



PARTICIPATORY STORIES

Margherita Hack (5 – 6 age group)

Learning objectives

The four sheets will focus on enhancing writing skills through role-plays and direct questions, sentence completion, sound and dialogue boxes, and teaching sheets. This will enable children to identify appropriate adjectives for words, choose their own narrative language, understand the position of onomatopoeias and dialogue in stories, and use question words to continue/complete a story.

Helpful Narrative & Writing Tools

- Letter reference table for children to practice copying parts of sentences onto the sheets (in general/preparatory tool)
- Division of groups for the role-play of the battle scene and the ending of the story (1st and 4th sheets)
- Three "bags" with continuations for writing prompts (2nd sheet)
- Sound boxes for dialogues/onomatopoeia (3rd tab)
- Writing checklist (in general/post-writing exercise)

1st sheet: DESCRIBE CHARACTERS AND SITUATIONS

Set the mood of the beginning of the story by reading aloud the writing prompts:

Margherita wants to be an astronomer. The cat Cicino crouches on her books and helps her study.

Since this is a biography, it is necessary for the children to become familiar with perhaps the simplest parts of the story, selected according to the age and ability of the children. Divide the pupils in each group so that they play the various roles in the story, in this case: Margherita and the cat. Ask them to **interpret the scene** described above and expand on it to add variations (for Margherita: What would you do if you also wanted to become an astronomer? For the cat: If you had to help your friend study, what would you do). Then ask each group of "actors" to describe their role:

- **How is Margherita? How do you imagine her?** (refer to adjectives appropriate to their reading level: intelligent, kind, generous, funny, etc.) You can use the illustration or the text to describe her **physical characteristics** (she has blue eyes, is thin, agile, etc.).

- **If you are working with an advanced group of students:** encourage sentence expansion by asking: "What else can Margherita do to become an astronomer?" (e.g. stargazing, talking to other astronomers, going into space, etc.).
- **What is Cicino the cat like? Is he white? Is he black? Is he thin and agile or fat and slow?** Add yes/no questions to complete the description of his character: Is he nice? Is he intelligent? Is he curious?
 - **What does the cat do?** (e.g. purr, sharpen claws, meow)
- **If you are working with an advanced group of students:** encourage sentence expansion by asking: 'What else could the cat do to help Margherita? (refer to actions, even fantasy ones: he turns the pages with his paws, looks at the stars from the roof, listens to her repeat what she has studied, etc.).
- Ask the whole group to brainstorm about **astronomy**:
 - What does this work consist of? (Studying the behaviour of stars, planets or other bodies)
 - Is this kind of work boring, fun, interesting, exciting?
 - What tools are needed? (a telescope, an observatory...)
 - When can one make the best observations: in the morning, in the evening, after dinner, etc.?
- Ask the whole group to brainstorm about the **books** (refer to words such as: scientific, illustrated, detailed, serious, precise, etc.)..

After the students' answers to your questions, repeat and write the most popular/most suitable words on the sheet. You should have descriptions for four words: Margherita, astronomer, cat and books. Since these words will be written in

different coloured writing prompts, **use the corresponding colours when writing descriptions for each of them.** This will help students identify the descriptions to go with each word if they get lost or confused.

After completing the brainstorming and writing, read the first writing prompt aloud again followed by the students' edited version.

What may result is something like:

The friendly and courageous Margherita wants to be an astronomer, an exciting job studying the stars and planets. The curious cat Cicino, with his black and white hair, sharpens his nails as he turns the pages of her books. Margherita and Cicino study in detailed illustrated books.

Then divide the groups into two parts that will take turns reading the modified sentences.

2nd sheet: ENHANCE ACTIONS WITH CONJUNCTIONS

Read aloud the writing prompts to the children:

Margherita becomes an astronomer.

She discovers the secrets of the stars.

She lives happily with her cats.

How these prompts will be continued is left to **three mystery bags** (one for each prompt), which contain half sentences to continue the story. Divide each group into three, assigning them a writing prompt and the corresponding bag. Each bag must contain **5 continuation half sentences** and **1 option for "Finish the sentence yourself!"**.

Examples of the contents of the bag for the first prompt could be:

“Margherita becomes an astronomer...”

- She learns to talk to the stars.

- Even though she doesn't have a telescope.
- And she flies to space.
- Observing the sky, she spots an alien.
- She has made her observatory important.
- Complete the sentence yourself!

Let the students assigned to each writing prompt choose 2 options from their bag and select the one they prefer. **If you are working with a group of advanced students**, allow them to copy the continuation sentence at the end of their assigned writing prompt (in the colour of each writing prompt to remain consistent). Otherwise, read the continuation sentence aloud (to the students and with the students) and write it on the paper next to the corresponding writing prompt.

What may result is something like:

Marguerite becomes an astronomer even though she does not have a telescope.

She discovers the secrets of the stars and spots an alien.

She lives happily with her cats in her important observatory.

Then, as with the first sheet, ask the group to take turns reading each of the suggestions aloud.

3rd sheet: ADD DIALOGUE AND SOUND WORDS

Read aloud the writing prompts to children.

Margherita observes the stars with a telescope. Stars narrate their story through light.

Turn their attention to the **empty dialogue box** next to the illustration of Margherita with the telescope and ask them what they think it is. If they do not know, explain the meaning of the dialogue box. Do the same with the **sound effects** box above the star illustration. By turning their attention to these boxes, ask the children to use their imagination:

- think about and come up with ideas about what Margherita might say to her astronomer colleagues e.g. her discoveries... (I've spotted a double star! It's blinking on and off!)
- think about onomatopoeias for stars, what sound or noise do you think stars make? (e.g. WHISH, FLUSH, SLAMP, SBRILL, LUXLUX) Do stars shout, or do they whisper?

- Demonstrate the importance of appropriate punctuation after each proposal by acting it out (e.g. by ending sound effects with an exclamation mark (!) and shouting them out)

You can suggest **further elaboration** of this sheet, as was done in the first sheet, by asking guiding questions:

- What colour are the stars (white, yellow... and the sun?)?
- Apart from the stars, what can we observe in the sky? Planets, satellites, comets and meteors...

What may result is something like:

Margherita observes **two yellow stars** in the sky. To her colleagues she says "**I have spotted a double star! It's blinking on and off!**" and "**It seems to be talking to me!**". The stars pulsating and shining **seem to shout: WHISH, SLAMP LUXLUX! Others whisper: SBRILL SBRILL.**

Then, read aloud the prompts with the children as done in the previous two sheets.

4th sheet: IMAGINING AN ENDING TO THE STORY

Read aloud the writing prompts to children.

Margherita lives with her cats.

She has grown old but her desire for discovery has remained young.

For the final activity, ask the children to use their imagination, encouraging them to imagine a fantastic ending and giving them the roles of Margherita and her cats. Ask questions to help them in the role play: **"What would you do if you had already discovered everything but had some curiosity left?"** Would you build a powerful telescope or a spaceship to discover new worlds?

- **If you are working with a group of advanced students:** let each group write in cursive the role-play proposal they have come up with for the end of the story. Otherwise, write the proposals yourselves on the paper.

What may result is something like:

Margherita lives with her cats.

She has grown old but her desire for discovery has remained young

Together they build a powerful telescope.

With a spaceship they travel into space!

Then, read aloud the prompts with the children as done in the previous sheets.

* For a post-writing exercise, if the children have had a larger contribution in the writing tasks, prepare a **Writing Checklist** and have them double-check their work before recording their stories.