



Storytelling Arts of Indiana
Transforming everyday life

Teacher's Guide: Teaching Storytelling

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What Is Storytelling?

Each day we hear friends recapping their child's ballgame, lamenting a recent traffic mishap, or sharing the highlights of a movie. These are all examples of storytelling. We not only listen to others, we respond with stories of our own. This certifies that we are all storytellers!

Platform storytelling, such as the 17th Annual Hoosier Storytelling Festival, takes the daily ritual of sharing stories on stage to the next level. The stories seem spontaneous, but not without hours of coaching and practice—captivating an audience is no easy task. Storytellers, like stage directors, must decide what the characters and setting look like, how they sound and smell, and what they are feeling. The tellers use their voices, movement, and expressions to bring these elements to life in the listeners' minds and hearts. Storytellers are “directors of the theater of the mind,” co-creating the story's images and emotions with the audience. That is why sharing stories builds community—between teller and audience and from one listener to the next.

Benefits of Storytelling in Education

How Stories Teach

from *Children Tell Stories*, by Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss

Storytelling is the oldest form of education. Cultures around the world have always told tales as a way of passing down their beliefs, traditions, and history to future generations. Stories capture the imagination, engaging the emotions and opening the minds of listeners. Consequently, any point that is made in a story or any teaching that is done afterward is likely to be much more effective.

How Storytelling Benefits Student Writing

adapted from *Writing as a Second Language*, by Donald Davis

Donald Davis, noted storyteller, author, and educator, teaches storytelling as a bridge between a child's “first language” (gestures and speech) and “second language” (writing). Students begin writing a story by telling it, that is, by talking through their stories with fellow students who act as helpful listeners. They use student feedback to revise and retell their stories until ready to write them down. This approach allows struggling writers to use listening, speech, and gestures until they are bursting to write. Instead of starting with a blank page and ending with a final draft marred with red ink, students start with a willing listener and end with writing worth reading.

How Children Benefit from Listening to Stories

Hearing stories:

1. Stimulates the imagination.
2. Improves listening skills.
3. Instills a love of language, reading, and creative writing.
4. Improves language skills, such as vocabulary, comprehension, sequencing, and story recall.
5. Builds community by providing a common experience and collective language of story catch words and phrases.

How Children Benefit from Telling Stories

Storytelling:

1. Increases self-esteem by building confidence in speaking before groups.
2. Improves expressive language skills and stimulates inventive thinking.
3. Promotes greater cooperation and stronger relationships among children and between students and teachers. If we know others' stories, we are less likely to judge or misunderstand them.
4. Encourages personal growth through risk-taking.

Choosing, learning, and telling a story is a process which teaches students:

1. How to read for a purpose and how to evaluate stories.
2. The difference between storytelling, reading, and visual media.
3. How to be a respectful listener and how to give constructive criticism.
4. Techniques for gaining and holding an audience's attention during an oral presentation (eye contact, use of voice, gestures, etc).

Specific Benefits of Traditional Tales, Myths, and Legends

1. Folk- and fairy tales teach lessons without moralizing and stimulate emotional development.
2. Hearing traditional stories from around the world provides insight into other cultures, forcing us to look at situations from another point of view.
3. Knowledge of "old stories" (folktales, myths, and legends) is requisite to understanding literature, history, and culture students later encounter.

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Teaching Storytelling Games

adapted from *Storytelling Games*, by Doug Lipman

Why Use Games?

Games are a great way to introduce storytelling in the classroom. They can encourage participation from shy children who might quake at the prospect of telling a whole story individually. Games spark creativity, build confidence, and establish ground rules for safe storytelling. Games also are a good way to isolate and practice discrete storytelling skills, such as eye contact, body movement, vocal range, and plot development.

Preparing for Games

Before you introduce a game, prepare yourself and your group. Make sure you have imagined the game yourself, created the necessary space to play, and gathered any needed materials. Set ground rules to create the emotional safety necessary for true play, eliciting contributions from students. Ask players to give their full, nonjudgmental attention to you and to speaking players. Remind students that mistakes are okay, but put-downs and teasing are forbidden. This applies to teacher “flubs,” too. Groups respond better when teachers explain the fact that they are attempting something new and may need practice, too.

Introducing a Game

Most of the games can be taught in 10 or 15 minutes. In this time period you will be able to demonstrate the game and offer turns to two or three players. Whenever possible keep your words of introduction to a minimum. When you call on a player for a contribution, call first on a player who you think understands what you want. Some of the games require sample stories. Tell them with enjoyment. Don't try to memorize them. Don't try to memorize the directions of the games. Instead, try to understand them and apply them to your group's contributions.

Responding to Players

Restate the contribution with a tone of approval, trying to repeat the player's exact words. This can help the group understand what the player said. If a player's response seems inappropriate, you can still treat it with respect:

*Good way to end the story there... What if we wanted to keep it going?
I never thought of that!
Then what?*

Again, remind students: Put-downs and teasing are off-limits.

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Storytelling Games to Warm Up

adapted from *Storytelling Games*, by Doug Lipman

Game 1: Rakan-san

Purpose:	Players will learn to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Become comfortable performing in front of a group of people.• Use body movements, including facial expressions to convey a character.• Accept applause and feel more self-confident.
State Standards:	Addresses Speaking Applications, part of English/Language Arts Standard 7.
Grade Levels:	Recommended for gr. K-5.
Space:	Open area where all players can make movements standing in place.
Game Summary:	Players chant a rhyme and imitate the pose struck by the leader at the end of the last line.
Directions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Have: students stand in a circle in the open area where they can see players acting out movements. (Do this in groups if space is tight).2. Name and summarize: the game: <i>Rakan-san, rakan-san</i> <i>Come to life and pass it on.</i> <i>In Japanese, “Rakan-san” means “the images” or “the statues.” In Japan there are many statues—some scary-looking, some happy, some are dancing, some are fishing. When I say the word, “on,” I’ll change into a statue. Join in the rhyme and watch me!</i>3. Repeat: the rhyme, encouraging everyone to join in: <i>Rakan-san, rakan-san</i> <i>Come to life and pass it on.</i> At the word, “on,” strike a pose as a statue. See Statue Starters next page.4. Discuss: your statue: <i>What kind of statue am I? Notice how my legs are. Notice my arms and my face. This time, when you hear the word “on,” turn into a statue just</i>

like me.

5. **Repeat:** the game until all are participating, then pass the role of leader around the circle.
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Adaptation:

- Let everyone become a statue:

This time, when you hear the word “on,” strike your own pose as a statue.

- Repeat the rhyme and let everyone become a statue.

Now hold your pose, but take a peek at the person on your right. This time you will change into the statue of the person on your right.

- Repeat the rhyme and wait for everyone to assume their new poses, then tell them to look at the person on their right again. Continue this process until the poses have traveled completely around the circle.
 - Conclude by discussing the extent to which poses change as they travel the circle, what is difficult about the game, and what poses were most difficult.
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Statue Starters:
Statues may be:

-Sleepy	-Bored	-Angry	-Happy
-Sad	-Arrogant	-Fearful	-Brave
-Hyper	-Bashful	-Strong	-Goofy

Statues may:

-Fish	-Climb	-Sleep	-Plow
-Ride	-Fight	-Hide	-Crawl
-Think	-Sit	-Swim	-Jump

Game 2: Fortunately, Unfortunately

adapted from *Storytelling Games*, by Doug Lipman

Purpose:	Players will learn to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop a composite story.• Pronounce a contribution clearly to a group.• Practice taking turns.• Add to a given story by improvising action.• Make eye contact.• Distinguish positive from negative actions.
State Standards:	Addresses Listening Comprehension, Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication, and Speaking Applications (parts of English/Language Arts Standard 7).
Grade Levels:	Recommended for gr. K-12.
Space:	Best done in a community circle area, where all players can easily see and hear each other, but can be done with students at their seats.
Game Summary:	Players take turns adding to a group story. The additions alternate starting with the words “Fortunately...” and “Unfortunately...” The story ends with three consecutive additions beginning with “Fortunately....”
Directions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Begin: a story, such as this one: <i>One day, we decided to go to the zoo. So we got up, got dressed, ate breakfast and left the house. We went to the bus stop to wait. But unfortunately... ” [Pause]</i>2. Ask: <i>What do you think happened that was unfortunate or unlucky?</i>3. Call: on a volunteer to add an “Unfortunately...” such as, <i>Unfortunately, it started to rain really hard.</i>4. Interrupt: saying; <i>But fortunately... [Pause]</i>5. Ask: <i>Who can add something fortunate or lucky?</i>6. Call: on a volunteer to add a “Fortunately...” such as, <i>Fortunately, a big stretch Hummer pulled up to the bus stop. The driver, my uncle, rolled down the electric</i>

window and said, “Need a ride to the zoo?”

7. **Continue:** calling for alternating additions until ready to end the story. End by calling for three “Fortunately’s...” in a row.
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Adaptations:

- Before or after the game, try reading or telling the story “Oh, That’s Good! No, That’s Bad,” from *Stories in My Pocket* by Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss. Tell the story in tandem with the class, directing them to give the alternate responses, “Oh, that’s good!” or “No, that’s bad!” as appropriate. You can also go to the Web page, [Listen to Clow Storytellers in Action](#). Scroll and click on this story to hear a recording of it by a student teller.
- Vary the opening or destination (mall, arcade) to fit the age group.
- To draw out shy players, insist that each player get only one turn. You may wish to call on shy players as soon as their hands go up and let the more outgoing players wait for the next opportunity.
- Allow students to add more than one sentence. For example, ask students to use specific descriptive words and phrases to explain the action they added. For example, “It was raining really hard—so hard the world looked swirly and gray, as if we were behind a waterfall looking out.”
- With older students, discuss how the positive and negative action could be changed to make the story more complex and interesting (e.g., repeating a pattern of three negatives and a positive). Tie this discussion to familiar literature and discuss how authors use positive and negative action to create a plot including problem/conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution.

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Game 3: I Was Present

Purpose:

Players will learn to:

- Use a cue to begin a turn.
- Become comfortable performing before a group.
- Retell a familiar story.
- Imagine an alternative version of a familiar scene.

State Standards:

Addresses English/Language Arts Standard 7 – Listening and Speaking.

Grade Levels:

Recommended for gr. K–12.

Space:

Community area where players can sit in a circle.

Game Summary:

Players take turns helping to retell a familiar tale by saying, “I was present,” then adding something different to the story.

Directions:

1. **Ask:** *Do you know the story of “Little Red Riding Hood?”*
2. **Say:** *In this game, you get to change the story to make it more interesting by raising your hand and saying, “I was present!” Then you get to tell what happened next. For example, when Little Red Riding Hood started down the path to her grandmother’s house, you might raise your hand and say, “I was present! When she started down the path, a little green man jumped out in front of her and she fainted from fright.” Then someone else can say “I was present!” and add to the story.*
3. **Explain:** *“The only rules are you can’t change what someone else said and you have to say ‘I was present’ before you add to the story.”*
4. **Start:** The story and continue until someone says, “I was present.”
5. **Choose:** Another player after each turn, or continue it yourself if no players volunteer.
6. **Continue:** Until a volunteer contributes a suitable ending and say: *“That sounds like a good place to end the story.”*

If an ending comes up too soon, ask the player to save their ending until more people have a chance to

Adaptations:

participate, then re-choose that player when it is time to end the story.

- Use a familiar story from home, TV movies, computer games, or the curriculum.
- Use this game to tell an end-of-unit story after studying an historical event, novel, or even a scientific process, such as the water cycle.
- Put words on slips of paper or on the blackboard. Require each student to draw or pick a vocabulary word they will use in their improvised addition to the story.

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Game 4: Count Down

adapted from *Look What Happened to Frog, Storytelling in Education*, by Pamela J. Cooper and Rives Collins

Purpose:	Players will learn to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Portray a simple character using tone of voice.• Perform a simple, repetitive action in front of a large group.
State Standards:	Delivery of Oral Communication, part of English/Language Arts Standard 7.
Grade Levels:	Recommended for gr. K–8.
Space:	A small open area viewable by all.
Game Summary:	Players use voice to portray a certain character counting in a specific way; listeners try to guess the character and the counting task.
Directions:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Explain: That each player will count in a special way to convey a character doing a certain task. Players will convey the characters through tone of voice and repetitive body movement. Listeners must guess the task and character.2. Demonstrate: A three-year-old counting out pennies on a table: <i>One, two, (f)ree...</i> Try to convey who you are with your voice and use only enough body movement to show what you are counting. If the class is stumped, repeat the task, using more body movement, skipping numbers, etc.3. Ask: for volunteer players. Whisper assignments to players in advance or let each draw an assignment from prepared slips of paper. Remind players to convey the character through voice and repetitive movement.4. Call: On a volunteer to go first. If the class is stumped, let the player repeat the task, using more body movement to convey props, setting, or character. Offer suggestions to players if requested. If the class is still stumped after one repeat performance, let the player tell what the assignment was and ask the class for ideas about how to convey the message.

Adaptations:

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- Divide into small groups, let each group think of a task and character. Then select a player and enact their idea. Repeat to let more participate.

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Preparing to Tell Stories

What You Need:

- A Storyteller
- At least one listener
- A story.

All three elements are necessary for storytelling to occur. One is not more important than the other.

<i>Storyteller's Job</i>	<i>Listener's Job</i>	<i>Teller/Listener Feedback</i>
<p>the story needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A beginning • A middle • An end <p>The storyteller needs to picture the story in his/her mind. Tellers must see each scene of the story as if watching a movie. As the storytellers see the pictures, they describe to the audience what they are seeing.</p> <p>Some audiences will need more description if they are unfamiliar with the scene the storyteller is describing. For example, individuals who have never driven a tractor will need to be told step by step how to drive a tractor if it is important to the story.</p>	<p>As the story is told, each audience member is responsible for making his or her own pictures of the story. Each person will have different pictures. If you asked each listener to describe the main character in the story you just told, you would be surprised at the different descriptions.</p>	<p>The listeners are very important in sharing stories. Through facial expressions and responses, the storyteller receives feedback on the telling of the story. The storyteller might learn that he or she needs to slow down to give the listeners more time to comprehend the story or that the storyteller left out a vital link in the story and needs to go back and explain the link. For this reason, listeners must give 100% of their attention to the storyteller and the story. Listeners need to be respectful. It is very important to discuss the role of the listener with students so each storytelling experience is successful.</p>

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