

# In English? Yes, Why Not! Teaching English in Dutch Primary Schools

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Promotions

## IN ENGLISH? YES, WHY NOT.

*Written by Tatia Gruenbaum. This article originally appeared in AVANS Hogeschool: LeerKracht: Ontwerpen, Onderzoeken, Onderwijzen on 5 April 2017.*

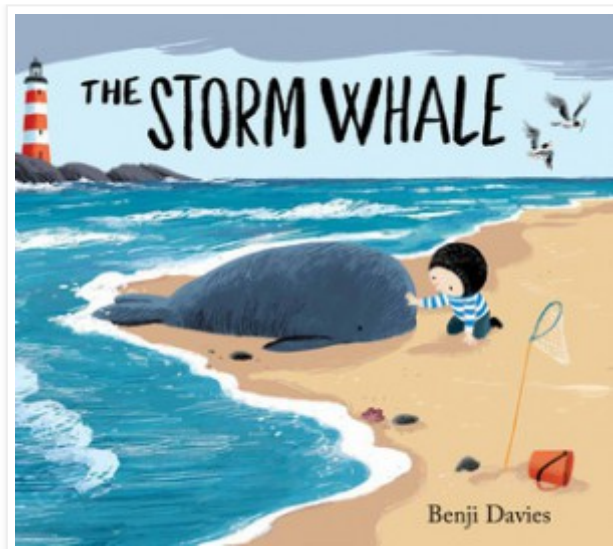


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*ABC is very happy to work with Tatia on our 1-2-3 Book Packs and other initiatives for schools. See [abc.nl/schools](http://abc.nl/schools) for more information, and [click here for more book recommendations](#).*

**2017 sees *De kleine walvis* by English writer Benji Davies selected as picture book of the year for the Netherlands.** By the time you are reading this article, you will no doubt have come across this book during the [Nationale Voorleesdagen](#) in January 2017.

Many primary teachers will feel inspired to read this book in their classes. Some teachers will perhaps use features of the book such as the covers to stimulate discussion and further Dutch language development. Others might complete the story with a crafts or colouring activity or use the story's protagonist, the whale, to make a cross-curricular link. Now, did you know that *De kleine walvis* was first published in English in 2013, entitled **The Storm Whale**? So yes, why not try out the English version in your class? With the current rise in early (primary) English in the Netherlands, using this authentic English picture book in your classroom, can offer familiarity to many of your young language learners and to you.



## LET'S READ IN ENGLISH

Have a look at some of these simple teaching ideas linked to *The Storm Whale*. Personally, I find it useful to have a cycle of a pre-task, reading, and a post-task built around a picture book, so I have arranged my suggestions into these three categories. Do ensure that children sit and work together in small groups and that you discuss answers together as a class. It does help if you have a copy of the book for each group.

So give it a try. Picture books are not just for young but also for older children – and teachers enjoy them, too. Choose wisely, prepare carefully, be creative and enjoy the book with your young language learners. I hope you will find these teaching ideas useful and for more tips, check this famous (and free) British Council publication by Ellis and Brewster: [Tell It Again! The Storytelling Handbook for Primary English Language Teachers](#).

### Pre-Reading Ideas

The aim of the pre-task is to set the scene, create a 'story-reading-atmosphere' and establish or revise children's existing knowledge of English. It is about getting children to feel comfortable and excited about reading and learning English.

#### Cover Time (let children look at the front and back covers):

- Ask which words they know in English and mention words which sound similar in Dutch and English.
- Lower-level classes: select a few English words from the covers and create a bookmark with either words or icons which you can attach to the children's copy of the book. Let them guess the meaning and pronunciation.
- Higher level classes: make and attach a bookmark with questions for children to discuss, explain and / or predict.
- Cover up the title on the children's copy and let them make up their own title with no more than 6 words, for example: Blue Whale and the little Boy, or Big Whale on the Sand.

## Hide it!

- Keep the book hidden and give the children either the title or the first sentence (if short).
- Let them draw what they think it says / means. In this case, the first sentence reads: “Noi lived with his dad and six cats by the sea.”
- Let the children negotiate the meaning with each other (or with your help) if there are unfamiliar words.



## **Reading Ideas**

This part focuses on the reading of the picture book so do apply all the techniques you use when reading Dutch ‘prentenboeken’. Although it is not necessary for children to understand every word in the book as the images help to negotiate meaning, it can be useful to pre-teach some vocabulary (5-8 words). Make your vocabulary choices based on word groups (nouns, adjectives, verbs) or by theme related to the book or a certain page.

## Reading in English

- Foreign languages always sound so much faster if you do not speak them. So take your time when reading and consciously pronounce each word. It is your English pronunciation which will ultimately be your children’s point of reference.
- If in doubt, listen to an audio version of the book and add symbols into your book indicating the rise and fall (intonation), word stress, syllable stress and pauses.
- Encourage children to participate by imitating your gestures and / or repeating words after you in English.

## Parallel reading

- Parallel reading-out-loud is a simple way of familiarising young children with the sound of English. It is great fun and works very well with young language learners in groups 1-4. Personally, I like to have a Dutch teacher with me and alternate (page by page): English – Dutch – English – Dutch...

### Audio – video reading

- Many picture books have [YouTube versions](#) available which can be suitable for use in class. Especially older children enjoy reading along while listening.
- If you choose this method, you will notice how children will read along and focus on pronunciation. It is therefore best to give children time to look at the book first so that they can discover the story before the audio/video starts.

### **Post-reading skills**

As in the case of the pre-task, this is the time to be creative in class. The aim of this part is to recycle and revise children's newly (and previously) acquired English. And of course, it is now that you can also expand on existing knowledge and make cross-curricular links.

### Writing skills

- If you have IT available, use [www.storyboardthat.com](http://www.storyboardthat.com) for children to write an alternative ending or a Part 2.
- Children can design a 'Lost / Wanted' poster for the whale to find his mum.

### Vocabulary

- Put the pre-taught vocabulary and any other words on the board and ask children to make sets of memory cards (image or word). Let them play in groups and encourage repetition each time they turn the card.
- Expand and discover new vocabulary linked to the book. *The Storm Whale* links nicely to: emotions, weather, house / furniture, sea, colours and clothes.

### Grammar

- *The Storm Whale* offers many opportunities to introduce or re fresh the Simple Past.
- You could also look at models of prediction (e.g. might, could).

### Discussion / speaking skills

- Scaffold your young learners by giving them the start of the sentence: Noi is ... Noi's Dad is ... The Storm Whale is ... I like ... I think ....

- More advanced children can engage in story-telling. They can retell the story or tell it from a different point of view (i.e. the whale or the father).
- Children can discuss / create an imaginary friend for the Storm Whale.

### Intonation & pronunciation

- Revisit any words children find difficult to pronounce. These might be words with /p/ versus /b/ or /t/ versus /d/ sounds. The word 'storm' is quite a challenge for Dutch speakers due to the 'r' and the 'o' sound.
- Add some fun and change your voice (shout / whisper), exaggerate and turn tricky sounds into funny short tongue twisters: Ten strong storms storm.

### Cross-curricular links

- *The Storm Whale* offers links to Geography (oceans), Biology (whales, marine life), Drama (act out scenes, write short dialogues Noi & father, Noi & the whale).
- Arts & Crafts (create an underwater scene, make a whale), Maths (compare sizes of whales, counting cats & birds).
- Pages such as the one where Noi is eating breakfast by himself can open up discussions about home life, likes, dislikes and loneliness.

