

Storytelling Basics

Presented by Professional Storyteller & Teaching Artist

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How to Introduce Storytelling to your Theatre Class

ACTIVITIES

Anybody Who... (aka The Cold Wind Blows)

This is a Storytelling twist on a classic Theatre game. Eliminate any chairs or desks that do not have students sitting in them. (This works best as a circle activity, but I have also done it with desks – they just have to be more careful with desks in the way.) There should be one fewer chair than participants. Establish ground rules based on your students, reminding them to show respect to others and others' property while playing.

The person without a chair stands in the middle/front and says, “Anyone who...” followed by something that is true for them. If that statement is true for others in the room, they will stand up and find a new spot. The person who is left standing must tell a 30-60 second story about a *specific time* they can remember that demonstrates the previous statement. When finished with the short story, that student will give another “Anyone who...” statement. Play continues like this for as long as you want.

Warning: I have never played this game with people who didn't like it. Kids always want to play more. It is a great way to get them thinking about stories, sharing short stories, and connecting with each other. Give older/more experienced students the challenge of only saying statements about something that happened in one specific moment (e.g., “Anyone who has ever been camping in a National Park” rather than “Anyone who likes camping”).

After the game, invite students to make note of any of their own stories that came up (out loud or in their minds) during the game.

Personal Story Lists (Grades 3+)

Provide students with several prompts to inspire stories. Have them quickly write down a few words to remember those stories. Wait at least 30 seconds between prompts.

Sample questions:

What stories or characters were your favorite when you were three-years-old? Five? Eight? Ten? Why?

Where do you love/hate to visit? Why?

List times when:

You made the biggest mess ever.

You had to clean up after someone else.

You got in trouble for something you didn't do.

You should have gotten in trouble, but didn't.

You played a trick on someone or had a trick played on you.

You thought you were going to die.

You were the hero.

You were proud of someone.

You taught someone something. What did you teach them?

You were terrified.

You were overjoyed.

You knew you belonged somewhere.

Ask each student to choose a story seed he/she would like to expand. Make sure each story has a problem and a resolution, and is set in a specific time and place. If they love the cabin, don't have them simply explain why they love their cabin, ask them to tell the story of one particular time when they fell even more deeply in love with their cabin. If the story hasn't ended yet, it is not time to tell it just yet.

Storyboarding Any Story (Grades K+)

Use one of the attached storyboards, or invite students to fold a piece of paper in half each way to create a simple four-part storyboard. Number the squares 1-4; then title and explain each section.

1. Beginning: What characters/location/situation/problem does the audience need to know to start this story?
2. Rising Action: What makes the story more exciting? If the problem has not been introduced yet, what is the problem? How does the character try to solve the problem, or what makes the problem worse?
3. Climax: This is the most exciting part of the story. The character is trying desperately to solve the problem and either succeeds or fails.
4. End/Resolution: What has changed? What did the character learn? What does the audience need to know to complete the story?

Draw pictures to tell the story in the storyboard squares in this order:

Beginning

End

Climax

Rising Action

How does the character in the beginning get to the end? There may be details that are not important to the story. Don't worry about those.

Concentrate on getting the story to its final destination.

Once the storyboard is filled in, go back and add any needed details.

Demonstrate the storyboard at least once before asking the students to create their own.

If a story has too many details to make the story coherent in four boxes, allow them to use 6 or 8 boxes. Do this with caution; many times a complex story can still be summed up in 4-6 boxes. There are some very long and complicated folk/fairy tales that will require 6-8 boxes.

Telling the Story

Once students have remembered the details of the story, they will be ready to tell it. Invite them to find a partner and take 2-5 minutes each to tell their stories. Invite the listener to say two things they liked about the story. (Model giving positive feedback.) Once the students have told their stories a few times to different partners, invite some volunteers to share their stories with the class or begin writing their stories. Some students will need to practice telling the story to gradually bigger and bigger groups. Follow the lead of your students.

STORY FEEDBACK/COACHING MODEL

The teller is ALWAYS in charge, and can choose to go as far down the line as (s)he wants.

1. Active Listening (No feedback is given; teller simply tells story.)

2. Appreciations/Praise: Audience members share only specific things they liked, e.g., "Whenever the bear was in the story, your voice became deeper, and your back slumped down. I could always tell when the bear was talking." Or "I loved how big your eyes got when your mom caught you!"

3. Questions from the Teller: The teller can ask any questions they want. Audience members may only respond to the specific question asked. Sample questions: "Could you follow the plot of the story?" "I've been working on _____, did you notice this in the story? If so, where? If not, where would you have liked to see it?"

4. Questions for the Teller: Listeners may ask questions of the teller. They can clarify the story or characters, the teller's intentions, etc., and can be open-ended or close-ended.

Sample Questions: "Why did you choose to tell this story?"

"How old is the little girl in the story?"

"How do you think the wolf felt after knocking down the first house?"

5. Suggestions: Suggestions should be positive. Listeners should start their suggestions with I statements (e.g., "I felt confused when..." or "I wonder..."). The teller is ultimately in control of her/his story, and can choose to accept or reject suggestions later. Sample suggestions:
"I couldn't tell the difference between the monkey and dog characters."
"I wonder if it would help me understand the story better if you told this story from one character's point of view?"

Note: Variations of this coaching model have been attributed to Liz Lerman (Critical Response Process) and Doug Lipman (The Storytelling Coach). I did not create this model, it was passed down to me, and I modify it as needed for different classrooms. This is the format I am currently using.

A Closing Note:

Please have fun with Storytelling! Modify the activities and feedback model to meet your needs. Don't be surprised if one story activity gets students so excited that it naturally leads to another. Please contact me if you have any questions or if I can be of service to you in any way. Thank you for taking the time to learn more about using story in your classroom. Please let me know how it benefits you and your students.

Sincerely,
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Suggested Resources

Teaching Students to Tell

Hamilton, Martha and Mitch Weiss. *Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom*. Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc., 2005.

Sima, Judy and Kevin Cordi. *Raising Voices: Creating Youth Storytelling Groups and Troupes*. Libraries Unlimited, 2003.

Story Collections (Mostly Folklore)

Cole, Joanna. *Best-Loved Folktales of the World*. Anchor, 1983.

De Vos, Gail. *Storytelling for Young Adults: A Guide to Tales for Teens*. Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 2003.

Forest, Heather. *Wisdom Tales from Around the World*. August House, 1996.

Holt, David and Bill Mooney.

Ready-to-Tell Tales. August House, 1994.

More Ready-to-Tell Tales from Around the World. August House, 2000.

MacDonald, Margaret Read.

Earth Care: World Folktales to Talk About. Linnet Books, 1999.

Peace Tales: World Folktales to Talk About. Linnet Books, 1992.

Three Minute Tales: Stories from Around the World to Tell or Read When Time is Short. August House, 2004.

Five Minute Tales: More Stories to Read and Tell When Time is Short. August House, 2007.

McCarthy, Tara. *Multicultural Fables and Fairy Tales: Stories and Activities to Promote Literacy and Cultural Awareness*. Scholastic Inc., 1992.

Norfolk, Bobby and Sherry. *The Moral of the Story: Folktales for Character Development*. August House, 1999.

Yolen, Jane.

Favorite Folktales from Around the World. Pantheon Books, 1986.

Not One Damsel in Distress: World Folktales for Strong Girls. Silver Whistle/Harcourt, Inc., 2000.

Beginning Storytelling Guides

MacDonald, Margaret Read. *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book: Finding, Learning, Performing, and Using Folktales*. August House, 1993.

Rydell, Katy, ed. *A Beginner's Guide to Storytelling*. National Storytelling Press, 2003.

Coaching

Lipman, Doug. *The Storytelling Coach: How to Listen, Praise, and Bring Out People's Best*. August House, 1995.

Brain Research

Haven, Kendall. *Story Proof: The Science Behind the Startling Power of Story*. Libraries Unlimited, 2007.

Websites

Catch the Story Bug! Karen Chase, Storyteller and Web Researcher. (So many stories, articles, and links...) www.storybug.net

National Storytelling Network. www.storynet.org

Rippling Stories. Storyteller and Teaching Artist Katie Knutson.

www.ripplingstories.com

Sur La Lune Fairytales. (story collections with annotations)

www.surlalunefairytales.com

Storytelling in Schools. (Advocacy for the Effectiveness of Storytelling in Schools) www.storynet-advocacy.org/edu

World of Tales: Stories for Children, Folktales, Fairy Tales, and Fables from Around the World. www.worldoftales.com