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# **Pictograms and Story Grammar**



## Pictograms and Story Grammar

Pictogram's aid story recall and language comprehension by providing a visual structural support for children who struggle to read or write stories. Students draw simple stick figures to represent a story narrative. Pictograms are a viable alternative for children who cannot write quickly or well due to reading/language difficulty, or are too young to write.

Pictography is the process of drawing simple pictures to represent text. Pictography is highly useful because it can convey ideas and events of a narrative without needing to resort to written language and can improve children's reading comprehension skill.

Pictography represents events in a story using simple stick like figures. Children are encouraged to draw simple stick figures that represent actions from a story grammar. Most young children can draw simple stick figures without too much difficulty. The images are produced in chronological order, and, like text, begin from the *left* of the page and move across to the *right* of the page. The drawings are able to provide a detailed representation of the events in a story with only a small handful of images.

Pictograms also provide memory and organizational support for narratives which students may struggle to verbally recount. The pictograms in this section are based on the *Guff's Journey* story.

### Pictograms for the Guff's Journey

The events depicted are events detailed in the Guff's Journey story. Guff's Journey has story grammar elements with initiating event, plan, attempts, consequences and reactions which can easily be explored using pictogram stick figures.

## Pictograms and Story Grammar Example

The clinician writes the pictograms in sequence starting with the mammoth hunt and includes all the major sequences and events in the story, finishing with Guff being found by his father. Note that the clinician adds arrows after each sequence.



**Clinician:** 'At the start of the story Guff gets separated from his tribe while on a mammoth hunt.'

**Clinician:** 'Guff is chased by a mammoth and runs for his life.'

**Clinician:** 'Guff escapes the mammoth by falling down a cliff.'



**Clinician:** 'Guff wakes later that day laying in a ditch.'



**Clinician:** 'Guff spends the night in the ditch and sets off the next day following a river to find his tribe.'



**Clinician:** 'After a day of walking Guff finds a lake and decides to rest.'



**Clinician:** 'Guff is hungry so he makes a spear to catch fish.'



**Clinician:** 'Guff cooks his catch over a fire he makes.'



**Clinician:** 'The smell of the cooked fish attracts a saber-toothed cat.'



**Clinician:** 'Guff distracts the cat and races for a nearby tree.'



**Clinician:** 'Guff climbs the tree before the big cat can catch him.'



**Clinician:** 'Members of Guff's tribe see smoke from the fire and rescue Guff. Guff is safe.'

As can be seen from the above pictogram example, the drawings do not require any artistic skill and can be drawn very quickly. After the clinician has drafted the pictographic representation of the story events, the clinician discusses the story with the student.

The events in the pictogram can be coded as *setting*, *complication*, *attempts*, *internal response* and *resolution*. The clinician then discusses the events with the student.

**Clinician:** ‘The story is set in the prehistoric world and Guff chooses to go along the mountain pass. This is our setting for the story. The story begins with Guff separated from his tribe following a mammoth hunt gone wrong and needing to find his way home to his family and tribe. This is the first part of the story and is what we call the initiating event. It’s called the *initiating event* because it’s the beginning of the story and what sets the story in motion. Guff is concerned and frightened about being separated from his tribe but he is resourceful, clever and very brave. We call this Guff’s *internal response* and it is how he feels about his situation of being cut off from his tribe but determined to find his way home and the decision he needs to make to find his way home. Guff’s plan is simple: he needs to find his way home. He chooses to follow a river because it may lead him to his family. Guff makes many *attempts* and endures *complications* on his journey down the river and eventually finds a lake, catches a fish and makes a fire. A saber-toothed cat is attracted by the smell of the cooked fish. Guff takes the only option open to him and climbs a nearby tree. The *resolution* is Guff escapes the big cat and his tribe and father find him safe up the tree. Guff is relieved and happy to have survived the dangers of the prehistoric world alone.’

## Recommended Pictogram Story Grammar Sequence

- Read the *Guff’s Journey* story and then use the story itself to create pictograms that sequence the events in the story.
- After students have read the *Guff’s Journey* story, encourage them to talk about the events in the story. Students are to provide an oral retell of the events in the story.
- Demonstrate the sequence of events in the story modelling a story grammar using the pictograms featured in this chapter.
- Students are then to create their own pictogram using the stick figures in this section as a guide, but are encouraged to create their own figures. Remember to draw arrows to represent the flow of time and to connect of events from the story.
- Students then narrate the story using their pictograms to aid their recollection of the events from the story.

## Completed Story Map *Example*



