Mama Panya’s Pancakes: New Story Sack Resource for Teachers

Working with certain picture books can help teachers to deal with several curricular and teaching objectives simultaneously. *Mama Panya’s Pancakes: A Village Tale from Kenya* (written by Mary and Richard Chamberlin and illustrated by Julia Cairns) provides an opportunity to teach young children about Kenya thus addressing the geography strand unit: *people and places in other areas*. Creative teachers can address the potential provided by the text and illustrations for teaching literacy and numeracy. The story also enables teachers to bring a global dimension effortlessly into their teaching by highlighting concepts such as diversity and equality, principles which are central in the new *Aistear* curriculum (NCCA, 2009).

*Mama Panya’s Pancakes* depicts a young Kenyan boy’s experience of visiting the market with his mother. Along the way, Adika invites all their friends for pancakes, causing Mama to worry that she can’t afford enough flour to feed the extra guests. However, everyone brings ‘gifts’ such as milk, butter, and flour so that there is more than enough for everyone. The story highlights the vulnerability of impoverished families but the use of topics such as food and journeys allow children to identify similarities with their own lives.

The Kenyan landscape is presented in the book, as are sample Swahili words such as ‘Jambo’ and ‘Harambee’. The book contains a map suitable for primary school children which outlines some of the major geographical features located in Kenya, e.g. rivers, mountains and major cities. Additional information about village life in Kenya can also be found including animals, insects, reptiles, plants, instructions for pronouncing Kiswahili words and Mama Panya’s pancake recipe.
Trócaire and the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education (CHRCE), St. Patrick’s College have recently published the *Just Children* story sack. Aimed at pre-school educators and Infant class teachers, the sack is built around this colourful children’s story: *Mama Panyà’s Pancakes*. The handbook and resources included in the sack build on this story. Developed in consultation with educators and early education experts, the handbook contains a programme of learning experiences designed to introduce children aged 3 to 6 years to concepts such as: fairness, interdependence, near and far, similarity and difference and another perspective, in a global context. With a puppet, songs, a CD and photographs, the sack provides an example of how education for a just world can begin in pre-school educational settings.

The story sack is informed by research into young children’s engagement with global justice issues (Ruane et al. 2010. Dillon et al. 2010). According to this research, young children already held perceptions of the wider world and of Africa and that these perceptions were predominantly formed by media and fundraising campaigns. The research also indicated young children’s ability to empathise, to articulate their own ideas in relation to justice issues and to recognize people’s basic human needs.

The *Just Children* story sack provides resources for teachers to begin exploring with their children concepts, attitudes and perspectives related to global justice. The programme focuses on five dimensions identified as central to education for global justice:

- An understanding of fairness;
- The ability to empathise;
- Openness to and respect for diversity;
- Awareness of the connections between people around the world;
- Awareness of the wider world and of people living in developing countries.

The programme is divided into four modules:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module One</th>
<th>Module Two</th>
<th>Module Three</th>
<th>Module Four</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Near and Far</em></td>
<td><em>Another Perspective</em></td>
<td><em>Living with Poverty</em></td>
<td><em>Exploring Fairness and Interdependence</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Using a song to travel from Ireland to Kenya.</td>
<td>4. Creating a life size Adika and mapping his journey to the market</td>
<td>7. Investigating how food is produced</td>
<td>10. Discussing fairness and helping Adika the puppet understand fairness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Meeting the puppet Adika</td>
<td>5. Creating and playing in a make-believe play area depicting the Kenyan market scene</td>
<td>8. Exploring the tasks Adika has to do</td>
<td>11. Looking at fairness in the Kenyan market scene</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The story sack contains the following items:

1. **A copy of the storybook: Mama Panya’s Pancakes**

2. **A book of Teacher’s Notes.** Detailed teachers notes with learning objectives, learning experiences, ancillary material (e.g. words for songs, cut out cards, photocopy and cut out pages) are included for each of the four modules. A detailed chart set out links to the primary school curriculum and Aistear:the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework NCCA,2009).

3. **Four posters** which portray episodes from the storybook. These posters can be used to facilitate group work for examining the detail of the illustration and the structure of the story.

4. **Eight photographs of Cecilia** depict the daily life of a girl living in urban Kenya. They ensure children engage with different perspectives on Kenya and support progression from a fictional story to the more factual medium of photographs.

5. **The Adika Puppet** which can support children’s engagement in discussion and encourage empathy. The puppet enables the educator to use role play and drama thus providing the freedom to be confused, sad, proud or excited.

6. **The CD** contains stories and music to help develop the themes as well as introducing voices and sounds from Kenya.
   The tracks include:
   - A reading of Mama Panya’s Pancakes
   - Two stories about Adika
   - A narration from Cecelia to accompany her photographs
   - How to pronounce Swahili words in the story
   - Kenyan music

Bates and Pickering (2010) highlight three teaching points for working with stories such as Mama Panya’s Pancakes. Firstly, focusing on similarities between different cultures provides a foundation upon which children can develop their thinking. Secondly, the use of illustrations in picture books for learning about distant places can be very effective in challenging children’s preconceived images about a place. Thirdly, it is important not to replace one set of stereotypes with another set. For instance, many stories set in Africa tend to portray rural life but modern vibrant cities are also a reality in African countries. Equally dramatic media coverage of famine and war can perpetuate stereotypes. Our job as teachers is to help children to understand the different sides of a story and the different realities which exist. As children incorporate new ideas into existing ones, a more complex understanding of distant places will be achieved over time. The *Just Children* story sack provides all the assistance any teacher will need to teach about children in Kenya using the story Mama Panya’s Pancakes. An ideal Christmas gift for your colleague!!!

Further information about the story sack is available on the Trócaire website [http://www.trocaire.org/resources/education-just-world](http://www.trocaire.org/resources/education-just-world) and information about seminars based
on the resource is available from Rowan Oberman at Rowan.Oberman@spd.dcu.ie The story sack can be purchased for €20 from Mary Boyce in Trócaire at maryb@trocaire.ie

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References:


