

Storytelling: Building Comprehension Through Oral Narrative

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This workshop was developed in association with the
John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Workshop

This workshop is designed to help teachers become storytellers. In order to implement arts integration strategies in oral narrative, teachers must first become competent tellers themselves. Fortunately, this is not too difficult, as storytelling is a very accessible art form. This workshop is primarily for teachers who work with students in grades K-2.

We will briefly explore the connections between oral storytelling and developing emerging readers' abilities to use reading comprehension strategies. Stories can teach and reinforce reading comprehension approaches before students acquire decoding skills.

Rationale

Storytelling is a natural way for teacher to build engagement, reinforce comprehension strategies to students who have not yet mastered decoding, and explore cultures from around the world. The connections between listening skills and reading comprehension skills are deep and direct. Storytelling draws on different learning styles and engages students in active participation.

In addition, reports such as *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* provide evidence that arts experiences engage the hearts, bodies, and minds of students in learning that is meaningful and relevant to their lives. Brain research also supports the role of storytelling in creating lasting learning connections in students' lives.

Workshop Objectives

In this workshop, participants will:

- know how to prepare to tell a story to students;
- know how to tell three folktales to students;
- be able to explore ways to use voice, body, and imagination to become better storytellers;
- appreciate connections between oral narrative and common reading comprehension skills
- appreciate connections between oral/kinesthetic communication and reading comprehension strategies.

Workshop Overview

We will focus on building storytelling skills in teachers, including learning sequences and employing elements of the storytelling art form. We will work in our large group, in small groups, and as individuals to learn to tell stories. The repetition of activities through different stories is a deliberate model for how we all learn and build confidence.

Safety

In order to learn, we must risk. To learn in a group, students must respect each other's risks, allow for mistakes, and be gentle with each other's feelings. No one will be required to tell a story in front of the whole group.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

Grade 2 Standards

(Similar standards for grades 1 and 3 can be found at <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>)

Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and Collaboration

SL.2.2: Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

SL.2.4: Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

Reading: Literature

Key Ideas and Details

RL.2.2: Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.

Craft and Structure

RL 2.6: Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

RL.2.9: Compare and contrast stories in the same genre.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

RL.2.10 Read and comprehend literature, including stories and poetry, in the grades 2-3 text complexity band proficiently.

Virginia English Language Standards of Learning

Grade 2 Standards

- 2.1 The student will demonstrate an understanding of oral language structure.
 - b) Create and participate in oral dramatic activities.

- 2.3 The student will use oral communication skills.
 - a) Use oral language for different purposes: to inform, to persuade, to entertain, to clarify, and to respond.
 - b) Share stories or information orally with an audience.
 - c) Participate as a contributor and leader in a group.
 - d) Retell information shared by others.

- 2.8 The student will read and demonstrate comprehension of fictional texts.
 - b) Relate previous experiences to the main idea.
 - c) Ask and answer questions about what is read.
 - e) Describe characters, setting, and important events in fiction and poetry.
 - g) Identify the main idea.
 - h) Summarize stories and events with beginning, middle, and end in the correct sequence.

National Core Arts Standards: Theater

Grade 2 Standards

(Similar standards for grades 1 and 3 can be found at <http://nationalartsstandards.org/>)

Anchor Standard 4, Performing: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

TH: Pr4.1.2

- a. Interpret story elements in a guided drama experience (e.g., process drama, story drama, creative drama).
- b. Alter voice and body to expand and articulate nuances of a character in a guided drama experience.

Anchor Standard 5, Performing: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

TH: PR5.1.2

- a. Demonstrate the relationship between and among body, voice, and mind in a guided drama experience (e.g., process drama, story drama, creative drama).

Anchor Standard 6, Performing: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

TH: Pr6.1.2

Contribute to group guided drama experiences (e.g., process drama, story drama, creative drama) and informally share with peers.

The Kennedy Center's Definition for Arts Integration

**Arts Integration is
an **APPROACH** to **TEACHING**
in which students
construct and demonstrate
UNDERSTANDING
through an
ART FORM.**

**Students engage in a
CREATIVE PROCESS
which **CONNECTS**
an art form and another
subject area
and meets**

EVOLVING OBJECTIVES
in both.



Tools of Storytelling

Storytelling

Storytelling is the art of performing a story in one's own words from memory. It is not about memorizing word for word. Stories might come from folktales, fiction, or accounts of personal events. Storytellers use -

Voice



Body

Facial Expression
Gesture



Mind

Imagination
Memory
Concentration



Storytelling Warm-Ups

Purpose: To focus on voice, gesture, and facial expression as the outer, audience-perceivable techniques of storytelling. Storytellers also use imagination, concentration, and memory, although the audience doesn't directly perceive those elements. Audience participation can be a valuable tool, but we won't address it in this workshop. Props can be used as well, but, in this workshop, they are distracting from our focus and will not be used.

Following are activities to help teachers warm up bodies, voices, and imaginations, in order to become more effective storytellers. These activities are also useful for working with students to introduce them to storytelling techniques as well as to involve them kinesthetically in the discussion following the stories. Feel free to adapt them to your specific students and situation.

Vocal Warm-Ups

Elements of Vocal Expression

Speed
Emotion
Pitch
Volume
Enunciation

Echo

This activity allows teachers to practice the elements of vocal expression. It also allows everyone to be easily included in an initial activity.

Have participants make a circle. Introduce or review the elements of vocal expression-- speed, pitch, and volume. One person in the group chooses a word and says it using one of three elements: speed, pitch, or volume. Everyone echoes the word and tone. The next person says a different word, again using one of the three elements. Everyone again echoes back the word and tone. Proceed around the circle having each person say a different word with the group echoing until everyone has had an opportunity.

Counting to Five

This activity helps teachers to imagine themselves in a particular situation as a way of eliciting verbal expression.

In a large group or in small groups of 4-6, have teachers make a circle. Have one person at a time count to five in different ways. Following are some ideas:

- talking over a cell phone that's breaking up
- counting someone "out" in the wrestling ring
- a toddler just learning to count
- counting birthday presents on the table for you

"What do you want to do?"

This activity allows teachers to connect emotions with a verbal statement.

In a large group or in small groups of 4-6 students, have teachers make a circle. Have each person say, "So, what are you going to do?" with a different emotion: scared, nervous, shy, cool, excited, angry, happy, jealous, flirtatious.

Body Warm-Ups: Gesture

Gesture Circle

The purpose of this activity is to introduce participants to gesture and to let them practice creating and imitating others' gestures.

1. Have the whole group create a circle.
2. Have one person speak an action line (or short sentence) and do a gesture that demonstrates it. For example: "He chopped down the tree," "She opened the door."
3. The rest of the group echoes back both the line and the gesture.
4. Next, go around the circle and have each person speak a different action line with a gesture that demonstrates it.
5. The whole class echoes back each person's line and gesture until everyone has shared.

Gesture is the limited use of the body to amplify telling. It's not acting out or performing the story. Some storytellers use gesture extensively, others use it very little. Gestures should seem natural and not distract from the telling.

"Mirror neurons" probably play a role in explaining why we respond to gesture. Mirror neurons fire when a person performs an action and when they observe another human perform that same action.

Body Warm-Ups: Facial Expression

Disconnecting Facial Expression and Vocal Expression

The purpose of this next activity is to introduce the concept of facial expression and its connection to emotion.

1. Have participants find a partner.
2. Tell participants to have one person say to their partner, “I’m so happy,” with an angry face.
3. Then have the same person try the opposite—say, “I’m so angry,” with a happy face.
4. Have participants switch roles so that both have a chance to participate.

Facial expression is connected to vocal expression. Both are connected to the emotion being expressed. Facial expression is a skill that can be developed, depending on the teller’s comfort level and skill.

Body Warm-Ups: Eye Contact

This exercise allows participants to experience directly the importance of eye contact in communication, and in storytelling in particular.

1. Working with partners, have one teacher in each pair talk for 30 seconds about any topic while their gaze wanders randomly around the room.
2. Then switch and let their partner do the same.
3. Have partners reflect quickly on how they felt as a talker and a listener in each exercise.

Hall of Mirrors

This activity allows teachers to create their own facial expressions and to mirror expressions of others as a way of expanding their repertoire of facial expressions.

1. In a large group or small groups of 4-6 make a circle.
2. One person begins by making an outrageous face and showing it to the group. No hands can be used.
3. The rest of the group mirrors back the expression.
4. Proceed around the group until everyone has a turn.

Eye contact is a critical skill in storytelling and
in conversation in general

Tip: If making an outrageous face while telling a story, make sure the audience has enough time to appreciate it.

Imagination Warm-Ups

The Mind's Eye

The purpose of this next activity is to encourage participants to create and notice sensory details in their imaginations.

1. Ask teachers to make one large circle.
2. Start by saying a phrase naming a situation. Phrases might include: “the king walked into the feast hall,” “it was quitting time at the car factory,” “the tiger prowled through the jungle,” “there was a traffic jam on Main Street.”
3. Ask participants to respond by thinking of sensory details for the situation named. Invite student volunteers to share some of their sensory details from their imagination.
4. Repeat with different situations.
5. Have teachers work with a partner.
6. Start by saying a new phrase naming a situation.
7. Alternate providing sensory details to each other (as if making a list together) describing the situation as they imagine it.
8. Encourage teachers to bring in all of the senses: smell, sound, touch, and taste, as well as the visual.

Storytelling works in part because the imagination supplies images to make scenes and characters come alive.

Reflection Questions

1. When doing these activities with students, what adaptations might you make? What considerations would there be for your classrooms? Consider the physical set-up of the room, behavior management, adaptations, volume of the class, whether you have a second adult to model, managing student relationships, mixing up people.
2. How can we adapt these activities to students with special needs? To language learners?
3. In what way can these warm up activities help to build emotional competence?

Teacher as Storyteller Activity: “The Three Wishes”

Purpose of the Activity: For the workshop leader to model the process of telling a story and leading participants in an exploration of retelling the story using facial expression, gesture, voice, dialogue, and imagination (exploring sensory images).

“The Three Wishes”: A Story with Whole Group Discussion

1. Participants will hear the story of “The Three Wishes.”
2. Participants will explore the story through the following activities, with a final goal of sequencing the story as a group.

- **Determining Importance.**

In a large group, teachers will identify important parts of the story’s beginning, middle and end, and explain why each is essential to retelling the story. We will continue the discussion until all of the essential pieces have been identified.

Teachers will discuss one moment from each of the beginning, middle, and end parts in the story by responding to the following questions:

- Who is one of the characters in this part of the story?
- **Dialogue:** What is a sentence or question from this part of the story that you might use as a line of character dialogue in retelling it? *<have all teachers repeat the line of dialogue>*
- **Voice:** What vocal expression would you use as you retold the line of dialogue spoken by the character? How would this character say this line? *<have a few teachers share their interpretation>*
- **Facial Expression:**
 - What facial expression would you use for this character during this part in the story?
 - Is there another facial expression that you might use?
- **Gestures:** What gestures might you use for that character at this moment, whether as part of narration or dialogue?

- **Visualizing Sensory Images**

Continue discussing this same identified important part of the story by listing possible sensory details from the scene. Base responses on your own interpretation, not merely recall of how the storyteller used his or her voice, gestures, and facial expressions.

Describe a sensory detail from your imagining of this part of the story. The following questions may be included:

- What might you hear during this important part of the story?
- What might you smell?
- What might you taste?

3. Repeat the process above as needed.

4. In a large group take turns sequencing the story with each person saying one sentence at a time. Include both narrative and dialogue. The purpose here is mainly to recount the sequence of the story. It is not necessary to add storytelling techniques (voice, gesture, facial expression), although it does make it more fun (synthesis). (Teachers may use “I almost forgot to tell you” in order to backtrack and supply a forgotten detail if they need to.) The story may be ended simply by saying, “And that’s the story of...”

Telling A Story with Small Groups “The Turnip”

Purpose of the Activity: For the workshop leader to model telling a different story followed by questions focusing on storytelling skills that teachers will answer in small groups. Working in a small group will help each individual to explore storytelling skills in greater depth than a large group allows, and it will encourage a more detailed discussion and sharing of ideas.

1. The workshop leader tells the story of “The Turnip.”
 2. Workshop participants are divided into small groups of 4-5.
 3. Small groups answer the following questions:
4. Participants will explore the story through the following activities with a final goal of sequencing the story as a small group.
- **Determining Importance.**
In a small group, teachers will identify important parts of the story’s beginning, middle, and end, and explain why each is essential to retelling the story. We will continue the discussion until all of the essential pieces have been identified. Teachers will discuss one moment from each of the beginning, middle, and end parts in the story by responding to the following questions:
 - Who is one of the characters in this part of the story?
 - **Dialogue:** What is a sentence or question from this part of the story that you might use as a line of character dialogue in retelling it? *<have all teachers repeat the line of dialogue>*
 - **Voice:** What vocal expression would you use as you retold the line of dialogue spoken by the character? How would this character say this line? *<have a few teachers share their interpretation>*
 - **Facial Expression:**
 - What facial expression would you use for this character during this part in the story?
 - Is there another facial expression that you might use?
 - **Gestures:** What gestures might you use for that character at this moment, whether as part of narration or dialogue?

○ **Visualizing Sensory Images**

Continue discussing this same identified important part of the story by listing possible sensory details from the scene. Base responses on your own interpretation, not merely recall of how the storyteller used his or her voice, gestures, and facial expressions.

Describe a sensory detail from your imagining of this part of the story. The following questions may be included:

- What might you hear during this important part of the story?
- What might you smell?
- What might you taste?

5. Repeat the process above as needed.

4. In the small group take turns sequencing the story with each person saying one sentence at a time. Include both narrative and dialogue. The purpose here is to recount the sequence of the story but also to add storytelling techniques (voice, gesture, facial expression) where appropriate. (Teachers may use “I almost forgot to tell you” in order to backtrack and supply a forgotten detail if they need to.) The story may be ended simply by saying, “And that’s the story of...”

Reflection and Questions

1. How can issues of background knowledge be addressed in storytelling?
2. How would you use or adapt this approach for the grade level of your students?
3. How can these activities be adapted for students with special needs. For English Language Learners?

Selecting a Story

Considerations when Selecting a Story to Tell

- Length—not too long or too short
- Values—specific traits or characteristics to emphasize
- Connection to curriculum
- Personal connection—to students’ lives and interests
- Folktales
- Repetition
- Participation
- Cultural Focus
- Resources available—the kinds of books/ tapes/CDs, etc. available to search through
- A wide enough initial selection—looking at a variety of stories, rather than settling quickly
- Action, Drama, and Suspense—keeps the story moving and the students involved.
- Characters—that are sympathetic or interesting
- Simplicity—not too complex or difficult to remember
- Appropriateness for listeners—age appropriate
- Good Ending—a satisfying sense of completion

Rationale for Folktales

1. Folktales have been told for thousands of years.
2. They were originally told in oral form, although now we mostly experience them through written texts.
3. Because of their origins in oral tradition, they are already “smoothed out” for telling (simple, focused, logically sequential).
4. In general, students are more successful at listening to folktales than to contemporary, family, or original stories.

First Rule of Storytelling: It’s important to tell only stories that you like.

Preparing for Classroom Storytelling

Purpose of the Activity: For workshop participants to learn how to tell a story from text using the elements of storytelling—vocal expression, gesture, facial expression, and imagination.

A. Learning a Story

You will receive one of the folktales in the book – “Stone Soup,” page 34, or “How Rabbit Lost His Tail,” page 51. In your small group, read it through twice and summarize the plot in 4-5 sentences.

For example, a summary of “The Turnip” might be:

“There were two brothers, one rich and one poor. The poor one grew a giant turnip, and decided to give it to the king. He received great riches in return. His rich brother, hoping for a similar reward, gave the king all of his wealth. In return, the king gave this second brother the turnip.”

B. Looking deeper

1. **Focus on Storytelling Tools.** In your small group, each person will have a turn doing the tasks listed below. During the process, concentrate on using the storytelling tools of voice, gesture, and facial expressions. This is an opportunity to practice developing your personal storytelling skills using the tools.

2. **Beginning Middle and End.** Identify essential moments in the story’s beginning middle and end.

3. **Answer Questions about Each Part of the Story.** Focus on the first part of the story (as identified in the story sequence above) and answer the following questions:

- What is a sensory detail from that part of the story? (sensory details)
- What gesture might you use in telling this part of the story?
- How might you speak a line of dialogue for this character in that part of the story? (sensory images and inference)
- What facial expression might you use for this character in that part of the story. (inference, sensory images)
- What gesture might you include in the *narration* of the story?

Continue for the middle and end of the story.

4. **Discuss Schema Connections.** Have each person in the group answer the following questions:

- What is a connection between the story and your life?
- What is another story this story reminds you of?
- Does this story remind you of events or ideas out in the world?

4. Tell the Story by Having Each Person Say One Sentence of the Story. Have your small group sit in a circle. Tell the story in sequence by having one person say one line at a time, incorporating face, voice, and gesture into each line. (synthesis)

5. Individual Practice. Tell the story by yourself to no one. Practice using all of the tools we have explored in this telling – voice, face, gesture, imagination. It may be helpful to memorize the first and last line of the story, as well as one or two essential lines of dialogue or narration.

6. Tell Your Story to a Partner. Find a partner who has a different story. Tell your story to your partner incorporating gesture, facial expressions, and voice. As you are telling, stand at least 4 feet away so there is space between the teller and listener to create a more formal performance approach.

Second Rule of Storytelling:
Do not begin until your audience is ready.

Reading Comprehension Strategies.

Reading Comprehension Strategies are a common way to approach instruction at levels of literacy throughout elementary school. Students are often taught the names and approaches explicitly. Some of these strategies include.

1. Visualizing Sensory Details
2. Inference
3. Schema
4. Identifying Beginning, Middle, and End.
5. Determining Importance

Storytelling can help students to engage with these strategies before they are able to decode text well. Through active inquiry, students can build their own patterns of learning and relationship to text to facilitate deeper comprehension.

Reflection and Questions

1. Let's review the process of the workshop. How did the steps of this process help you to learn how to tell a story?
2. Let's look at common reading comprehension strategies. How can storytelling help students engage with these strategies even though the text is spoken, not read?

Closure

- A. Overview of resources listed in the workshop packet.
- B. How will you tell a story to students in the next three days? Can you tell three times to three different groups?

Selected Bibliography

Reading Comprehension Resources

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Writing and Storytelling

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- How and Why Stories*. Little Rock, Arkansas: August House, 1996.
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- Stotts, Stuart and Elizabeth Matson. *The Bookcase Ghost: A Storyteller's Collection of Wisconsin Ghost Stories*. Mt. Horeb, WI: Midwest Traditions, 1997.
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Online Resources

Storytelling Workshop with Gerald Fierst

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/storyteller/meet.htm>

Storyteller.net <http://www.storyteller.net/>

Story Arts Online <http://www.storyarts.org/>

Handbook for Storytellers

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/storyhandbook.htm>

National Center for Family Literacy www.famlit.org

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement

www.Ciera.org/

Search for folktales by theme. <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html>

http://directory.google.com/Top/Kids_and_Teens/School_Time/English/Literature/Myths_and_Folktales/

Arts Integration...Online!

<http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/content/arts-integration>

Visit this site to explore:

The **WHAT** and **WHY** of arts integration

Examine the thinking behind the Kennedy Center's definition for arts integration, explore various viewpoints about the value of arts integration for teaching and learning, and access a wide range of research and publications about arts integration.

Examples of **ARTS INTEGRATION in PRACTICE**

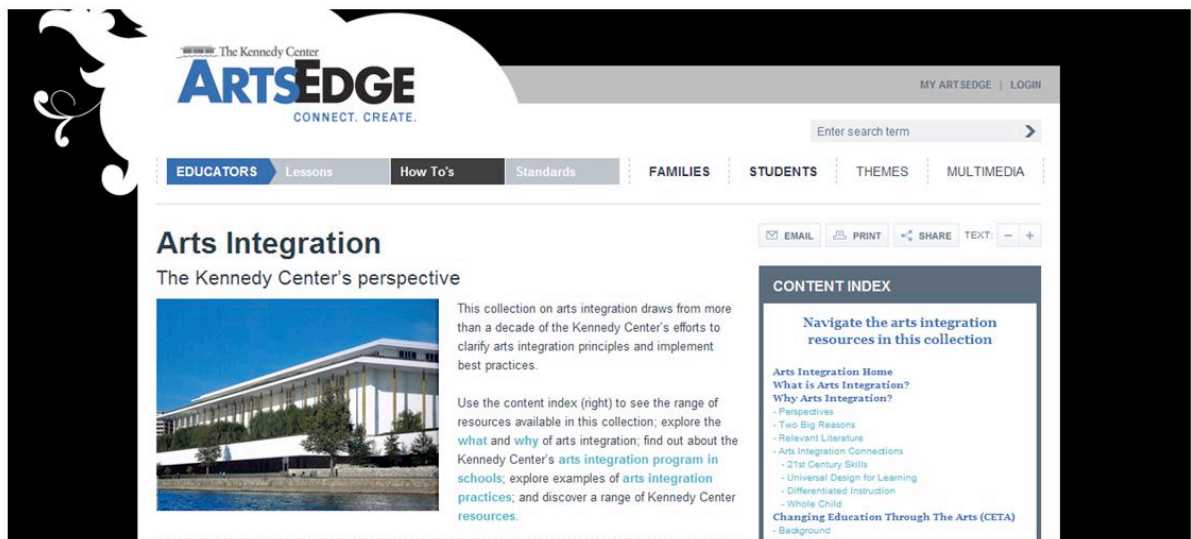
Explore examples of documentation of student learning through the arts and listen to Kennedy Center Teaching Artists describe powerful curriculum connections.

The Kennedy Center's **ARTS INTEGRATION PROGRAM in SCHOOLS**

Learn about the Kennedy Center's Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA) program and explore what you would see inside a CETA school.

A range of arts integration **RESOURCES**

Check out the Kennedy Center's professional learning opportunities for teachers, teaching artists, and arts organizations. Find out how to get involved in its national networks.



The screenshot shows the ArtsEdge website interface. At the top left is the Kennedy Center logo with the tagline 'CONNECT. CREATE.'. The main header includes the 'ARTSEGE' logo and a search bar. Below the header are navigation tabs for 'EDUCATORS', 'FAMILIES', 'STUDENTS', and 'THEMES'. The 'EDUCATORS' tab is active, showing sub-tabs for 'Lessons', 'How To's', and 'Standards'. The main content area is titled 'Arts Integration' and features a photograph of a modern building. To the right of the photo is a 'CONTENT INDEX' section with a list of resources including 'Arts Integration Home', 'What is Arts Integration?', 'Why Arts Integration?', 'Perspectives', 'Two Big Reasons', 'Relevant Literature', 'Arts Integration Connections', '21st Century Skills', 'Universal Design for Learning', 'Differentiated Instruction', 'Whole Child', 'Changing Education Through The Arts (CETA)', 'Background', and 'Key Features'.

The Kennedy Center



Storytelling Workshop with Stuart Stotts
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FIVE LESSON PLAN

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|---------|
| Day 1 20 min. total | Teacher tells first story. Teacher works with students to identify storytelling tools of voice, face, gesture, imagination. Students do initial storytelling warm-ups. | 15 min. |
| | Reflection – How is listening to a story different from having a story read to you? Do you use storytelling tools in your own life? | 5 min. |
| Day 2 20 min. total | Teacher tells second story. Reexamines storytelling tools. Has students identify places in teacher’s telling where he or she used the storytelling tools. Students work in whole group to use storytelling tools to engage with the story. | 15 min. |
| | Reflection – Have you noticed others using storytelling tools as they talk? What happens when you engage with the story by imagining and using storytelling tools together? | 5 min. |
| Day 3 25 min. total | Teacher retells one of the previous stories. Students engage through storytelling tools. In a large group, students retell the story, striving for the correct sequence and addition of storytelling tools. | 20 min. |
| | Reflection – What helps you remember a story? What happens when you include a storytelling tool in your own retelling? | 5 min. |
| Day 4 20 min. total | Teacher tells a third story. Students engage through storytelling tools. In a large group, students retell the story, striving for the correct sequence and addition of storytelling tools. Teacher uses facial expression exercises to examine emotional expression in story and in everyday life. | 15 min. |
| | Reflection – How do you pay attention differently when you know you will be retelling the story later? How does your face connect to identifying what you are feeling? | 5 min. |
| Day 5 20 min. total | Teacher tells one of the previous stories and directs students as they engage in the storytelling tools in small groups. | 15 min. |
| | Reflection – What did small groups and individuals have to do to be successful in working together? How is hearing a story different from being read to? | 5 min. |

Telling Tales: 14 Stories to Share with Young Children

By

Stuart Stotts and Faye Stanley

Available from Amazon.com

