



The Fire Monster

'There is a monster in the fire!' *Max*
'Sometimes monsters eat babies' *Archie*

'The fire monster is a rainbow who keeps us warm' *Etta*

'A naughty fire!' *Milla*
This is a bad fire, as scary as the dark *Etta*

'A tiny baby is hiding from the fire' *Leo*

'The good fire strokes the babies, then the babies
stay with the good fire forever' *Etta*



Each year Reflections has a nursery-wide focus on a language of expression and from September 2014 to August 2015 the focus was *Storying* – the use of narrative in children's everyday play and investigation.

We listened for the children's stories in many environments and at all times of their nursery day. We heard stories in the garden, in the forest, under tables, behind doors, at mealtimes, in the middle of fast dramatic play, first thing in the morning, at the end of the day.

We scribed, recorded and offered back some of these stories, for the children to re-visit and develop. A story that began in the middle of a game grew again through modelling clay. An illustration of one story provoked the next stage of another. *The Fire Monster* was a story that emerged over many months and began with one child, but in the end has become part of our collective nursery mythology.

Monsters were already in the two year olds' minds at the beginning of our *Storying* focus as they investigated *magical transformations* and things getting '*bigger and bigger*'. But when Max said, 'There's a monster in the fire!' a new idea was born. A group of children spent many days by the stove, feeding the fire with different 'food', wondering why it was sometimes very bright but other times hardly there at all. We offered dark paper, chalk pastels, paint, canvas, a place for drawing by the stove, other places in the Atelier and the main room to represent and explore the nature of The Fire Monster. And like a fire, the story grew.

The Fire Monster is big and small, dangerous and lovely, there and not there, clear and confusing. He has allowed two year old children to explore big oppositions and ideas, and to live with the contradictions. His story, a year later, is published and travelling the world. But it also lives in the stove, at Reflections Nursery, where it began.

