

A TEACHERS' GUIDE TO STORYTELLING PERFORMANCES with NOA BAUM

Why Storytelling

Storytelling can be a wonderful teaching tool: as a *folk art* it is accessible to all ages and abilities and is especially suited for student exploration. No props required other than the imagination and the power of listening and speaking. It can remind children in a nurturing way that spoken words are powerful and listening is important. Storytelling creates a strong foundation for reading and writing: research has shown that visualization is fundamental to acquiring reading and writing skills. When we tell stories we are engaged in the act of imagining and visualizing together.

Storytelling

- ◆ Develops listening skills and the ability to concentrate.
- ◆ Promotes the development of language skills, self-expression and communication.
- ◆ Encourages and deepens the use of the imagination.
- ◆ Allows for person-to-person interaction and provides opportunity for group participation.
- ◆ Opens doors to cultural and inter-cultural knowledge.
- ◆ Ensures wholesome fun and enjoyment.

PRE- PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

Storytelling: The Oral Tradition

For many thousands of years, long before there were written words – people told stories. Stories were part of the life fabric of the whole community, not just for kids!

Storytelling is one of the most basic and powerful of human experiences, as essential as food and shelter; it nourishes the deepest roots of heart and mind.

Stories pass on values, make sense of the world around us, heal and entertain.

Stories survived for thousands of years before books because people heard them and passed on what they heard. We call this way of passing on stories – The Oral Tradition. There were also special people who worked especially hard to listen and remember and pass the stories on. They were the elders, the spiritual leaders, the bards, the poets, and the storytellers.

The following suggested activities could be used as preparation before the assembly to illustrate and experience the meaning of the oral tradition:

- ◆ With closed eyes (or head lowered on table), in complete silence, listen for 2 minutes. Encourage students to name everything they heard, inside and outside sounds.
- ◆ Discuss with students what makes a good listener. Make a list of the suggestions on the board.
- ◆ In pairs: ask one student to tell about their weekend or special vacation. Ask the listening partner to offer encouragement to the speaker by showing in non-verbal ways with their eyes, facial expression and body stance that they are listening. When the speaker is done, change roles, the listener become the speaker. After each told their story the partner tells the story they heard to a small group or the entire class.
- ◆ Ask students to talk about their listening experience – did they pay complete attention to the speaker or did they notice their mind wandering to other thoughts. Can they examine other times when they are listening - what does their mind do? What happens when they're completely concentrating? Only the student can speak about his/her listening patterns.
- ◆ Discuss the partner-telling experience: what did you notice about the re-telling of the story you heard? Do we repeat the exact same words we heard or do we create our own?

Storytelling: An Interactive Event

The appeal of a story is universal. We listen out of curiosity wanting to know what happened, to whom, when, where, how and why and what happened next...

We listen, but actually, we see story. We see places and people in the movie of our mind. A good story stays with us in our hearts through the pictures we created with our imagination, in our mind. Without a listener to imagine the pictures - there is no story. During the storytelling performance students are invited to notice the pictures that are formed in their minds as they listen.

PERFORMANCE FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES:

- ◆ Invite students to share a favorite moment, part or story from the assembly.
- ◆ Discuss what they noticed about their listening. What “pictures” or images do they remember? Have students write and/or draw the images that stayed with them from any chosen story they heard in the assembly.
- ◆ Story circle - Recall: Traditional storytelling means telling the story in your own words from your mind’s eye memory. This is knowing the story “by heart”. Choose a story they heard in the assembly (or any other story you’ve read to them). Have students sit together in a circle. Go around the circle: the first person starts telling the story in their words. At a certain point, give a signal (bell, clap, chime, etc.), the next person in the circle must continue from the same place. No one is allowed to speak unless it’s your turn. No one is allowed to correct anyone else. If someone forgot an essential part – you must find a way to add it in when it’s your turn. If the story ends before everyone in the circle had a chance – start it again.

Tell-able-Tales

Tell-able-Tales are stories that have been told and shaped by generations of storytellers’ tongues. There are several basic kinds of tell-able-tales:

- Fairytale: The characters are capable of magical deeds.
 - Folktale: A story that arose from, and passed down among the common people.
 - Fable: A story told to teach a lesson, often with talking animals.
 - Myth: A story that explains the origins of a people, their customs or a nature phenomenon.
 - Legend: a story that occurred in the past and believed to have a historical basis though significantly embellished through generations of retelling.
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- ◆ Invite students share stories that they know that may fit the idea of a Tell-able-Tale. (Cinderella; Three Little Pigs; Three Billy Goats Gruff, Little Gingerbread Man, etc.) Older students can go to the library and research some stories (sections 398 & 398.2; 292-93 and 970 – Indian legends and myths).

- ◆ Each student needs to read a selected story aloud 5 times, then close the book and try to tell it in his or her own words to a partner. Tell it in your own way. No two storytellers are alike!
- ◆ Invite students to collect a folktale from their family or their family's ethnic tradition, and tell the story in small groups and/or in front of the class.

SUGGESTED READING – STUDENTS:

- Cole, Joanna.** Best-Loved Folktales of the World. Doubleday. 1983.
- Hamilton, Virginia.** In the Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World. 1988.
- Minard, Rosemary.** Womenfolk and Fairy Tales: Houghton. 1975.
- MacDonald, Margaret Read.** - Peace Tales - world folktales to talk about. Hamden: Linnet Books. 1992.
- Yolen, Jane.** Favorite Folktales from around the World. 1986.

SUGGESTED READING – TEACHERS:

- Harrison, Annette.** Easy-to-tell Stories for Young Children. National Storytelling Press. 1992.
- MacDonald, Margaret Read.**
The Storyteller's Start-Up Book. August House. 1993.
Twenty Tellable Tales - Audience Participation Folktales for the Beginning Storyteller.
 The H.W. Wilson Company. 1986.
Peace Tales - world folktales to talk about. Hamden: Linnet Books. 1992.
- Davis, Donald.** Telling your own Stories. Little rock: August House. 1993.
- Gersie, Alida.** Earthtales - Storytelling in Times of Change. London: Green Print. 1992.
- Rietz, Norma J. Livo and Sandra A.** Storytelling Folklore Sourcebook: Libraries Unlimited.
- Vos, Gail de.** Storytelling for young adults: Techniques and Treasury. Teacher Ideas Press. 1991.
- Yolen, Jane.** Favorite Folktales from around the World. 1986.

“Whenever stories are told, stillness falls. We cease our restless frittering. During these times of concentrated devotion to alternative realms we may reconnect with the power of creation. We rest momentarily. Through such resting we are renewed. Renewal inspires the courage to change.”

Alida Gersie, *“Earth Tales – Storytelling in Times of Change”*