



ART BRIDGES: Lesson Plans for Enrichment, Growth and Healing

Storytelling

**With Insights into the Art of Storytelling Provided by
Actress and Professional Storyteller**

Pippa White

And

Tell Us a Tale: Teaching Students to Be Storytellers

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Objectives:

The participants will:

1. Identify the elements of a story
2. Incorporate story-telling strategies to become effective story tellers
3. Be good listeners and performers
4. Gain confidence and poise

Audience:

This activity can be used and enjoyed by any age group.

History and Importance of Storytelling

For as long as there has been human memory, stories have been told and retold by people throughout the world. No one can tell when the first the story was

actually told but this ancient art form of entertainment, passing down history and orally recording tradition has been with us since the first utterance of words. Throughout history, stories have been used to calm, inspire and teach. Stories have helped to define our dreams, desires and values. When written word was unavailable, oral stories have been handed down from generation to generation as a way of chronicling family and cultural history.

Being a good storyteller requires being a good listener—relying on memory and adding excitement and passion, the storyteller can then relay to the audience stories from exotic and far-away lands. Acts of heroism, legends and fairy tales, epic adventures, fables and even ghost stories have been the subject matter for stories that have been passed down through the centuries. But stories are not merely a source of entertainment—they also reflect wisdom and knowledge and have been used to explain and memorialize people and events which become an important part of heritage and beliefs. Storytelling helps to define and bind our humanity.

Why Bother with Storytelling in this Age of Technology?

Storytelling is a pleasurable way to bring people together so they can share the experience. It helps our imaginations to soar, painting vivid images in our minds. A well-told story encourages expansion of vocabulary and language skills at the same time it increases attention spans, creativity and imagination in the audience. In a nutshell, storytelling connects people at a time in our technological world when so many are disconnected from one another.

Art of Storytelling as Shared by Pippa White

The Two Parts of Storytelling: Story & Telling!

Most school children now get wonderful instruction in the elements of **story**. As a matter of fact, if you ask an eight-year-old for the elements of story, you'll probably get a thorough and impressive answer--something like this: "The five elements of story are character, setting, plot, conflict and resolution." Some youngsters may even throw in point of view and theme, but the basic building blocks of story are usually those first five.

The basis of good **storytelling** starts with a great story. The greatest storyteller in

the world can't do much with an uninteresting story. So let's look first at those building blocks of a good story, and why they are so vital, and then we'll come up with some elements for good storytelling.

Elements of a Good Story

Character:

This element supplies the human interest. It's probably the most important element with regards to connection. The reader, the listener, connects to a story through the connection to a character, usually the protagonist, but to some extent with all other characters as well. Realize characters need to grow and change--this is called "Character Development". Just as we hope the reader or listener has learned something from a good story, so the characters in the story must learn and grow, too.

Setting:

When we read or hear a story, we see it play out in our minds. We visualize the story. Setting helps visualize what's happening in vivid, exciting detail.

Plot:

We can have a rich setting and charismatic characters, but what holds the reader or listener is "what's happening." The reader or listener needs to really care about "what happens next." Therefore, a tantalizing plot is **a must**. What makes for a tantalizing plot? Surprises, the unusual, the unexpected, and this can come in many forms, via character, intriguing settings, sudden twists to the plot--you name it. But a good plot needs the unpredictable.

Conflict or Problem:

This is the heart of the plot because it is this that keeps us entranced, keeps us caring. Call it conflict or a problem, a hurdle, a crisis or a struggle--without this element in the plot we eventually tune out. This is what makes us care--it's what makes us long to know "what happens next." Without people longing to know what happens next, a story is flat.

Resolution:

Problems and struggles disrupt. And though they make for great stories, human beings also long for order. So the exciting part of the story is dealing with the

problem that has disrupted the lives of those in the story. The satisfying part of a story is the return to order and familiarity. It ties things up. We need that resolution.

Additional Element of Point of View:

Point of view can come from an all-wise narrator or a detached narrator, or it can be the point of view of the protagonist or another character. The latter might be a first- person approach. All these approaches are good, you just need to decide which is best for your particular story, because your choice will have an effect.

Additional Element of Theme:

The theme is the message of the story. It's usually better if the message is subtle rather than too obvious. People are pretty good at figuring out what a story means to them.

Elements of Good Storytelling

So there are the Five Elements, with two additions, that make up a good story. Here now, are five elements in storytelling.

Energy:

There are many different styles of storytelling and it's important to find your own. But whether your style is laid back or dynamic, there has to be energy underneath it. You are trying to make the audience as enchanted and interested in your story as you are. You are sharing not just words but life. It's important that the audience senses your energy. That energy must be in every part of your body, and *especially in your voice*. This is the art of story "telling." Make sure every word is heard.

Caring:

You want your audience to care--to care about the characters, to care about "what happens next." If you care, they will. If you don't, they won't! One way to do this is to just look at your audience--make eye contact. Make friends with the audience.

Vocal Variety:

Too much vocal sameness is boring. Variety can happen in a number of ways.

1. You can use character voices.
2. You can use dialects and accents, if you do them well.
3. You can use verse, or rhymes, or even song.
4. You can just vary your intonation, your volume, your emphasis, your pace.

Whatever you do, ring the vocal changes. Don't get into a vocal pattern, or a repetitive habit.

Natural Speech:

Although vocal variety is a must, don't try to be anyone other than who you are. Don't think that because you're on stage, something new or different or formal is required of your speech. Enunciate, project, and use that energy, but always remember that the most pleasing speech to listen to is natural speech. Anything else will not ring true.

Relaxation:

If you're tense, the audience will be tense, too. If you're relaxed, they will relax along with you and then enjoy your story. The best way not to be tense is to just let physical tension go, but that will only happen *if you are prepared!* Rehearse your story until it is second nature. Then you can relax and have fun with it. If you're not completely prepared, you won't enjoy the storytelling experience, and neither will your listeners.

So there you have it—there are two equally important parts to Storytelling: the fascinating story and the relaxed but energetic storyteller. Put the two together and you and your audience will be delighted with the outcome!

Tell Us a Tale: Teaching Students to Be Storytellers

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<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/tell-us-tale-teaching-students-be-storytellers>

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Grades:

3-5; 6-8

Student Objectives:

Students will:

1. Read and choose a folktale or short story that they want to retell
2. Map the story's sequence of events with a graphic organizer
3. Identify and summarize story elements
4. Write a script that elaborates upon or interprets parts of the story
5. Build confidence and practice creative expression as they tell their story to the class

Materials:

1. Graphic Organizer for Sequence of Events — one copy for each student
2. Selection of books for students to choose from. See our recommended books for seasonal and timeless tales.
3. Watch or timer that can track 10 minutes

Directions:

Step 1: Choose a story.

1. Explain to students that any book or story can be told as an oral story. Storytellers take existing stories and use their imaginations, body movements, and expressive tones of voice to retell the story in their own way.
2. Invite students to look over your selection of stories and to choose one they think they think will grab the audience's attention.

Step 2: Read the story 4-5 times.

1. Students should read the story independently several times.
2. If it is a chapter book or long story, have them choose a specific episode that they can retell within the time limit (recommended time for each storyteller's performance is 10 minutes).
3. Explain that they don't need to learn the story by heart, but they should concentrate on remembering facts and details in the story, including:
 - The order in which things happen
 - Characters' names

- How characters feel in different situations
- Descriptions of locations or sounds

Step 3: Outline what happens.

1. Using the Sequence of Events, students should outline each scene in the order it occurs. Model this for students by outlining "The Three Little Pigs."

For instance:

Scene 1 - First pig is in his straw house

Scene 2 - At the same time, Big Bad Wolf is in the village looking for a pig

Scene 3 - Big Bad Wolf comes to the first pig's straw house

2. Students can add boxes to the organizer in order to outline all the events in their tale. Remind students that they will be telling a story in 10 minutes. If their story has too many scenes, they will need to shorten them or combine events to keep the story short.

Step 4: Describe each scene.

Have students write descriptions of the settings and characters' actions for each scene. They can use the book and these questions as guides:

- Where and when does the scene take place?
- Who is in the scene?
- What happens?
- How can you use movements to illustrate the action (i.e., pretend to open a door)?
- Besides characters' words, what sounds are heard (thunder, birds)?

Step 5: Use your imagination.

1. Once students have laid out the story "as written," ask them to look for ways in which they can make the action more exciting. For instance, what if their hero drove a racecar instead of riding a horse? Tell them not to be afraid to add or change things — that's part of the storytelling tradition!
2. Have them add notes to their outline that indicate where the new scenes or descriptions will go.

Step 6: Create a script.

1. Using quotes from the book or lines they write themselves, have students write a description and character dialogue for each scene. This is the first draft of their script.

2. Students should revise their script and specify the narration (when they will describe the setting and characters' actions) and character dialogue (when they will become the characters, speaking their lines and even acting like them.) Have them add notes that describe how they need to move or act as they speak.
3. Model creating a script based on the sequences of events created for "The Three Little Pigs." For example:

"The Three Little Pigs" SCENE 1

[sit with eyes closed]

One morning, Pig was napping, when suddenly....

[open eyes, jump up]

bam! bam! bam! There was a loud knock on his door.

Pig jumped up in surprise.

And went to see who was knocking.

[pretend to turn a doorknob]

In rushed his brother pigs and knocked him right over!

4. Using the watch or timer, have students read their scripts quietly to themselves and time it (remind them to read slowly and pause in places when they will imitate an action without speaking).
5. If their script is longer than 10 minutes, discuss ways they can edit it down: Are there lines you can shorten? Can you combine two or more scenes into one? Is every scene essential to telling a good, exciting story?

Step 7: Perform it!

1. Have students practice reading the script over and over until they can tell the story without looking at the paper. Storytellers don't have to memorize it perfectly, though. Explain that they should feel free to add on or alter the story as they perform it for the class (as long as they can keep it within or around 10 minutes).
2. Hold a storytelling festival and invite other classes to listen to your students tell their tales!

Adaptations and Extension:

- Invite a professional storyteller to visit your class and share a tale with students then share "secrets of the trade."

- Videotape each storyteller so students can see their own performances. Have them do a self-evaluation based on their taped performance.

Supporting All Students:

Encourage struggling readers to create an oral story about an illustrated book or one picture from a book. Check the images from our Teaching with Illustrators feature for ideas. Using a tape-recorder, have them tell a story based on the pictures. They can listen and alter the tale until they're satisfied and have learned it well enough to perform for the class. Tape their final performance; then help storytellers write out their tales to create books they can re-read along to with the audiotape.

***Pippa White**, when not on the road entertaining audiences as an actress and professional storyteller with her “One’s Company Productions” (a combination of theater, storytelling and history), offers workshops and residencies and has been a teaching artist with the Nebraska Arts Council for nineteen years. She is actively involved in aesthetic education including coaching “Poetry Out Loud” for the NAC. To learn more about Pippa, visit <http://www.pippawhiteonecompany.com> .*

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