

Sharing comics with children can help develop their spoken language, as well as lead even very young ones into a love of books. Many comics are based on popular children's TV and film characters, so provide a natural focus for chat and creativity.



Cartoons and comics

Essential resources

- Children's comics and magazines

- Children's TV and film toys

- Books based on TV characters

It is official... children love comics! Take a trip to your local newsagent or supermarket and you will find that there is a huge range of comics for children of all ages. While you can still find old favourites like *Beano* and *Dandy*, most comics are now based on popular children's TV programmes and films. Many children enjoy watching TV and DVDs, and some children have an almost encyclopaedic knowledge of their favourite programmes!

This is not to say that we want to encourage children to watch TV, but it is a fact of modern life that many families watch a lot of television, and DVDs are often used to entertain and stimulate young children. Parents buy their children clothes with images from these programmes, and children can become very attached to their TV-related bags, lunchboxes, pencil cases and other merchandise.

Before children can use words meaningfully to communicate, they need to have developed symbolic understanding.

In other words they need to know that small objects, such as toys, represent real objects. They also need to develop the

understanding that pictures represent real objects too. If they are already aware of TV programmes and can relate these to soft toys and comics, then they are well on the way to being able to use words to represent real objects.

Programmes such as *Telletubbies* and *In the Night Garden* are designed to attract even the youngest children with their mixture of bright characters, music and repetition, so it is no surprise that children as young as 12 months will have already chosen their favourite TV show!

Many adults will be unfamiliar with current TV characters, and this can, for once, put children in a position where they know more than adults! This usually leads to a lot of interesting chat, as children explain all about their favourite characters.

Comics are very expensive, and often don't last long in little hands. You might want to invest in comic annuals, or visit your bookshop after Christmas, where last year's annuals are usually on sale at a very reduced price. Charity shops sometimes sell second-hand comic annuals. You can use these as part of your book collection, or even let the children cut them up.

EYFS links

Cartoons and comics can help children to:

- Learn new words very rapidly and be able to use them in communicating about matters which interest them (Language for Communication, 22-36 months).
- Use vocabulary focused on objects and people that are of particular importance to them (Language for Communication, 30-50 months).
- Have confidence to speak to others about their own interests (Language for Communication, 40-60+ months).
- Initiate conversation (Language for Communication, 40-60+ months).
- Interact with others (Language for Communication, ELG).
- Listen with enjoyment, and respond to stories (Language for Communication, ELG).
- Show interest in stories (Reading, 16-26 months).
- Show interest in illustrations and print in books and print in the environment (Reading, 30-50 months).
- Retell narratives in the correct sequence, drawing on language patterns and stories (Reading, ELG).
- Know that print carries meaning and, in English, is read from left to right and top to bottom (Reading, ELG).

‘Many adults will be unfamiliar with current TV characters, and this can put children in a position where they know more than adults’



Tear out and file these pages so you can use them again and again

0-3-years-old

Young children can recognise soft toys such as Igglepiggle and Makka Pakka. Many large supermarkets sell soft toys that are related to children's TV and DVDs, and these can be a brilliant way of encouraging babies to relate to toys and begin to take an interest in sharing books. They can also stimulate language development in babies and toddlers as they begin to ask for, name, and make comments about their favourite toys and pictures.

Children between 18 months and three years will often spend significant amounts of time looking through comics. Comics have an added advantage over storybooks, in that you can turn to any page in a comic and talk about the pictures, whereas in a storybook you really need to start at the beginning and follow it through to the end for it to make any sense, and this can be a challenge for very young children.

TV-related books may include a music CD, and even very young babies respond to music that they are familiar with, while older ones enjoy singing along.

3-5-years-old

Many comics are full of craft ideas, including 'join the dots', 'spot the difference', word searches and even recipes! These activities can be an ideal way of encouraging children in this age group to develop fine motor and pre-reading and writing skills. These can also be found on the Internet at www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies

Take a trip to large newsagents in the high street, and talk about all the comics and related merchandise.

Care needs to be taken in checking suitability of comics. 'Superhero' comics have scenes of graphic violence, and some young children don't realise that the characters, such as Spiderman, are not real. There has been a lot of discussion about the value of 'superhero play', and it will be important for you to decide where you stand on encouraging children to get involved in this type of play.

On the other hand, some programmes for older children are designed to promote positive messages. One example of this is 'Lazytown', where Sportacus and

Stephanie promote exercise and having a healthy lifestyle.

If you have access to a laminator, it can be helpful to laminate pages from a comic, so your youngest children can look at them on their own, without you having to worry about them destroying a precious resource! If comics are getting a bit tatty, you can help children cut out the characters and make a collage. Talk about their favourite characters and why they have chosen them.

Tips for getting older children involved in helping younger ones

- Older children can make a comic book for younger ones. Help them to take photos of younger ones. They can cut out the photos and make up a story about the younger children, complete with speech and thought bubbles.

Extending activities for 5-8-year-olds

Comics can be a great stimulus to help reluctant readers to get involved with reading.

Children can make their own comics, either by cutting up old comics or drawing their own. They can draw their own background and add the characters to make up a story.

You can extend children's interests in the natural world by looking at National Geographic KIDS, and visit their related website at www.kids.nationalgeographic.com, which has activities, games, videos and blogs.

Children can make their own comics. They can draw their own background and add the characters to make up a story.

Getting parents involved

Parents often have strong views about TV, and may dislike their children being involved with certain cartoon characters. It will be important to discuss with parents why you are focusing on TV and comics. Ask them to donate comics or annuals, as well as toys (they may have several of these from fast food outlets, which often give them away with children's meals).

Michael Jones, early language consultant for the Every Child a Talker projects in Bedford and Thurrock

Children love socks! We know that children enjoy talking about clothes, but pairs of socks seem to generate most interest. They can be used in many different ways to stimulate talk, and particularly to develop maths and number concepts.



Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy (PSRN)

Socks and stuff...

Essential resources

- Pairs of socks
- Card, scissors
- Felt pens, crayons, or coloured pencils
- String, clothes pegs

Tell any young child that you like the socks they are wearing, and you are likely to have started a very long conversation! Socks come in all different sizes and colours, and the children's sock department in clothes shops can include several racks with the wildest colours and designs. The great thing about socks is that they come in pairs.

This can lead to all sorts of mathematical conversations, ideas and activities. Above all, socks seem to make children laugh, so you can have a lot of fun, while learning at the same time.

I have a picnic hamper full of pairs of socks that I have collected from various shops, including 'Pound Shops' and

department stores. These are used in lots of different ways, with children of all ages.

Socks come in all sorts of sizes and colours and patterns, and this can stimulate lots of chat, using words and phrases like: *stripy/spotty/ colours/ same/different/tiny/small/ big/ too big/ too small/ not big enough/ can't fit/ stretch/ match/ are there any left over?/odd/counting/ share/ how much can you fit in?*

Before children can learn what numbers really mean, they need to develop important concepts, such as matching and sorting. Socks are ideal for matching, because you will always start off with a pair.

'Socks are ideal for matching, because you will always start off with a pair'

EYFS links

Playing with socks helps children to:

- Distinguish between quantities, recognising that a group of objects is more than one (Numbers as Labels and for Counting, 16-26 months).
- Use some number language, such as 'more' and 'a lot' (Numbers as Labels and for Counting, 22-36 months).
- Sometimes match number and quantity directly (Numbers as Labels and for Counting, 30-50 months).
- Recognise groups with one, two or three objects (Numbers as Labels and for Counting, 30-50 months).
- Categorise objects according to their properties (Calculating, 16-26 months).
- Begin to make comparisons between quantities (Calculating, 22-36 months).
- Begin to categorise objects according to properties such as shape or size (Shape, Space and Measures, 22-36 months).
- Begin to understand variations in size (Shape, Space and Measures, 22-36 months).
- Begin to understand 'bigger than' and 'enough' (Shape, Space and Measures, 30-50 months).
- Order two or three items by length or height (Shape, Space and Measures, 40-60+ months).
- Sort familiar objects to identify their similarities and differences, making choices and justifying decisions (Shape, Space and Measures, 40-60+ months).
- Use language such as 'greater', 'smaller', 'heavier', or 'lighter' to compare quantities (Shape, Space and Measures, ELG).

Tear out and file these pages so you can use them again and again

0-3-years-old

Ask children to help you sort out your pile of socks. As they do it, talk about the colours and patterns. Can they match them up? Which ones are the same? Putting socks on teddy bears and dolls, or even on themselves, can introduce the concept of sorting.

Rig up a simple washing line with clothes pegs. Hang one sock from each pair on the line. Give children a sock each and see if they can find one on the line that is the same.

Introduce a collection of soft toys. Play with them with the children, and then help them to stuff them inside some socks. Can they remember which toy was in which sock? Ask the children to close their eyes while you hide a toy inside a sock. When the children

open their eyes, show them the sock and see if they can guess what is inside. It can be great fun to leave a little bit of the toy showing, to help them guess what it is.

Play a variation of 'pass the parcel' by helping the children stuff all the toys into socks.

Play some music, and the children pass the socks around. When the music stops, whoever has the sock can open it up and tell everyone what is inside. These games are also a great way of helping young children name objects.



3-5-years-old

Children of this age are often well and truly involved in matching and sorting activities. Three-to-four-year-olds will enjoy all the activities listed above, while the older ones can be encouraged to look at patterns and to think about simple number activities.

If you have a collection of teddies, can the children put a sock on each teddy's paw? This activity introduces concepts and words like 'match', 'share', 'pair', 'two', 'left over'.

You can make your own simple matching sock games. Draw socks on cardboard, cut them out, and draw a pattern on one of the socks. Help the children to copy the pattern. Include spots, stripes and different colours. When you have enough pairs, you can play two simple games. Spread the cardboard socks on the floor or table. Can they match the socks that are the same? Spread the socks face down. Can they take turns to find which ones match?

At this stage children are getting interested in learning to count, and two is a very popular number. Using sock games, you can draw children's attention to the number two, and even use the word 'pair'.

Introducing different types of socks, like football socks, trainer socks and even tights, helps to extend the children's vocabularies, and you can talk about different sizes. You can use socks of different sizes to introduce simple estimation activities. With a collection of soft toys and socks of different sizes, you can ask children questions like: 'Can we fit all these toys in that football sock? Or would they all fit in the tights? How many can you squeeze into that little sock?'

Fox in Socks by Dr Seuss and *Fox's Socks* by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler, are two fun rhyming books about socks that children thoroughly enjoy.

Michael Jones

Extending activities for 5-8-year-olds

Socks can help children count in twos, and to understand the concept of pair.

As socks are always getting lost, this is possibly the easiest way to introduce the concept of odd!

You can help children understand division through the concept of sharing, as in: 'Let's share the socks between the teddies. We have four teddies and nine socks. Let's

see how many socks we will use up, and if there will be any left over.' ('Nine divided by two makes four each, with one left over).

You can do the same with multiplication through the concept of 'lots of two', and even introducing the 'two times table'. You can say things like: 'We have five pairs of socks. That's five lots of two. How many have we got altogether? Let's add another pair. That's six lots of two. Now how many have we got?'

••••• Tips on how older children can help younger ones •••••

- Older children can join in the activities mentioned above; helping them to put their socks on, making sock cards and playing the games.

••••• Involving parents •••••

- Ask parents to donate pairs of socks that their children have grown out of.