

## Telling Stories

Wu Chi Chien, Er Chong Elementary School

*Why tell stories? Why is storytelling one of the most important things you can do in your classroom?* Storytelling is not only for school-age students. Everybody likes it because it is part of our heritage. And most importantly, stories are fun. We tell story in our classroom because it can engage the students' imaginations, stimulate their creativity, promote the language development, teach them about other cultures and learn to share feelings and experiences with others. Through storytelling students are actively involved in practicing and developing the four learning skills of English – listening, reading, writing and speaking. Stories stretch the audience's attention span and their imagination. It is also a good way for the teacher to teach grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Stories stir a student's intrinsic motivation to learn and read more books as well. Storytelling is an essential and important tool a teacher can use in the classroom.

So how to choose what kinds of stories to tell in the classroom for young learners? First, you need the story with a simple plot, with a clear ending and one or two characters only. Second, you need only the simplified language with a lot of repetition in the story that you choose. Third, it will be much easier for you to tell the story if you can have the story illustrated with pictures. Visual aids illustrating the plot and the meaning of the language is quite important. Once you can have all those features above considered and included in the materials you choose to tell the story, you can introduce the new language without the use of any abstract or complicated explanations. You can also introduce the new language in context. Moreover, it can enable the students to use the new language immediately with success and understanding. The advantages are-- you can have the topics relevant to children's experience,

you can have the new language presented in meaningful context, you can build the positive motivation of students through success, ownership and fun. Besides, it is easy to remember, useful for repeated practice, and it can be used as any other language material for further practice of various aspects of language.



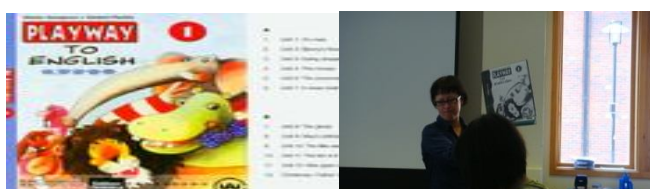
When you prepare telling the stories, here are some tips for you to do the storytelling. Try to memorize the basic story. Learn it by heart. If your story has dialogue, it's not necessary for you to memorize the exact dialogue, but just the basics. The reason is that you are telling a story, and not reading a story. Next, have an interesting story prepared to tell. The most important idea of storytelling is to give listeners a good story. If the story is not interesting to the listeners, it is not worthy to tell the story. That means it's just waste of time and can not have any satisfying results and progress in your teaching. So find a good and interesting story for listeners. And next, try to use the gestures and facial expressions at the same time to emphasize the story. This will be able to catch the listeners' attention as well as to make the story more interesting and easier to understand. Then allow your voice to be expressive. You can let the characters have different voices. The kids could have a younger voice and the elder could have a lower voice. So as do when the characters are excited, sad, scared or sick, you can use different voice expressions. While telling the stories, adding some sound effects is helpful. In that way, listeners can enjoy a more funny atmosphere in the storytelling. Finally, before telling the stories to your audience, practice it in advance. Try it out in front of a mirror.

Reading aloud is an important step in learning a story for the telling. Comprehension improves as students in the classroom re-tell and interpret the story. Through reading and listening, students practice the words, phrases, dialogues. They are exposed to the joy of language at the same time. Moreover, those four aspects of language development improve simultaneously: as students are involved in story telling (or listening or reading or writing) they are gaining language experience and developing skills. When the teachers read aloud the story to the students in the classroom, keep the following things in mind. First, you read clearly-- always. You don't want to impress the students. You want them to understand you. Second, you pause while telling the story--often. Students need time to think. You need to look at them. Stop to signal the change of scene, or time, or character. Third, you make the meaning clear. You want to help the students to understand. The useful ways you can do are as follows: to stress the important words; to use intonation by raising and lowering your voice; to use your voice by varying the pitch, varying the speed, shouting, whispering and making sounds; to use visuals as pictures, pointing, gestures, and miming; to express the emotions and etc. Finally, you involve the students while telling a story. For example, ask them questions, make them predict, make them repeat or make them mime. You do this because you want to keep their attention, and you want them to feel the story as well. Don't forget to maintain the eye contact. That is the main difference between storytelling and acting.

Students acquire English through play, music and TPR (Total Physical Response) that certainly provide them with a fun and dynamic learning experience. While telling stories to students, there are a wide range of support materials for teachers, including DVDs and animated cartoon stories, presenting target language in an amusing and motivating way. If you can have some illustrated story cards, picture cards and flashcards available when you plan a lesson to do the storytelling, that will be of a lot help for the children to remember what

they've learned. Bridge the gap between the different types of learners by adding audio/visual aides to your teaching techniques while telling stories to the students. Since most people are visual learners, especially for the young learners at the age of 7-12, it's more important to go beyond 'spoken words' while telling stories. Students are also more likely to get involved in the activity when they're exposed to in a variety of ways. I would like to share about the concept of 'blackboard stories'.

The 'blackboard stories' means when teachers tell stories in the classroom, you need a very simple short story illustrated with pictures or drawings for teaching a particular aspect of language to young learners. When you come up with a story, think of a simple story that can be told with the structures and vocabulary you want to teach. Write it up avoiding any unnecessary details and complex structures, including repetition and opportunities for students' involvement. As to the pictures that you had prepared in advance, plan the illustrations for the main points of the story. There should not be too many. Their main role is to make the meaning of the new language clear. The size of the pictures must be big enough for all students to see. Just use clear outlines and strong colors. Number the pictures. Then write the right part of the text plus any other notes on the back of each. Plan how to handle the pictures while speaking. Rehearse with the pictures. As you have this all set, you are ready for conducting the blackboard storytelling.



In terms of adapting stories, you may need to work on the following parts. First, you

need to focus on the vocabulary. Try to change the words that students might be unfamiliar with, eg. pound- kilo, terrified - afraid, astonished-very surprised, rushed-ran quickly. This will make them easier to understand the story. Second, you should focus on the structures. Try to simplify the complex structures or just get rid of them, *e.g.* he was out walking in the forest - he went for a walk in the forest; if only I hadn't I said that - I am sorry I said that; the prince promised he would come the next day - the prince said, "I will come tomorrow". Third, you change the unusual word order if it doesn't spoil the effect, *e.g.* down came the rain and sashed the spider out – the rain came down and washed away the spider out. Finally, you clarify ideas, *e.g.* break long complex sentences into a few simple ones; add time reference and linking words between ideas; add details to make the meaning clear or to focus students' attention on the important information; reduce the length of the story by eliminating events, characters and irrelevant details and so on.

Most of us could have the problem like this. Sometimes, when we tell a story to the students, and the story just seems a bit difficult for them to understand. In that case, adapting the story is quite a good way for you to solve this kind of problem. I, myself, tried this in my class, and I found the result was pretty satisfying. For example, I adapted the story 'The north wind and the sun' and told this story to the students in my class. With the simple words, sentences, and structures, the students could easily understand and get involved in the story. That creates a successful and positive atmosphere for their learning in the language. Moreover, except for the original Chinese version of this story, they can re-tell it in English by themselves. After that, they could even try to make a small picture book based on the story. By the way, as I mentioned above, try to add audio/visual aides to your teaching techniques while telling stories to the students. Integrate with the e-learning. There are so many resources and learning materials we can acquire on the internet. Therefore, I hooked on internet and let

students to see the animated story of 'The north wind and the sun'. They were impressed with it. Unlike the story in the book, they found it much more interesting.



Storytelling is fun and entertaining. It's accessible to all ages, genders and abilities. No special equipment beyond the imagination and the power of listening and speaking is needed. As a learning tool, storytelling can encourage students to practice the 4 skills as listening, reading, speaking and writing. The students can learn the moral values, problem solving skill and thinking strategies from the storytelling as well. So start picking out a story. Read it before you read out loud to the audience. This will help you make up a funny voice for the characters. When you are ready, you can make an introduction to the audience about what you are reading. For example, you can make up an introduction for what is about to happen. Ask them to make a guess. Predict what is going to happen. Let the audience sit in a comfortable place. While you are reading out loud, you can change the word in the sentence that sound too boring or for example too hard for the audience because they are only school-aged students. Think about adding actions to the story.

Tips are as follows for you to do the story telling. Never get too nervous! Your voice may sound funny and the audience don't understand what you are saying! Don't pause too long on paragraphs and stuff. You will waste your time just pausing and going, making everything too slow and not normal. The audience may wiggle and make noises if you're too slow with vocabulary! Choose a good story, simple and interesting. Keep in mind with all those

useful tips while telling stories. Support with the visual aides- picture cards, story cards, flashcards, video, on-line story and etc. Adapt the story if you find necessary. All those can make you a wonderful storyteller and your audience a happy and enlightened listener.