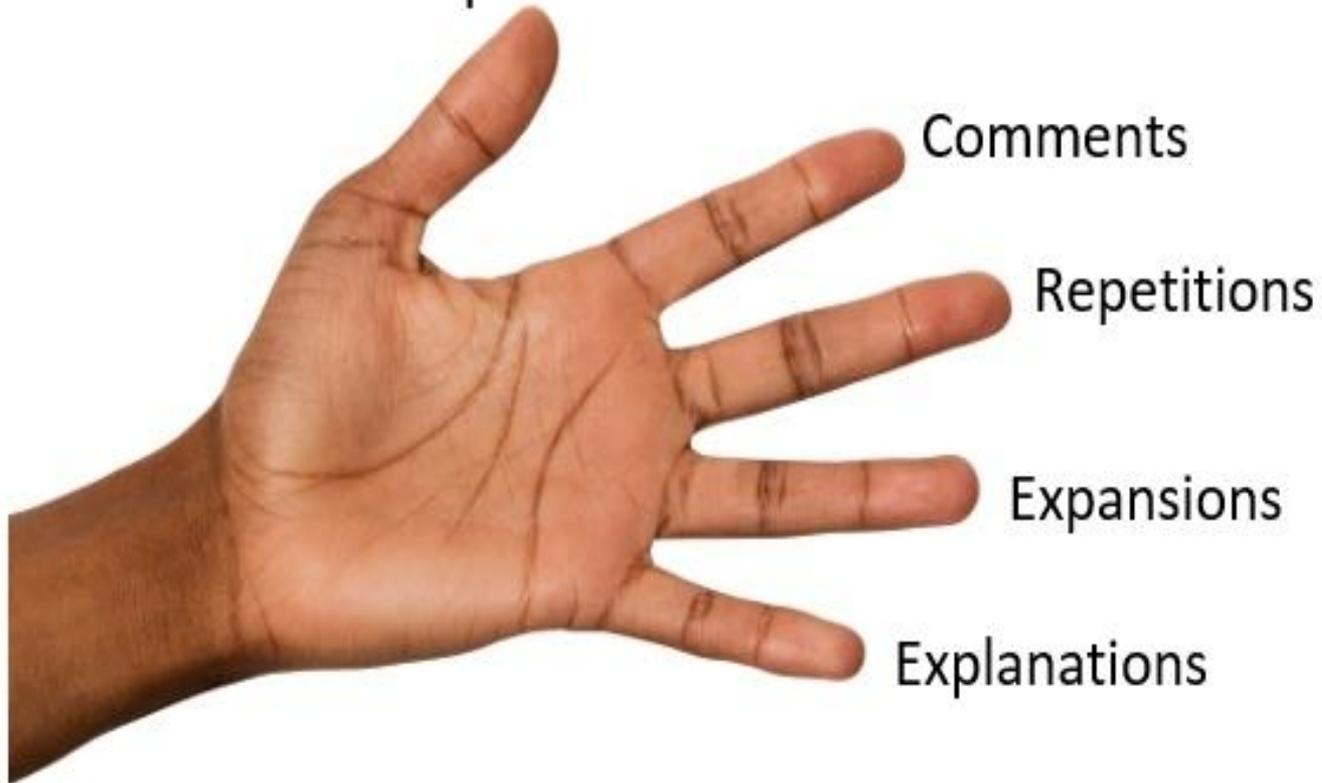
I wonder how it.....

I wonder what this does?

You look like you're having fun!

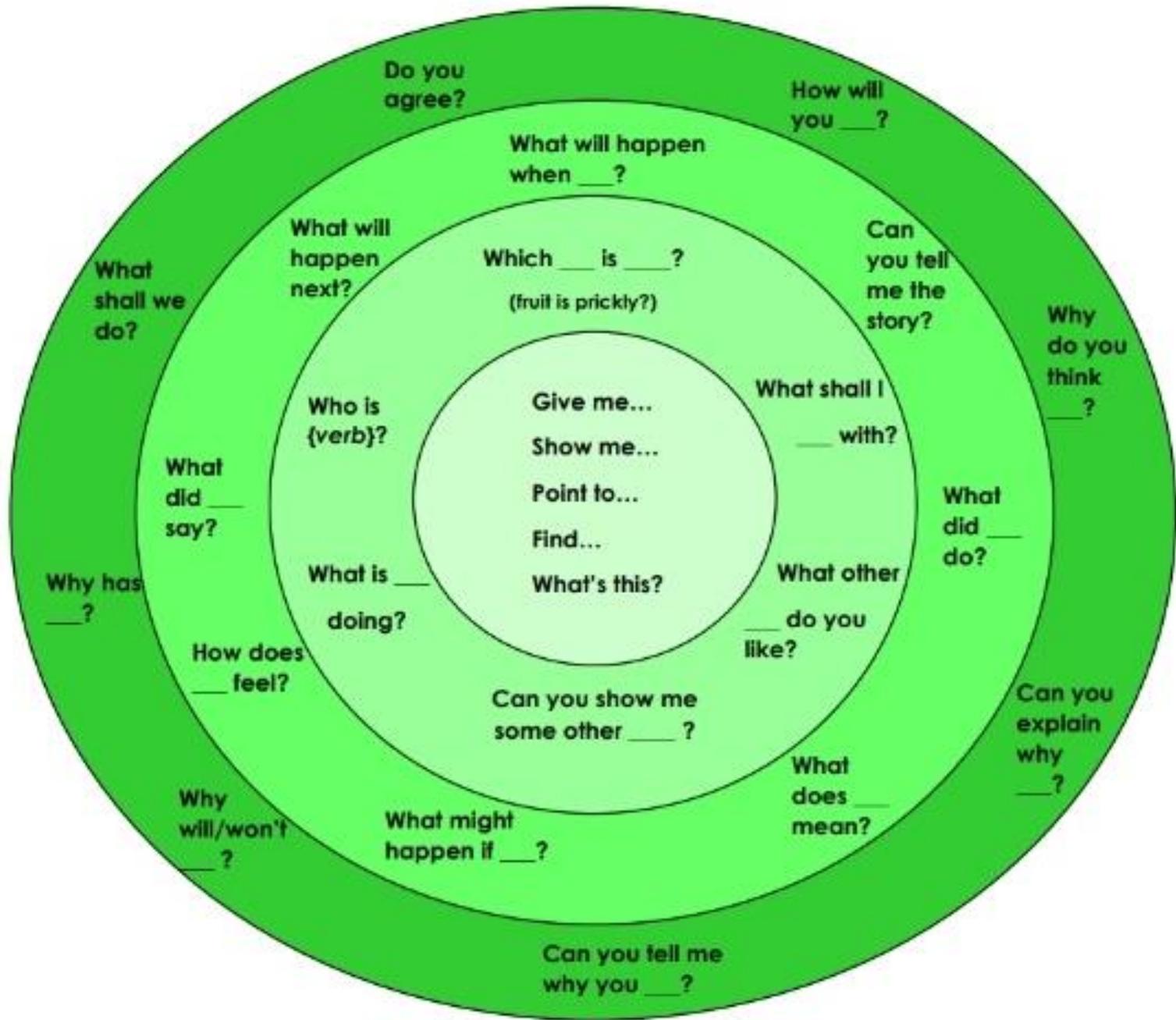
# The hand rule

One question to four...



# Hand Rule Examples

	<i>Child says</i>	<i>You say</i>
Comment	"Bike"	"You like the bike"
Repetition	"Big truck"	"Big truck"
Expansion	"Green apples"	"Yum, juicy green apples"
Explanation	"She is happy"	"She is happy because she is playing with her friends"





# A reason to talk at home



# Conversations light up children's brains



When they heard stories in the laboratory , the part of the brain involved in language processing lit up more for children who had lots of conversations at home

# Conversations light up children's brains



And ...for every extra 11 conversational 'turns' at home, there was a one point increase in the child's score on a language tests

# What can we do?

- **Simple messages**
- **Top tips for talk**
- **Something to talk about: scrapbooks and photo albums, picture books, story maps to take home, treasure boxes, Bags for Families, Today I ...stickers**

# Simple messages

You are the  
best toy in  
the box

Dummies hide  
smiles

Face time  
your  
baby

Turn off  
the TV  
and talk  
to me

Keep your  
first  
language  
alive

# What can we do?

- Simple messages
- **Top tips for talk**
- Something to talk about: scrapbooks and photo albums, picture books, story maps to take home, treasure boxes, Bags for Families, Today I ...stickers

# Commenting



# Add some words!

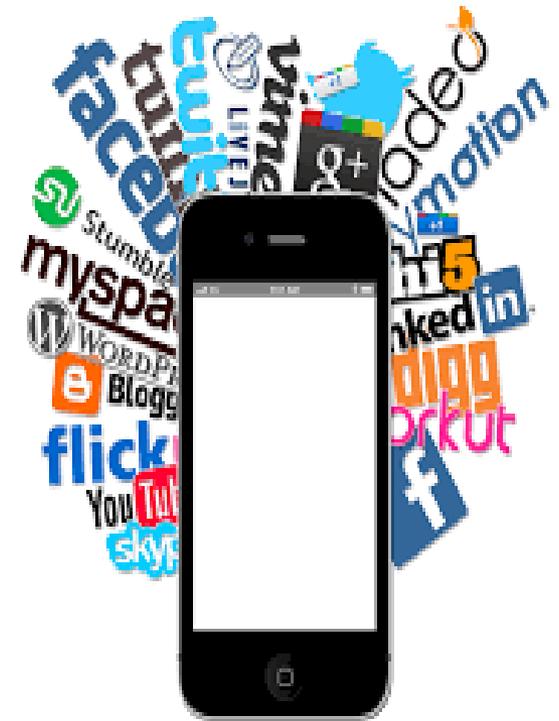
Big bird!

Yes it's a  
big noisy bird  
called a magpie

# Link top tips to things to do

To involve parents, settings have made 'story-sacks', 'musical instrument bags', 'verb bags' and 'treasure boxes'. Each contains a small piece of advice for parents on how to interact with the child, e.g. 'Spend 10 minutes playing with these items', 'Wait for your child to comment on these items BEFORE you do' etc.

# Use social media



# What can we do?

- **Simple messages**
- **Top tips for talk**
- **Something to talk about: scrapbooks and photo albums, picture books, story maps to take home, treasure boxes, Bags for Families, Today I ...stickers**

# Family photo books...







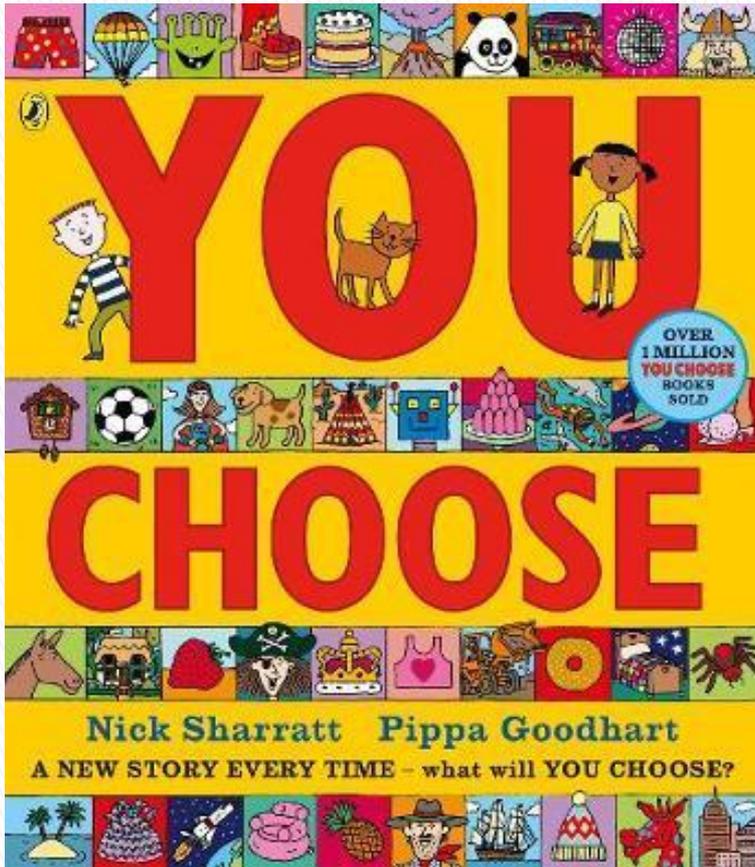








# You choose!



- ▶ Free books
- ▶ Parents only got the book if they came to workshop
- ▶ Child pester-power
- ▶ Shared the hand rule
- ▶ Modelled it for parents

**‘Today I... or ‘Ask me about ...’  
stickers**





# Parkside Primary

Talk threads for families are displayed on a huge banner in the playground that says 'Talk with your child ... check out the speech bubble below for ideas.' The ideas are changed weekly.



# Welcome and Introductions



**Oxford Expert Speaker Programme**  
Bringing the best educational minds together  
to raise achievement

OXFORD

## We value your feedback...



Following each event we share **presentations, handouts and videos**, as well as issuing a **certificate of participation**, to ensure you get the most from today's event. To receive this information, please complete our short feedback form before you leave today.

Please visit:

<https://oxford.ly/experts>



OXFORD

# Three components

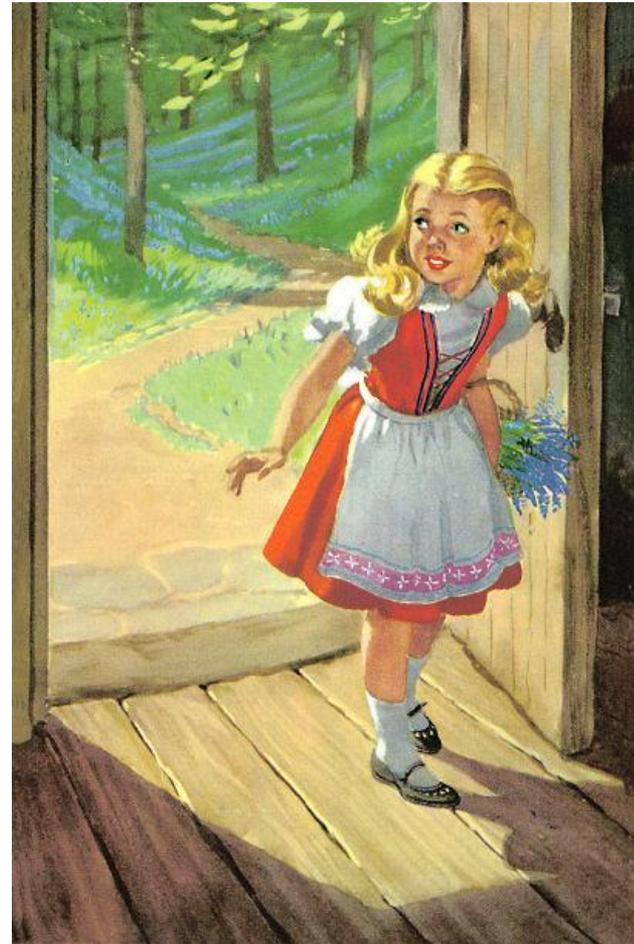
- ▶ A place to talk
  - ▶ A reason to talk
  - ▶ **Support for talk**
- 

# Vocabulary and football nets



# Goldilocks words

*Word Aware :*  
*teaching vocabulary*  
*in the early years,* by  
Stephen Parsons  
and Ann Branagan,  
Speechmark



# STAR – Select

Too easy	Goldilocks words	Too hard
Everyday words– ones a child might use to another child	Not too easy and not too hard, but just right Likely to be encountered again Average child 2–3 years older knows word well	Highly topic-specific  Average child 2–3 years older does not have much knowledge of this word

# STAR – Select

Too easy	Goldilocks words	Too hard
sword, ship, pirate, fight, swim, scary, climb	treasure, hook, captain, island, adventure, sail, discover, capture, escape, explore, dangerous	compass, booty, ransack, smuggle, bloodthirsty

# Which might be your Goldilocks words– houses and homes?

**bathroom, bedroom, village, castle,  
detached, terraced, inhabit,  
comfortable, enormous, tiny, build, big,  
kitchen, lounge, window, chimney, flat,  
windmill, tiles, old, bricks, construct**



# Building the football net

**Meaning**

**Sounds**

**Movement**

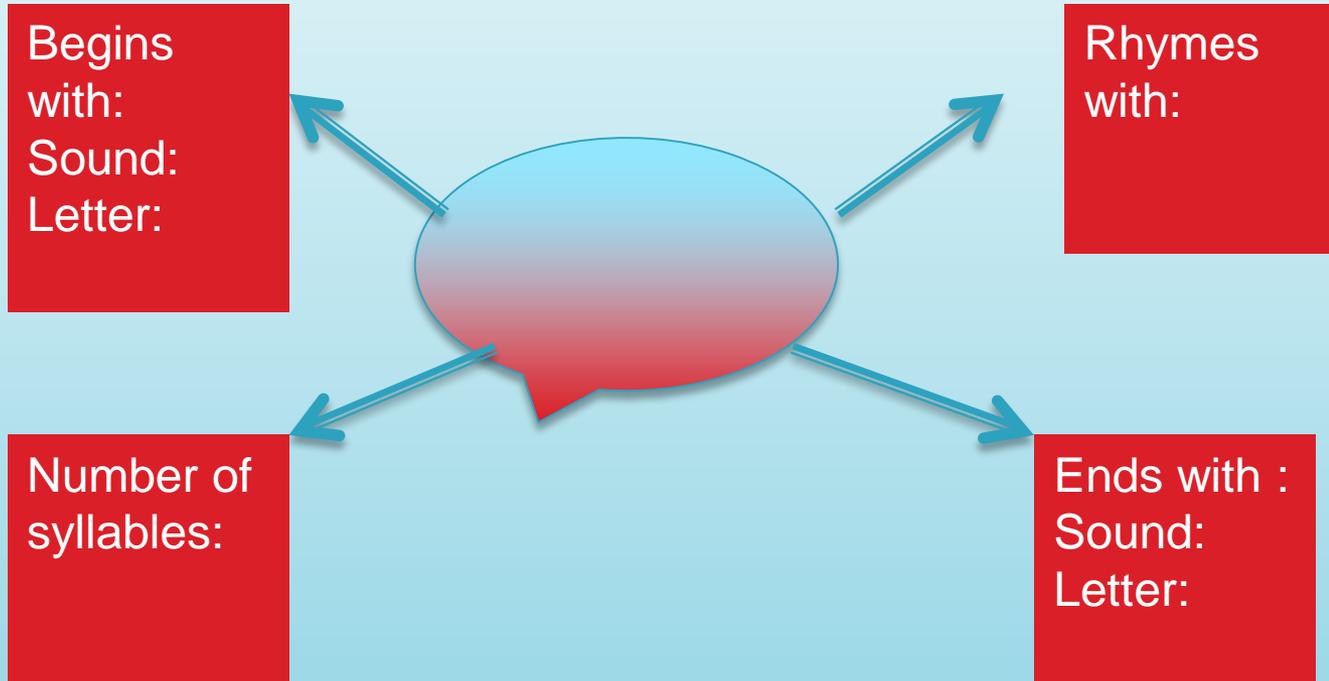
**Grammar**

**Associations**

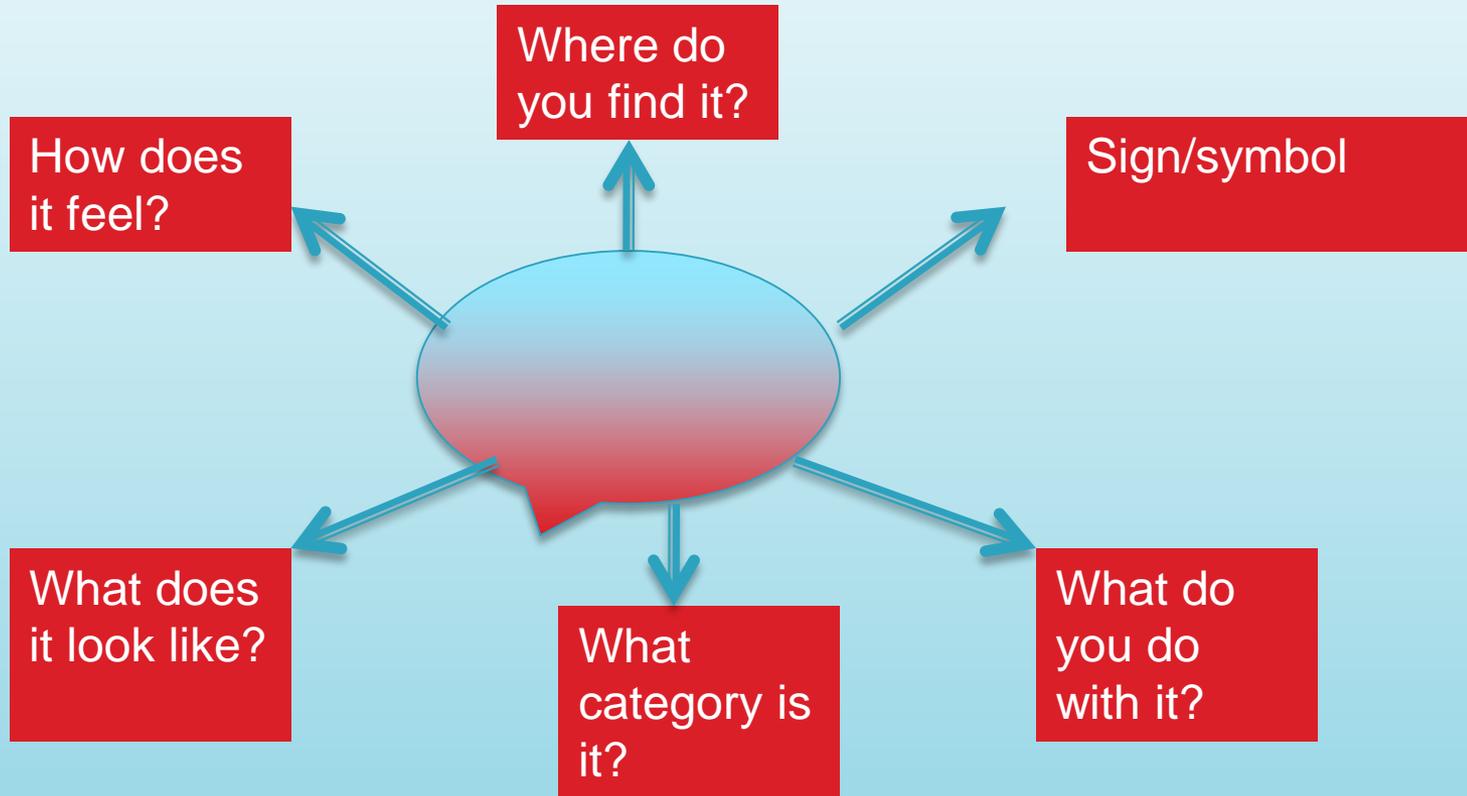
# Building the football net

- Sound links - What sound does it begin with?  
End with? What does it rhyme with?
- Meaning links What you think it means?  
Simple definition, relate to what they already know, tell a story
- Grammatical links : put it in a sentence
- Movement links: a gesture or sign
- Associations

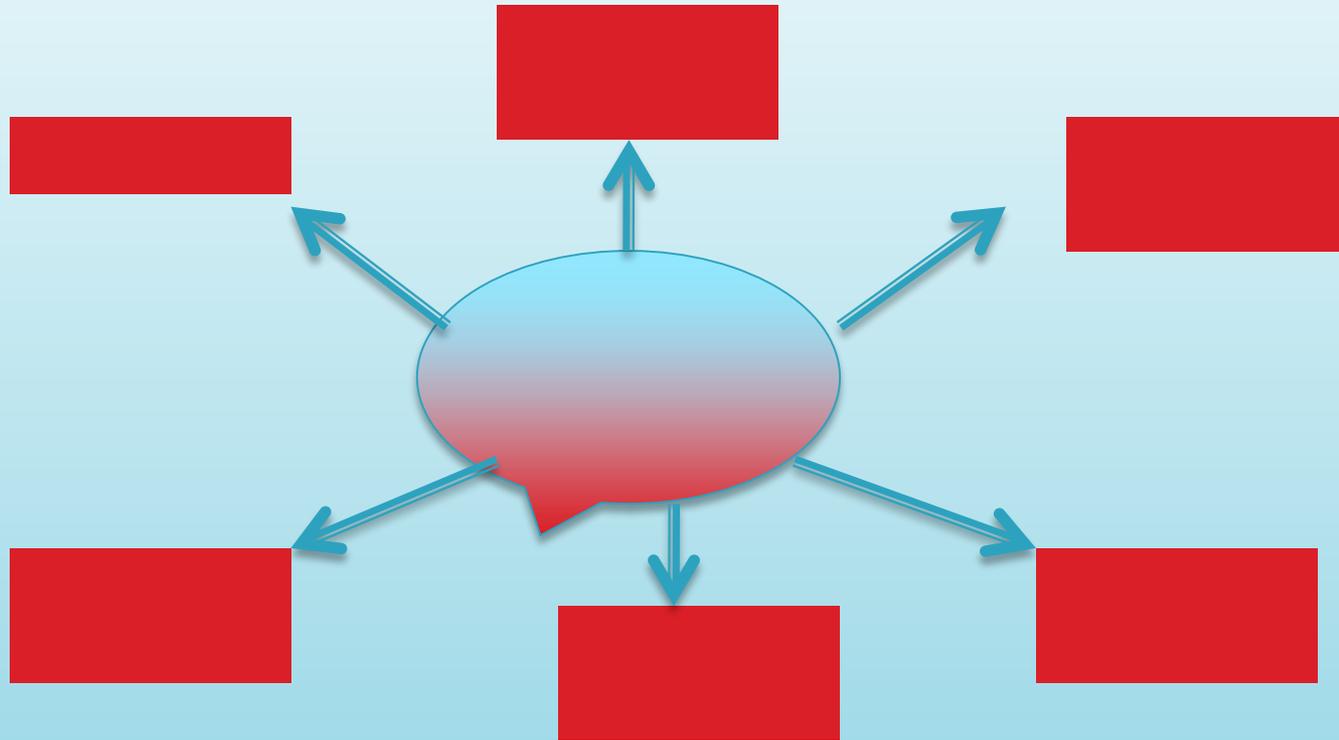
# What it sounds like



# What it means

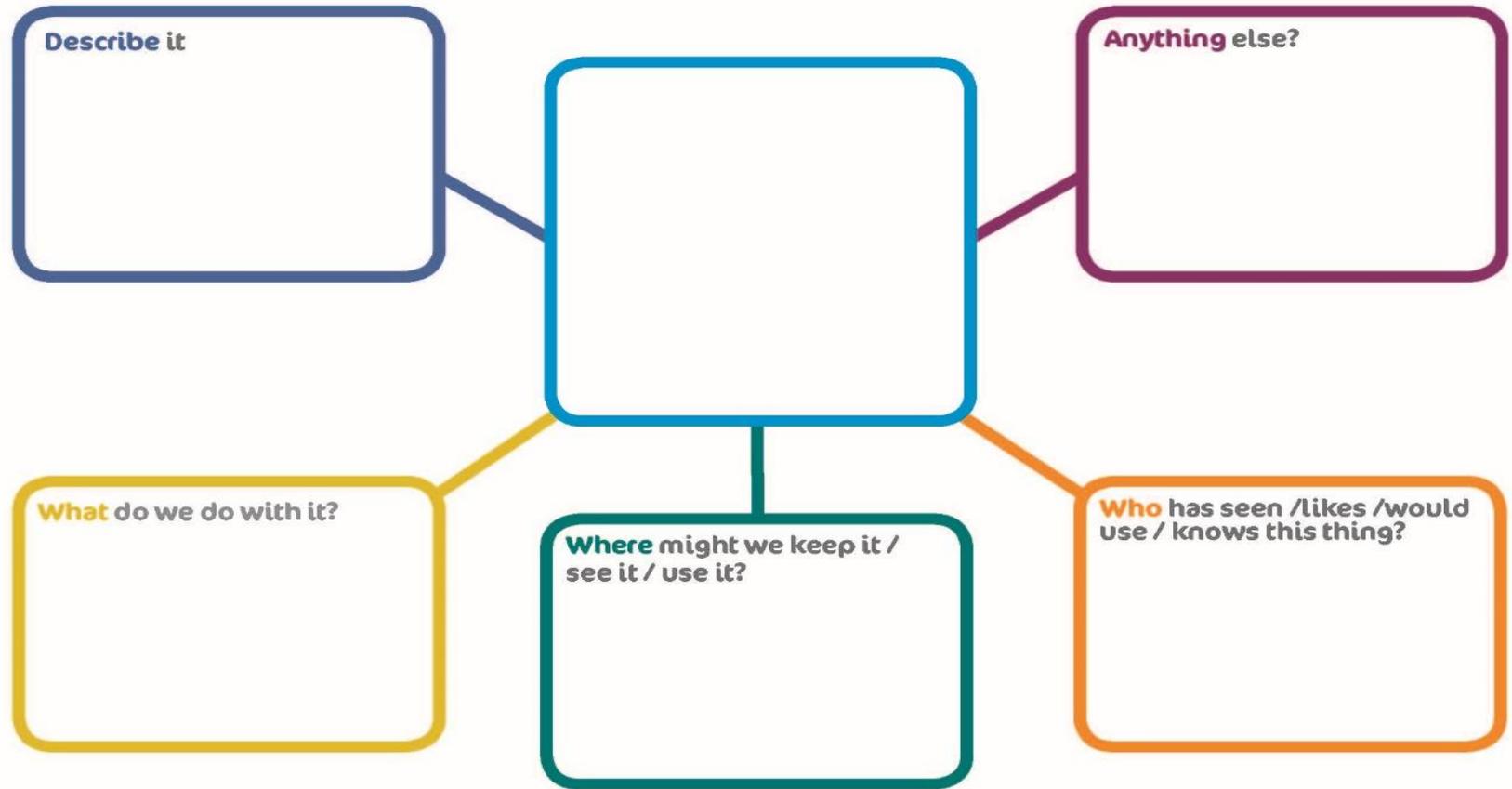


# Words that go with it



Put it in a sentence

## Word magic



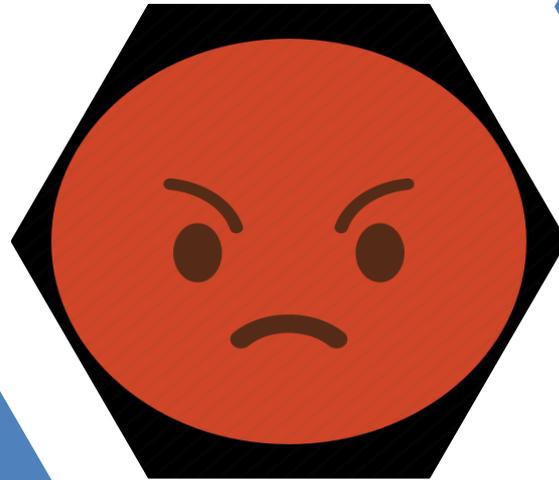
# Everyone using the chosen words



angry

mad

cross



furious

livid



- 
- Day 1 definition in child's speak
  - Day 2 add synonyms with actions and talk about the differences
  - Day 3 Use word in a story or to describe a picture.. Which of our words did I use? Why 'furious'?
  - Day 4 Ask children to choose a word to complete a full sentence e.g. I was livid when my brother broke my Lego model. Ask them to make up own sentence.

# Day 5 review - word pot games



# Resources

Babcock online vocabulary course for teachers

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/developing-vocabulary>

Teaching Vocabulary CPD programme -six short staff training sessions to deliver yourself in school [www.babcock-education.co.uk/shop](http://www.babcock-education.co.uk/shop)

# Oxford/Teach It free resource



<https://www.teachitenglish.co.uk/wordgap>

# Sharing books – the rocket fuel of vocabulary development



# Sharing books

- Toddlers read to or shown picture books daily are much less likely to be late talkers at two and a half (Collisson, 2016)
- Children who read regularly with adults in early years learn language faster, enter school with larger vocabulary and become more successful readers in school (Mol, 2008)

# The effects start very early



Babies read to at  
eight months  
have better  
spoken  
vocabulary at 12  
and 16 months  
(Karrass, 2005)

## ... and continue

Reading to a 4 -5 year old child more frequently (every day or almost every day instead of twice a week or less) had the same effect on children's reading skills at age 8-9 as being almost 12 months older (Kalb, 2013)

## **... and have long term impact**

- Being read to as a child predicts whether a child brought up in poverty will themselves escape poverty as an adult (Blanden, 2006)
- It even predicts whether a child will have behaviour difficulties (Ermisch, 2008)

More important in the home  
than amount of screen time!



E-books don't seem to work  
as well as real books

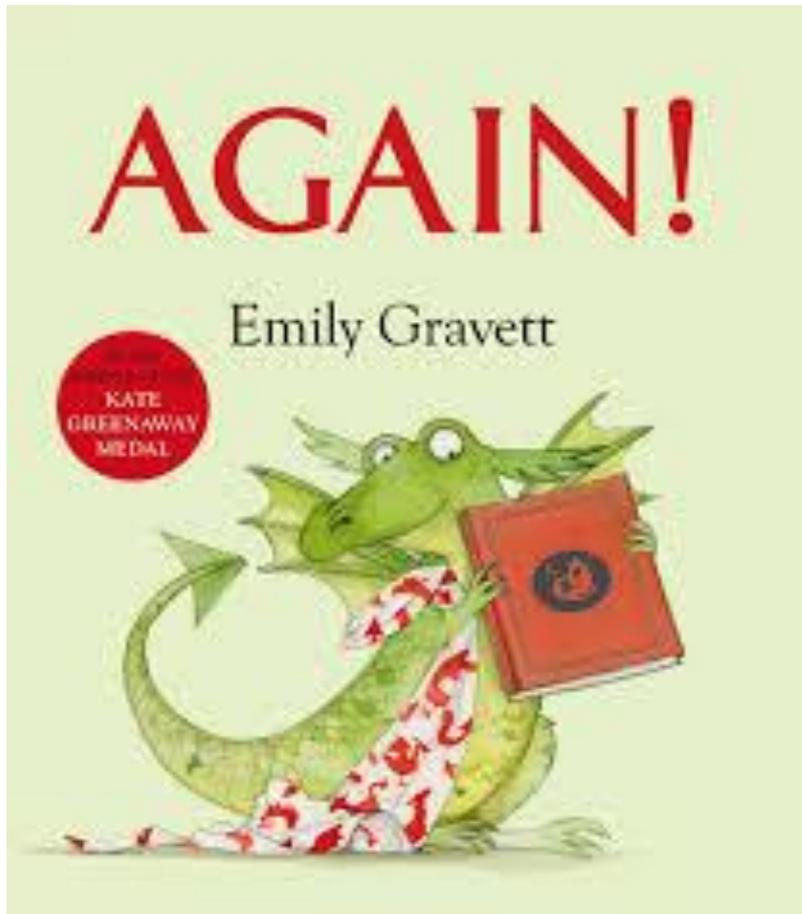




Greatest effect on language development found when adults use a conversational style, talking around and about the book and encouraging the child to join in, rather than simply reading the story aloud (Rowland, 2016)

# Using pauses

- Study of 3-5 year olds found dramatic pauses that invited prediction led to greater word learning from a shared book
- Dramatic silent pauses before new words in a story worked best



Research shows repeated reads of the same book are particularly effective for vocabulary development (Horst et al , 2011; Damhuis et al, 2014)

# Vocabulary is better recalled after a nap



# It's not looking good



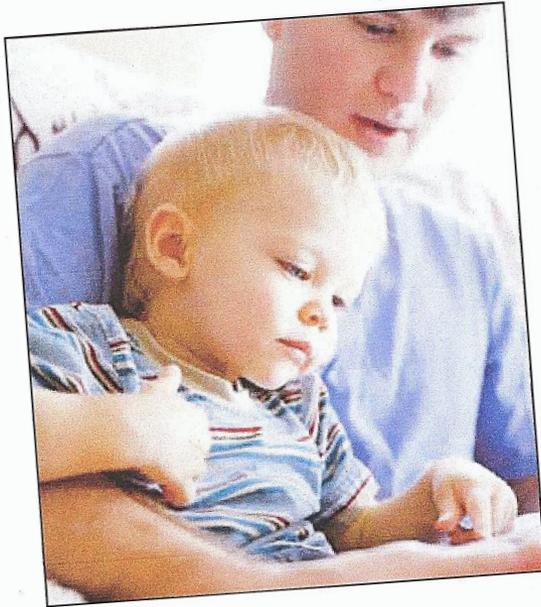
February 2018  
'The proportion of pre-school children being read to every day has dropped by a fifth over the last five years'

Alexa... read me a story



Parent partnership at Barbara Rose

# Dads are important.



Your child has been chosen to take home a story sack tonight.

Please could you tell your child a bedtime story and take a photograph of the special moment as you cuddle up together, sharing the book and props.

If you do not have a digital camera, you may borrow the Barbara Rose camera tonight.

**Did you know that 80% of fathers these days say they do not have time for bedtime stories!**  
– It can't be true, can it?

Best wishes from Esther and the Barbara Rose Team

## Dad's reading challenge:

*'It can't be true, can it?'*

*I really enjoyed coming home from work, knowing that my son had brought a story sack home from pre-school for our bedtime story.*

How can you create more opportunities for sharing books in the setting?



# How can we create those opportunities?

- ▶ ‘Five-a-day’ read-aloud programme in one setting – five stories, narratives and information texts each day.
  - ▶ Read me a story time across the school
  - ▶ Volunteer programmes
- 

# A little extra for some children

- ▶ Checking that the children who need it most are getting a high number of shared books
  - ▶ Checking they are getting a high number of conversations with adults
- 

# Resources you can draw on – films

- ▶ DfE's Hungry Little Minds  
<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>
- ▶ BBC's Tiny Happy People  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p078qy47>

# Harvard : serve and return

[https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/how-to-5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-return/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=may\\_2019](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/how-to-5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-return/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=may_2019)

# Leeds SLT service animations

<https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/speech-and-language-therapy2/service-downloads/>

# NSPCC

- ▶ Look say sing play

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/look-say-sing-play/>

# Big Lottery A Better Start

## ▶ Big Little Moments

<https://www.abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/biglittlemoments>

# National Literacy Trust

- ▶ Chat as you go

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAxdDchXSug>

- ▶ Book sharing films

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/reading-aloud-and-sharing-books-good-talking/> [and](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1crCPpG42tk>

# Sites for parents– milestones, tips, and activities for different age groups

- ▶ ICAN's Talking Point

[www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

- ▶ National Literacy Trust's Small Talk

[www.small-talk.org.uk](http://www.small-talk.org.uk)

# Let's have a look

- ▶ <https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/#0>

Hungry Little Minds 0–6 months

- ▶ <https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/speech-and-language-therapy2/service-downloads/>

Leeds SLT Service Top Tips Tip 8

# Films from TCT

<http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-parents/through-the-eyes-of-a-child.aspx>

- ▶ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3k\\_gbicdYLg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3k_gbicdYLg)

# Resources for parents from The Communication Trust



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# Talk partner time

- Talk to your partner about any questions you might want to ask, comments you might want to make, or information you need



What one thing am I going to do tomorrow?



this is  
tomo  
rrow

Let's make  
better mistakes  
tomorrow.

Thank  
You!!!