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Storybook Themes

There are some questions that are raised by many, or even all, books. These are bound to come up sometime and these notes will provide guidance in how to handle them. You may be tempted to leave them alone so that you can get on to the 'real' issues of the book, but I would see that as a mistake. These themes are important ones, and to quickly answer or gloss over them misses an opportunity to get the children to think about some of the bigger questions of stories and writing.

Leading Ideas

1. Stories, fact and fiction.
2. Animal characters.
3. He or she?



Leading Idea 1: Stories, fact and fiction

Stories seem to be an important part of all human culture. In an oral society they are the linchpin and the storyteller is an honoured member. Important truths are passed down through myth and the history of the people is in its stories. Though the stories are embellished and altered, they are often regarded as the truth.

With writing, we have fixed our stories. In our culture, we are quite comfortable with the genre of fiction stories, but it hasn't always been so. When it was discovered that *Robinson Crusoe* was fiction, Daniel Defoe was almost thrown in jail. Edmund Gosse, who was educated at home late last century, tells of his bemusement at coming across novels at university. His father had never allowed him to come in contact with fiction as he did not approve of 'lies' in books.

Children can share this bemusement. It is common when discussing a difficult question from a book, for some child to say, "It doesn't matter. It's not true anyway." Just what it is if it isn't true is an interesting question. A child might offer that it is a fake, or a lie or 'just a story'.

The point is that lies, fakes and so on are deliberate attempts to mislead, whereas fiction or stories have other intents. Children can articulate what these intentions are. Further work on this theme can be found in *A Lion in the Meadow*: Leading Idea 1 – Truth within a story and truth of a story.

In answer to question 1 below, you are liable to get several possibilities, including a lie, a fake, a fib, a story. Write them on the board for later use in question 6.