

We've explored...

the gingerbread Man

How one setting brought the traditional tale to life for its children. **Annette Rawstrone** reports

Oh no! I've come into nursery today and found this terrible mess. There is flour everywhere and the room smells like ginger. Does anyone know what has happened?' asked nursery teacher Heather Adamson as she turned to children and parents at Kingsley Community School in Toxteth, Liverpool for their help in solving the messy mystery.

'We aim to create awe and wonder to encourage our children to develop their language and problem-solving skills and also encourage parents to be engaged in their children's learning as much as possible,' explains Ms Adamson on behalf of the nursery team.

She sent the message along with photos of the chaos she had 'found' to the parents for them to discuss with their children before attending nursery the following day.

The classroom floor was strewn with baking tools, an apron and chef's hat, recipe book and lots of flour, some of which surrounded the suspicious outline of a man. There were also pieces of fluff and puddles of water.

'We have a high ratio of families with English as an additional language and a lot of them didn't already know the Gingerbread Man story, so they didn't automatically guess. Instead they speculated with their children. It was suggested that the cleaner had made the mess or that I had been baking cakes,' Ms Adamson says.

When the parents brought their children into nursery they were already excited to see what had happened in their classroom. A large photo of the mess was waiting for them outside their classroom to encourage parents to speak to their children about it more, with debate

that a dinosaur had done it and various teachers also getting blamed. When they entered the classroom the area was cordoned off and there were magnifying glasses and investigation books to encourage the children to explore further, which they did with enthusiasm.

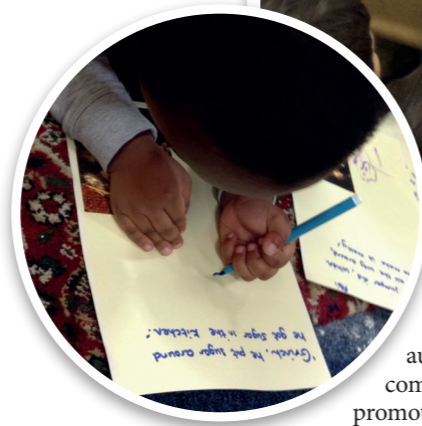
MAKING SALT DOUGH

The nursery has a playdough station and the nursery team had noted how engaged the children were with exploring the flour, salt and water. At the start of the school year they would make a gloopy mess, but by January their experimenting had resulted in them succeeding in making actual playdough.

'The children were really interested in making playdough so we wanted to enhance and expand their interest and turned to bakery because it involves all the senses and we knew it would engage the children,' Ms Adamson explains.

The traditional Gingerbread Man tale was chosen as a good way of introducing this. 'If we capture the children's attention then their

Acting out the story, baking and writing (inset)



The Gingerbread Man and volcano



imagination goes into overdrive and all their learning automatically comes after. We promote active learning through play,' she says.

Staff allowed the children to speculate and explore through the session alongside their play before reading the story of the Gingerbread Man to them at the end. Children were excited to link the story with what they had been investigating that day and realise that the mess must have been created by a fleeing gingerbread man; the fluff was even linked to the cunning fox at the end of the story.

RETELLING THE TALE

Over the next few weeks the nursery team continued to share the Gingerbread Man story with the nursery children, encouraging them to imitate the repetitive language used, and to use actions and sequence pictures to retell the tale. During weekly stay-and-play sessions Ms Adamson saw how parents were going on the learning journey alongside their children as they began to learn the story themselves and engage in it with their children.

During one session the nursery team decided to act out the story to the children. 'The children belly laughed when they saw the

gingerbread man run away from the little old lady,' she says. 'They loved it and started to act out the story themselves and take on the different roles. This led to them creating a theatre, mark-making programmes, gathering props, creating tickets and buying them with money and Numicons.'

Children did other activities linked to the Gingerbread Man such as developing both their numeracy and writing skills by using tweezers to catch pompom 'buttons' to put on gingerbread men. They increased the complexity as they raced against each other to complete the task. Children also set up their own bakery and made products out of salt dough which they sold to their friends.

GOING FURTHER

Once the children became very familiar with the story, staff introduced new elements to it. Instead of the old lady making a gingerbread man, she created a dinosaur and the character had to cross over a volcano instead of a river. They had fun changing the story and in one retelling the volcano erupted when the fox was taking the dinosaur over it.

Children were inspired to create volcanoes out of clay and Ms Adamson saw the opportunity to introduce more awe and wonder by making a volcano and causing it to erupt while the children were

having a singing session. 'They came running to find out what had happened and were keen to have a go themselves. They were amazed when it erupted again,' she says.

'We decided to experiment with the ingredients to see what made the mixture erupt. So the children split into groups and each combined baking soda with a different liquid. The children had to use their noses to work out what the special liquid was – vinegar, milk or water – and then predict whether it would make their volcano erupt by using smiley faces to say it would explode and unhappy faces to say it wouldn't.'

The children loved conducting the experiment, which has led the nursery team to do more science experiments and predictions with them, including turning a raw egg into a bouncy egg after reading Humpty Dumpty.

'The children's personal, social and emotional development rocketed during our Gingerbread Man-linked learning,' says Ms Adamson. 'Their level of enquiry was brilliant and we saw lots of examples of child-led learning, such as developing the theatre, which meant that children's confidence and emotional wellbeing went sky high. We have also noticed that communication skills have increased and that children are now playing with each other more and are developing ideas together.' ■

fiction



The Gingerbread Man: Ladybird First Favourite Tales

by Alan MacDonald

Follow the gingerbread man as he tries to escape all manner of hungry animals and people, told using funny rhythm and rhyme.



The Gingerbread Man 2: What Happened Later?

by Stephen Dixon

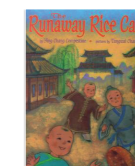
A fun, rhyming sequel following the fox on his journey back to the bakery. He has a newfound desire to bake, but what happens when he makes an oven full of little gingerbread men?



The Gingerbread Cowboy

by Janet Squires and Holly Berry

'Giddyup, giddyup as fast as you can. You can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man!' In this rodeo-romp, the Gingerbread Cowboy runs from the rancher, dashes past javelinas and giddyups by grazing cattle. But then he meets a coyote sleeping in the sun...



The Runaway Rice Cake

by Ying Chang Compestine and Tungwai Chau

It's Chinese New Year and the Chang Family has only enough rice flour to make one nián-gāo – a special New Year's rice cake – for the entire family to eat. Unfortunately this delicious little nián-gāo has other ideas as it comes to life and escapes.



The Gingerbread Girl

by Lisa Campbell Ernst

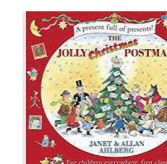
In this rewriting of the traditional tale, the lonely old couple decide to bake a girl who also runs off but, unlike her brother before her, she outsmarts the fox with her intelligence and cunning.



Gingerbread Friends

by Jan Brett

The Gingerbread Baby visits a bakery in order to make friends but they all ignore him. Discouraged, he's chased home by a long line of hungry creatures where he finds a wonderful surprise.



The Jolly Christmas Postman

by Allan and Janet

The postman has lots of festive treats on his round – including little mince pies at The Gingerbread Man's house.