



Storytelling Arts of Indiana
Transforming everyday life

Teacher's Guide: About the Tellers

Table of Contents

[Click a name to navigate to that storyteller](#)

Deborah Asante.....	2
Celestine Bloomfield.....	3
Peter Cook.....	4
Bill Harley.....	5
Bil Lepp.....	6
Olga Loya.....	7

Deborah Asante

Types of Stories:

- African and African American stories and folktales
- Family and personal stories

School Performance Schedule:

Performance Type	Day	Date	Starts	Ends	Appears With
Student (middle/high)	Friday	Jan. 8 th	10:00 am	11:15 am	Bill Harley
Student (primary)	Friday	Jan. 8 th	11:45 am	1:00 pm	Bill Harley

Background:

One of Indiana's most captivating storytellers, Deborah Asante is from everywhere; her father's career was the Army. The eldest of five children, she began her storytelling career by coaxing her younger siblings to wash the dishes in exchange for a story from her. "I never knew what the story was going to be. I just made it up as I went along," she says.

Her natural talent with the spoken word led her to study acting in Los Angeles after attending college in southern California. When a friend in California moved back home to Indianapolis and founded the theater, Performance Plus, she offered Deborah a directing job there. Deborah took the job and found a home and a calling in Indy. Three years later, she founded a theater company of her own: Asante Children's Theatre (ACT) and became the artistic director, writing and producing plays on such themes as the Middle Passage, the Motown story, and African history. To cultivate her storytelling gift, Deborah applied for and was awarded a Creative Renewal Fellowship from the Arts Council of Indianapolis. The grant took her to Ghana, West Africa and where her research began with the African oral historians known as griots (gree-ohs). But Deborah's dramatic and engaging style is all her own. With warmth, energy and skill, she conveys the heart and soul of a story, weaving a rich tapestry of shared history.



Web Sites:

- Deborah at [Young Audiences of Indiana](#)
- Read the *Indianapolis Star* article about Deborah, "[She Sees Blues as Key to Black History](#)"

Celestine Bloomfield

Types of Stories:

- Personal and family stories
- Hoosier stories
- World folktales

School Performance Schedule:

Performance Type	Day	Date	Starts	Ends	Appears With
Student (primary)	Friday	Dec. 4 th	10:00 am	11:15 am	Bil Lepp
Student (middle/high)	Friday	Dec. 4 th	11:45am	1:00 pm	Bil Lepp

Background:



Celestine Bloomfield grew up in Gary, Indiana surrounded by family members who worked in the steel mills. She listened to her father recite Paul Lawrence Dunbar and Sir William Cullen Bryant. After pursuing degrees in theater and library science, Celestine was suddenly telling stories and loving it. In 1977, she officially began to call herself a storyteller. She was featured at the First Annual Hoosier Storytelling Festival in 1988 and has regularly made appearances since that first year. She was commissioned by Storytelling Arts of Indiana and the Indiana Historical Society to research, develop and tell the story of “Steel Stories: Tales from Da Region.” She has also received a

Teacher Creativity Grant from Lilly Endowment. Currently she is the media specialist at Indian Creek Elementary in Lawrence Township.

Selected Works:

Stories from the Heartland, CD

Peter Cook

Types of Stories:

- Family and personal stories told through mime, dance, and storytelling.

School Performance Schedule:

Performance Type	Day	Date	Starts	Ends
Family	Saturday	Mar. 13 th	2:00 pm	3:00 pm

Background:



Peter Cook is an amazing storyteller who lives in Chicago and happens to be deaf.

When he lost his hearing at age three, Peter began performing as the only way he knew to communicate. Later he began writing poetry. At nineteen he discovered ASL—American Sign Language—and his creative expression exploded. After taking a college poetry workshop with Allen Ginsberg, Peter began to develop his own visual style of presenting rhymes and rhythms

beyond the confines of signing. He pushed the envelope, and after college Peter founded Flying Words Project, which showcased the talents of deaf storytellers, poets, playwrights and others. During this time, his work expanded to include elements of other performance mediums such as dance, mime, storytelling, movement, and acting to more clearly communicate his message to the audience.

As a storyteller, Peter is a delight to deaf and hearing audiences of all ages, making those of us who hear, “hear” from his point of view. Unlike other tellers, he uses a voice interpreter, who simply states the plot in its barest form. All the expression, the description of characters, their feelings, their behavior and attitudes, spring humorously and poignantly from Peter. Through mime, acting, and facial expression, Peter demonstrates that we don't have to speak the same language... we don't even need words to share stories. As others have noted, Peter's stories are “louder than words.”

Web Sites:

- Check out Peter's videotapes at [Signs of Development](#)
- Read about Peter at [Deaf Awareness Week](#)
- Visit Peter's web site, www.deafpetercookonline.com

Selected Works:

- *From a Gator Ride to the Dentist Office*, VHS tape
- *United States of ASL Poetry and Other Tales*, VHS tape

Bill Harley

Types of Stories:

- Childhood stories
- Humorous and musical tales

School Performance Schedule:

Performance Type	Day	Date	Starts	Ends	Appears With
Student (middle/high)	Friday	Jan. 8 th	10:00 am	11:15 am	Deborah Asante
Student (primary)	Friday	Jan. 8 th	11:45 am	1:00 pm	Deborah Asante
Family	Friday	Jan. 8 th	7:00 pm	8:00 pm	

Background:



Dubbed a “Garrison Keillor for kids,” Bill Harley is one of the premier storytellers in the country, drawing huge crowds at national and regional festivals. Bill grew up in Indianapolis, where he was “the victim of a very normal childhood,” which spawned a wealth of hometown stories. Graduating college with a degree in religion, Bill went on to direct school programs in peaceful conflict resolution and has worked in schools as an Artist in Residence with the Rhode Island State Council for the Arts. Still active in community projects and education, he is a popular keynote speaker at regional and national conferences on education and children. Bill has also been a leader in the Pokanoket Watershed Alliance working to save the Runnins River and

Hundred Acre Bay, close to his Massachusetts home. His art reflects such concerns. In his 2001 performance at The Children’s Museum with the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra, Bill musically recounted the hilarious adventures of a single raindrop, illustrating the entire watershed cycle. He has won national awards for every one of his children’s recordings, including the 2006 Grammy for Best Spoken Word Album for Children, and he is a member of the National Storytelling Network’s Circle of Excellence. Bill has been a regular commentator on National Public Radio’s “All Things Considered,” since 1991. His listeners often find themselves blinking back tears one minute and aching from belly laughs the next. Bill is known for his ability to bring out the kid in all of us.

Web Sites:

For a chuckle visit www.billharley.com

Selected Works:

- *I Wanna Play*, CD
- *Blah Blah Blah*, CD
- *One More Time*, CD
- *The Amazing Flight of Darius Frobisher*, Book
- *Sitting Down to Eat*, Picture book

Bil Lepp

Types of Stories:

- Original (not traditional) tall tales

School Performance Schedule:

Performance Type	Day	Date	Starts	Ends	Appears With
Student (primary)	Friday	Dec. 4 th	10:00 am	11:15 am	Celestine Bloomfield
Student (middle/high)	Friday	Dec. 4 th	11:45 am	1:00 pm	Celestine Bloomfield
Family	Friday	Dec. 4 th	7:00 pm	8:00 pm	

Background:



Bil Lepp lives in South Charleston, West Virginia just a mile from his boyhood home. Since age eight or nine, Bil wanted to be a writer and he was always telling or listening to stories. But his first vocation was just that: Bil was called by the Methodists to pastor a congregation. Bible stories were his mainstay until years later when Bil's brother entered the West Virginia Liar's Contest. Bil threw his name in the hat, and his first story won second place! He went on to win the Liar's Contest five times. It was clear Bil's true calling was tall tales, and he's been telling them for a living the past 15 years.

Now Bil's brand of tall tales isn't the Paul Bunyan legends you read in third grade. Bil stands in his tractor cap and faded jeans and starts his stories with some silly thing a living person has actually done. It all sounds reasonable for the first few moments, then the embellishments start to flow. As *Duke Divinity Magazine* said of Bil's stories, "With Lepp, the sorry, low-down lie becomes a grand and glorious creation, a verbal sculpture in which a hundred small fibs, stretchers, falsehoods and prevarications are piled together, shaped and molded into one stunning, awe inspiring cathedral of flapdoodle and bull."

Bil was featured at the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough, Tennessee last year and had everyone laughing so hard they invited him back again this fall. But if you're worried that Bil's tales are only for adults, rest easy. Bil tells tales about his own childhood missteps and kids love them.

Web Sites:

- Meet [Bil Lepp – Liar](#) at his home page.

Selected Works:

- *The Armadillo Recon Unit*. Book.
- *Buck and the Monster Stick*. CD, Paperback.
- *Mayhem Dressed as an Eight-Point Buck*. CD, Cassette.

Olga Loya

Types of Stories:

- Personal and family stories
- Latin American stories
- Myths

School Performance Schedule:

Performance Type	Day	Date	Starts	Ends
Family	Saturday	May 1st	2:00 pm	3:00 pm

Background:



“Long before I was a professional storyteller, I was a professional listener,” says Olga Loya- which is not surprising considering that she comes from a family where storytelling is abundant. Loya grew up in East Los Angeles, California with both her father and paternal grandmother telling stories. In addition to being a storyteller, she is an author, keynote speaker, performance artist, and teacher. She has performed and taught workshops throughout the United States and Mexico. “In my performances, the audience is able to see different styles of telling because I perform personal tales, folklore, and do improvisation, where I enjoy involving the audience in a number of surprising ways” Loya states about her work. This bilingual storyteller has been a featured teller at the First Latin-American Storytelling Festival in Guadalajara, Mexico, and the 1993 National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough. She has appeared at the Ghost Tales in 2001 at the National Storytelling Festival. She is on the roster of many arts councils, some of which include Los Angeles Music Center Education Division, Santa Barbara-San Luis Obispo Children’s Creative Project, and Santa Cruz Cultural Center – Spectra. Loya will perform “Singing and Dancing Through Stories” for the Storytelling Arts of Indiana season. The performance includes folk tales, personal stories, and myths.

Website:

Visit Olga Loya at www.olgaloya.com

Selected Works:

Momentos Magicos (Magic Moments), Book
Tio Conejo (Uncle Rabbit), Book