

# **Storytelling and Literacy: Hearing and Telling Stories- The Connection to Reading, Writing and Speaking**

**Workshop by Patti Christensen  
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This training focuses on using storytelling in tutoring sessions and in the classroom as a path to improved literacy. Research and practical aspects of the literacy storytelling connection will be presented. A range of activities are used including:

- Basic storytelling skills for tutors and classroom teachers
- How to facilitate student storytelling through games and exercises
- Story theatre-group storytelling and creative drama
- The speaking/writing connection
- Special consideration for English Language Learners
- Easy to use internet and classroom resources

***“If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive.”***

***Barry Lopez***

## Why Tell Stories in Literacy Programs?

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- Leaders can model interesting and expressive language as well as correct language structure and usage for the students
- The art of storytelling is an enjoyable tool for practicing verbal expression and listening skills
- New vocabulary words can be introduced and easily understood in a story's context
- It allows different learning styles to be used: auditory, visual & kinesthetic
- Hearing stories helps build comprehension by being able to mentally map the story's main events
- Storytelling exposes us to unfamiliar literature and traditional tales and increases understanding of our world's diverse cultures
- Storytelling develops mental imaging skills
- Storytelling encourages problem-solving behavior and offers solutions to moral dilemmas
- Hearing stories instills love of language in listeners and stimulates them to read
- Hearing stories encourages creative writing and public speaking skills
- Storytelling is accessible to all ages and abilities-everyone who can speak can tell stories, it doesn't depend on a high level of literacy skills
- Story is the best vehicle for passing on factual information
- It's fun for the whole family!



We can tell people abstract rules of thumb which we have derived from prior experiences, but it is very difficult for other people to learn from these. We have difficulty remembering such abstractions, but we can more easily remember a good story. Stories give life to past experience. Stories make the events in memory memorable to others and to ourselves. This is one of the reasons why people like to tell stories.

*-Roger C. Shank, from Tell Me A Story*

## Tried and True Storytelling Tricks and Techniques for the Classroom or One-on-One Teaching

By Patti Christensen

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1. Storytelling verses story reading-put the book down.
2. Read a picture book to the class with their eyes closed. Without showing them the pictures, talk about the pictures they saw in their heads. Compare and talk about the illustrator's vision of the story.
3. Let's act it out-simple act out, teacher narrated.
4. Add simple props.
5. Adding sound effects- easiest to add:  
Wind blowing, crying, stomping your feet, animal noises, snoring, cheering, booing
6. Students hear story, draw or retell from storyboards.
7. You tell or read-students retell in groups of three
8. Button box-pass around a box of buttons (your grandma's button box?). Each student chooses a button and then tells a partner a) what piece of clothing did the button come from, b) whose clothes was it and c) how did the students get the button. Can also follow up with writing the story down or sharing with the class.
9. Magic box-demonstrate how you can use mime and gestures to show without words what you are taking out of the magic box. Have students guess what you are taking out of the box. Then have them take turns taking something out of the box and having the class guess what it is.
10. Say phrases using different emotions. Suggested phrases: "Oh no", "I'll do it",  
Excited  
Angry  
Disappointed  
Frightened  
Disrespectfully  
Respectfully  
Shyly
11. Story seeds/story starters:  
Tell about a scar you have and how you got it.  
Have you ever laughed so hard you fell out of your chair?  
Did you ever play a practical joke? Have you ever had one played on you?  
Tell us something about your name-how did you get it, who were you named after, what does it mean?  
Who do you think of when I say "That person just drives me *nuts!*"
10. What to do with chapter books-act out scenes, costumes, props, create dialogue
11. Visualize and tell the story before writing.



## What's Your Story? What's Your Learner's Story?

*To be a person is to have a story to tell. -Isak Dinesen*

Questions for you and/or your learner:

1. What was your family like growing up? Who did you live with?
2. How many children were in your family? Where did you fall in the birth order? How did this impact you?
3. What cultural group(s) do you identify with? What does that mean for you?
4. Where did you grow up? What was going on in the world or your local community as you were growing up? How did those things impact you?
5. What attitudes did your family or community have towards education?
6. Did your family stay one place or did you move? How often?
7. What was your experience with school? How far did you go in your education? What subjects were easy? Which were difficult for you?
8. Have you ever tried to learn something that was REALLY hard for you? Did you quit? If you kept going, what helped you to do so? Was there a situation that taught you humility?
9. What were the barriers or obstacles that you had to overcome in getting an education? This could be economics, attitudes, teachers, life situations, etc.
10. What were the things or people who helped you in getting an education?
11. How difficult is it for you to ask someone for help? What makes it harder or easier?
12. Have you traveled or lived in another country? Do you speak any languages other than English? Did you ever have to "start over" in a new place? What was that like for you?
13. What have you accomplished that you feel really proud of?

*One lesson we can learn from pre-industrial peoples is the power of storytelling. I am struck by how important storytelling is among tribal peoples; it forms the basis of their educational systems. The Celtic peoples, for example, insisted that only the poets could be teachers. Why? I think it is because knowledge that is not passed through the heart is dangerous: it may lack wisdom; it may be a power trip; it may squelch life out of the learners. What if our educational systems were to insist that teachers be poets and storytellers and artists? What transformations would follow?*

*-Mathew Fox*



**Featured books:**

Aber, Linda Williams. 2002. Grandma's Button Box.

Brown, Jeff. 1964. Flat Stanley.

Fujita, Hiroko. 1999. Stories to Play With. Includes The Old Coat.

Loya, Olga. 1997. Momentos Magicos: Magic Moments: Tales from Latin America Told in English and Spanish. Includes The Rooster's Claw.

Munsch, Robert. 1996. Stephanie's Ponytail.

Sachar, Louis. 1998. Holes.

Slobodikina, Esphyr. 1940. Caps for Sale: A Tale of a Peddler, Some Monkeys and Their Monkey Business.

Walter, Virginia. 1995. "Hi Pizza Man!"

**Storytelling Books:**

Hamilton, Martha & Weiss, Mitch. 2005. Children Tell Stories: A Teaching Guide.

Hamilton, Martha & Weiss, Mitch. 2001. Through the Grapevine: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell.

Lipman, Doug. 1995. Storytelling Games: Creative Activities for Language, Communication, and Composition Across the Curriculum.

National Storytelling Association. 1994. Tales as Tools: The Power of Storytelling in the Classroom.

Rydell, Katy, editor. 2003. A Beginner's Guide to Storytelling.

**Internet sites:**

National Storytelling Network. <http://www.storynet.org/>

Heather Forrest. Excellent storytelling in the classroom resources including Aesop's ABC...Twenty Six Fables [www.storyarts.org](http://www.storyarts.org)

Diane de la Casas excellent site filled with classroom resources  
<http://www.storyconnection.net/>

National Council of Teachers of English statement on Teaching Storytelling

<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/curr/107637.htm>

*“There are many ways to teach literacy, some better than others. Ms. Christensen has a style of her own that energizes, mesmerizes and inspires the young, and not so young. Taking stories and bringing them to life is no small accomplishment. After spending an afternoon at one of her storytelling sessions, I heard an elementary school student proclaim, “Wow! The book is better than the movie!” That, my friend, is no small accomplishment.”*



**Josephine Jones**  
Literacy Services Coordinator,  
Escondido Public Library

Patti and storytelling partner, James Nelson-Lucas, as **The Patchwork Players**, are also available for **school assemblies** and **family reading nights**. Through their high energy, literature based performances they engage students and families in the joy of making the stories come alive. See their website at [www.patchworkplayers.com](http://www.patchworkplayers.com) for popular programs.

