

## A Little Bit Of History

Storyteller and author Donald Davis says that, “A story is like a line, a wire between the teller and the listener. Both people hold each end of it, and the story walks on that wire between them.”

Oral storytelling is the relating of a tale through voice and gesture. It is not the same as reading a book or reciting a poem. Oral storytelling is more like a conversation. A storyteller creates a series of images. In response, audience members might sit up straight and look intently back at the teller. They might yawn and fidget in their seats. They might smile, laugh and say the words of a familiar story right outloud with the storyteller.

All these responses communicate what the audience is thinking, and the teller can adjust the pace and choice of a story in response. Storytelling is like a musical concert. When the concert is over, the music is only a memory. When a storytelling performance is over, the story is also a memory, but unlike a music concert or a play, storytelling occurs for a particular group, and stories can be adjusted and changed according to the needs of the moment.

## Why Tell Stories At School

**Storytelling sets a model for all oral communication.** It gives experience in listening and using gesture and voice.

**Telling stories is an excellent vehicle to encourage writing.** Speaking is easier for some, and the sharing of memories can spark new memories as students get ready to write.

**Listeners hear new vocabulary and language patterns through repeated sharing of stories.** Because a story is told eye to eye and ear to ear, an oral story can have a lasting impact on listeners.

**Studies show that stories are excellent vehicles for passing along factual information.** Cultures through time have been explaining the world as they know it through oral story. Stories place facts on a human level and give them a needed context.

**Helping children to become storytellers permits many children who don't excel at reading and writing to shine.** Going through the process of learning one story permits a student to feel the power of making that story their own.

## ♦ What You Can Do To Extend Storytelling Into The Curriculum....

## Telling and Writing In The Classroom

This list of lesson ideas encourages students to do some oral experimentation before they write. You can start with an exploration of a one of the types of tale which stem from the oral tradition. (see below) Familiarize your class and yourself with the characteristics of the genre, then, with the children, write or tell some stories of your own.

- ◆ Choose a type of tale and find as many examples as you can of that type (circle stories, chain stories, fables, ghost stories, scary stories, fairy tales, tall tales, pourquoi stories, myths, legends and jokes are all story types which are told best in the oral tradition- see Handbook for Storytellers cited in the bibliography.) Get lots of books within the genre you chose. Display them, tell them, read them and have them there for the children to read to themselves and each other.
- ◆ Discuss the stories. Find similarities and differences.
- ◆ Choose a few tales and compare them. Write the plot patterns on the board.
- ◆ Brainstorm a class version of the plot pattern which emerges
- ◆ Divide the students into groups of three. Give each group ten minutes to brainstorm their own version of the story. Students must use the main elements of the story and make creative alterations. Keep to the time limit to keep students on track.
- ◆ Appoint a teller from each small group to share the new stories. Using the same elements, different stories will emerge.
- ◆ Have the small groups identify two things they like about their story and two things they might like to change.
- ◆ When the stories start to take shape, encourage the students to write them as a group or individually. Have the students practice their stories aloud in small groups and make further oral revisions.
- ◆ If they are able, ask them to write the full narrative.
- ◆ Prepare the written version as a polished product.
- ◆ Publish the stories in some way. Tell them to students in the lower grades. Read them aloud to another class. Publish them in a class book.

Adapted from *Tales As Tools: The Power of Story in the Classroom* by Sheila Dailey. Published by the National Storytelling Association.

## Listening

Listening is an important part of storytelling. Television and video games provide such a barrage of sound and images that they don't encourage good concentration. Here are a few ideas which can help encourage good listening.

- ◆ Play the telephone game. Have children count out in groups of three. "1,2,3, 1,2, 3" and so on assuming a group of 24. Have the children line up in three lines of eight. Whisper a short message to the child who is first in line. Ask him or her to pass that material down the line. Ask the last child in line to repeat outloud what was said. Compare it to the first. The exercise begins with the counting. As you do this exercise, children should call out their number more accurately and whisper the message they heard as well.
- ◆ Play "find my toy or object" One child describes an object. A volunteer finds the object described.
- ◆ Tell a story and encourage children to draw a picture of the characters or a scene.
- ◆ Give a series of instructions and increase the difficulty as you go.
- ◆ Play a tape of familiar sounds. How many can you identify?
- ◆ If a story contains a repetitive rhyme, encourage children to join in.
- ◆ Take a listening walk. Walk around inside or outside the school and listen to all the sounds. Make a list.
- ◆ Read a short paragraph containing an idea which doesn't belong. Ask the children to identify it.
- ◆ Only say directions once. If repetition is needed, ask another student to repeat what was said.

**Happy telling, writing and listening! Sally Crandall, Storyteller**