

# A guide to Meta Skills Land

August 2024

A decorative horizontal band consisting of a series of diagonal stripes in purple, green, and blue colors.

**Making skills work for Scotland**

### Introduction

Storytelling is an important part of our human experience. Stories are all around us, and we use them to make sense of ourselves, the world and who we are in the world.<sup>1</sup> UNICEF state that “Science has shown us that life is a story for which the beginning sets the tone”.<sup>2</sup> 90% of brain growth happens in the first few years of life, where more than one million neural connections are made<sup>3</sup>. Developing brains need caring and responsive relationships, appropriate nutrition and a safe environment.<sup>4</sup>

Every child has the right to play<sup>5</sup> and play experiences can provide an interactive, safe, enabling environment that supports the development of essential human skills. These skills, also known as meta-skills, help us learn how to learn by supporting the process of acquiring and applying knowledge. They prepare us for the future by supporting us to manage ourselves, connect with others and innovate, so that we can navigate and thrive as a lifelong learner in an everchanging world.<sup>6</sup>

### What is Meta Skills Land?

Developed with the support of practitioners, and their learners, across Scotland, Meta Skills Land was created as a resource that could be used within a play-based context to support deeper learning about the concept of meta-skills, whilst offering opportunities to practice those skills.

Meta Skills Land represents every individual’s unique environment (their social environment, their physical environment and their experiences) where they use their 12 meta-skill helpers (12 characters, each representing a meta-skill) to support them in different situations. Within a narrative and storytelling approach to play, practitioners or children and young people can create their own stories, incorporating a combination of the 12 meta-skill characters.

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*“The magic of storytelling has the power to bring the curriculum to life, enabling vivid and embodied learning and understanding across all subject areas”.*

[Traditional Arts and Culture Scotland](#)<sup>7</sup>

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### What are the benefits of storytelling in the context of meta-skills?

The process of storytelling can help develop a deeper connection with the concept being learned and supports language acquisition.<sup>8</sup> Stories, songs and rhymes can also support children to process their experiences<sup>9</sup> and recognise and understand their own needs and the needs of others.<sup>10</sup>

When a young person is asked to create a story about a topic they are interested in, their **curiosity** is sparked. When researching for their story they will be required to **focus** and filter and sort information that they want to use. They use their **creativity** to generate ideas and **critical thinking** skills to evaluate them. They might use their **initiative** to make decisions or suggest options about the plot of the story. They could use their **feeling** and **integrity** skills to consider others’ thoughts and feelings and behave in an appropriate way when developing stories in groups. They could also consider their characters feelings and behaviours in the context of the plot they have created. **Collaborating** and **communicating** skills are required to listen to and share ideas, thoughts and opinions, to negotiate and

<sup>1</sup> <https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/supporting-early-years-children-tell-stories/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/early-childhood-development>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/start-for-life/early-learning-development/#:~:text=90%25%20of%20your%20child's%20brain,develop%20confidence%20and%20make%20friends.>

<sup>4</sup> [https://cde-lego-cms-prod.azureedge.net/media/wmtlme0/learning-through-play\\_web.pdf](https://cde-lego-cms-prod.azureedge.net/media/wmtlme0/learning-through-play_web.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/pgkgrzlf/skills-4-0\\_a-model-to-drive-scotlands-future.pdf](https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/pgkgrzlf/skills-4-0_a-model-to-drive-scotlands-future.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.storytellingforum.co.uk/storytelling-in-education/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/media/uwpg245f/literacy-english-pp.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Children-and-Young-Peoples-Views-of-Play-A-literature-review-to-inform-the-refresh-of-Scotlands-Play-Strategy-2024.pdf?plscmtl\\_id=24685](https://www.playscotland.org/resources/print/Children-and-Young-Peoples-Views-of-Play-A-literature-review-to-inform-the-refresh-of-Scotlands-Play-Strategy-2024.pdf?plscmtl_id=24685)

<sup>10</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf>

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agree next steps. **Leadership** skills help ensure that everyone is heard and motivated. Based on research or the opinions of the group, they might need to **adapt** their thinking or show how their characters adapt in a plot twist. Their **sense-making** skills support them to structure their story into beginning, middle and end.

A combination of meta-skills could be practiced throughout the process of the creation of the story and the storytelling approach, whilst they are also developing their understanding of the concept of meta-skills by considering the role of the characters.

## **Resources to support practitioners to use the Meta Skills Land characters**

The National Literacy Trust recommends that there are a variety of different ways to approach storytelling in practice, including the use of resources such as storytelling starters, puppets and storytelling dice.<sup>11</sup>

Using research, and feedback from early years and primary practitioners across Scotland, we have developed resources to support practitioners to incorporate the Meta Skills Land characters into their practice.

To support awareness and understanding of the characters and their associated meta-skill, we have developed a suite of [posters](#). These posters can be displayed in classrooms and referred to when reflecting on skills development.

We have also created a suite of [example poems](#) including:

- Introduction
- Self-management
- Social intelligence
- Innovation
- Reflection

These poems could be used, as one poem or separately, to position and introduce Meta Skills Land and the characters in each theme.

We have also created [character dice](#). These could be used by young people to:

- Choose what characters will be involved in their story.
- Reflect on/tell a story about how they have used that meta-skill that day.

The meta-skills character dice can also be used in combination with any other storytelling dice practitioners use to determine settings, words and props.

[Finger Puppets](#) can be used to bring stories to life:

- Practitioners could use the puppets when reading stories to reflect on the skills being used by different characters.
- Practitioners could connect the meta-skill characters to other characters they use in their practice, for example characters for the SHANARRI indicators.
- Young people could use the puppets to act out their own stories, live or creating digital content.

There are a variety of different activities that puppets could be used for. For example:

- The practitioner or young person describing the character and the rest of the class guessing who the character is.
- Role playing activities. For example, the character puppet for Feeling Felix could be used to explore others' perspectives and the character puppet for Integrity Imani could be used to explore rules that keep us safe when playing outdoors.

Meta Skills Land [character icons](#) have also been developed and can be used by practitioners:

- Within presentations
- To create stickers

<sup>11</sup> National Literacy Trust (2020) Supporting early years children to tell stories

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[Colouring in worksheets](#) have also been created to allow learners to customise the characters.

We will continue to work with practitioners and key partners to develop further resources to support practitioners to embed meta-skills in their classroom practice.

This approach is not mandatory. These resources are provided for those who would like support, ideas or inspiration as they develop their own approach to embedding meta-skills.

## The twelve Meta Skills Land characters



### Self-management

- Focusing Fergus
- Integrity Imani
- Adapting Aleksander
- Initiative Ivy

### Social intelligence

- Communicating Cate
- Feeling Felix
- Collaborating Cora
- Leading Li

### Innovation

- Curiosity Carlos
- Sense-making Samira
- Creativity Cassidy
- Critical thinking Chris