

Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Dato' Razali Ismail

LGA3103 Stories for Young Learners

Topic 1: Importance of Stories for Young Learners



Contents

Topic 1: Importance of Stories for Young Learners	2
Who is this book for?	2
Storytelling	2
Courses in Storytelling	3
Top 10 Benefits of Reading Aloud to Children	4
Features of children's stories	4
Getting Started - A Storyteller's Vocabulary List	4
Basic Creative Tools	4
Raw Material	5
First Steps to Retelling a Plot.....	5
Story Elements	6
Character	6
Storyline	6
Time sequence	6
Setting	6
Diction	7
Length	7
Illustration	7
Works Cited in this Topic	8

Topic 1: Importance of Stories for Young Learners

The importance of storytelling in education – especially for young learners - can hardly be overstated. A teacher who can tell stories well will surely capture the imaginations of the children and take them to wonderful places of learning.

Here is a brief excerpt from “Storytelling with Children” by Andrew Wright. (Note that much of his writing is about using stories in an ESL context.)

Who is this book for?

Children

In this book, the activities described here have been used with children aged seven to fourteen with between six months and three years of English. This is a very wide range of experience and potential learning development. Furthermore, in my experience the difference between one class and another, even of the same age and in the same school, can be enormous. So much depends on whether English is part of the children’s lives in their society, how enthusiastic and informed their parents are about English, how naturally English is used by the teacher in the normal life of the class, and last but not least, how free the children feel to ‘have a go’ in English.

Children can be helped to understand quite complex stories in language well above their own active command. It is what we expect the children to do which determines the proficiency level required, not the story itself.

Teachers

This book is for teachers who believe in the enormous importance of stories in the daily lives of their children and in the English lesson, and who would like a few pointers and examples in order to make stories central to their teaching. Don’t worry if you are not very experienced in using stories or if you feel that your English is not very good – I have tried to make the explanations easy to follow.

(Wright, 1995, p. 3)

In the Language Arts text book Carole Cox writes this about storytelling:

Storytelling

Even with the large number of books available for children today and the variety of stories they are exposed to on television and videos, children never seem to lose their fascination with storytelling. As one first-grade child put it, as I was about to read a picture book of a favourite folktale, “Tell it with your face!”

The tools of the storyteller are so deceptively simple and so basically human that storytelling is often neglected as a way of teaching listening and talking. It is, however, a powerful way for children to listen to and use spoken language. It’s also a wonderful way to share traditional literature and stories of the past, whether historical event or even personal life stories – perhaps yours or your students.

Here are some suggestions for storytelling by teachers and students:

1. **Finding Stories:** In addition to stories about personal experiences and those heard told by others, traditional folk literature is an excellent source for storytelling. Young children enjoy timeless tales, such as “The Three Billy Goats Gruff”, “The Three Pigs”, and other tales of three. Tales like “Jack and the Beanstalk” and “The Gingerbread Man” are sure winners, too.

2. **Telling Stories:** Storyteller Ramon Royal Ross advises that above all, the storyteller should know the story very well. In addition, he suggests the following approach for actually telling the story, which works well for him:

- a. Read the story aloud several times. Get a feel for its rhythm and style.
- b. Outline the major actions in the story, identifying where one ends and another starts.
- c. Picture the characters and setting in the story carefully. Describe them to yourself.
- d. Search for phrases in the story that you’d like to work into telling it.
- e. Practise gestures that add to the story.
- f. Prepare an introduction and conclusion before and after the actual telling.
- g. Practise telling the entire story – complete with intonation, colourful phrases, gestures, and sequence – in a smooth and natural fashion.
- h. Make an audio- or video-tape of yourself telling the story, and listen and look for areas in which you might improve. Also time yourself.

3. **Props:** Even though props aren’t necessary, some teachers like to use them for storytelling, especially with younger children. Props might be picture cards, flannel boards, puppets, or objects like a handful of beans for telling “Jack and the Beanstalk”. Mood makers like candles and incense and background music and noisemakers (e.g., rattles and tambourines) effectively enhance the telling, too.

4. **Costumes:** When used with props, costumes can create a dramatic impact. For instance, wearing a black cape and witch’s hat adds drama to telling scary stories in autumn. Even simple costumes, like hats and shawls, can be used in many creative ways.

(Cox, 2008, pp. 158-9)

In her book on *Storytelling in Teaching*, Green writes the following:

Courses in Storytelling

Courses in storytelling to children are generally a minor elective subject in Teacher Training, and yet for those who master this craft it quickly becomes their most valuable and well-used skill.

As an old Indian proverb says:

“Tell me a fact and I’ll learn. Tell me the truth and I’ll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever.”

Some of the advantages of using stories in any part of the curriculum are that

- stories create interest and fuel curiosity,
- stories provide a structure for remembering course material more so than isolated concepts,
- stories are a familiar and accessible form of sharing information than abstract concepts,
- telling a story from experience can create a more personal student-teacher connection.
(Green, 2003)

On the *Great Books to Read Aloud* website we find this list of the benefits of reading aloud to children. It is recommended that parents read books to their children from a very early age, and that this practice continues with regular and frequent stories from the teacher.

Top 10 Benefits of Reading Aloud to Children

- 1 Reading aloud creates the perfect bond between parent and baby – it's cosy, comforting and it's fun.
- 2 Listening to stories provides children with new 'friends' – characters whom they learn to love.
- 3 Hearing new words gives children a richer vocabulary.
- 4 Children can understand stories that are beyond their own reading ability.
- 5 Hearing books read aloud improves a child's ability to listen for periods of time and increases attention spans.
- 6 Reading aloud allows children to interact by interrupting and asking questions about meaning.
- 7 Hearing a story read aloud enables children to make connections with others' personal experiences.
- 8 Listening to more complex stories can help children to extend their knowledge and understanding.
- 9 Listening to a story being read aloud shows beginner readers how fluent readers read.
- 10 The words children hear in books give them a rich language when they begin their own writing.
(Wilson, 2006)

Features of children's stories

Everybody loves a story, and children will listen to any story if it is told well. However, obviously some stories are more suitable and beneficial to young children than others. Students need to learn to recognise the features of stories so that they can select and if necessary adapt them.

Here are some pointers from the *Story Arts* website:

Getting Started - A Storyteller's Vocabulary List

- **Plot:** The sequence of events from which a story, play, song, puppet show, song, etc. can be made
- **Retell:** To restate in one's own words
- **Version:** One of many possible presentations of the same plot
- **Character:** People, animals, or other communicating entities in the tale
- **Narrator:** The presenter of the tale

Basic Creative Tools

- **Words:** Spoken text created by memorizing or improvising language of the tale
- **Nonverbal Communication:** Body language, gestures and facial expressions that contribute to the meaning of the communication

- **Imagination:** An interior creativity that generates language and physical expression in the storyteller

Raw Material

Learn a plot to tell as a story: Find a folktale plot to retell in the folktale collections (Look in the 398.2 section in the library)

Other possibilities:

- Tell a personal or family story
- Create an original plot
- Present a literary tale by memorizing the words of an author

First Steps to Retelling a Plot

- **Beginning:** Picture the plot as a movie in your imagination. Start off retelling it by "chatting" it in your own words to make sure you remember what happens in the plot. Create your own version by retelling it over and over to different listeners until it starts to feel like a story. (**Story** is the art form; **plot** is the raw material from which it is made.)
- **Middle:** Have a strong beginning and end by creating an enticing first and last sentence. Improvise the middle.
Using descriptive language, add detail to your basic "chatting" of the plot. Try to help your listeners see what is in your mind. Pretend to be all the characters by letting some of the characters speak dialogue. When you are the narrator, make sincere eye contact with the audience.
- **End:** Stand up and tell the plot as a story. Let your imagination make your body and face respond to the tale as you imagine it. Tell the tale to a partner or a few people. Ask a friend to offer you some coaching (Ask them to listen to you and then give you some practical comments). Practice helps to reduce stage fright. As you gain confidence, try telling the story in front of a larger group.

Have Fun!

(Story Arts, 2000)

Story Elements

Students need to be familiar with all of the terms listed here.

Character

Definition: A character is a person depicted in a narrative or drama. Characters may be flat, minor characters; or round, and major. The main character in a story is generally known as the protagonist; the character who opposes him or her is the antagonist. Character is revealed by how a character responds to conflict, by his or her dialogue, and through descriptions. (Wiehart, 2013)

Give an example of 3 well-known story characters:

.....

Storyline

Well, the storyline is basically the plot.

The story create considers what event (problem) propels their main character's life from ordinary to extraordinary and shakes up their everyday existence. It could be:

- a goal he/she will work to achieve
- a problem or conflict he/she has to resolve
- an obstacle to his/her goal

Give an example of a storyline or plot in a traditional story:

.....

Time sequence

The time sequence is built into the plot, as the main character / protagonist moves through the problems and obstacles to the final resolution.

Give an example of a time sequence in a fairytale:

.....

Setting

The setting is obviously where the story takes place, and it can include not only the geographical location, but environmental factors, climate, and social factors. It can also include a time factor (such as historical era) and fantasy or science fiction elements. A traditional story is sometimes re-told in a changed setting for interest and fun.

What is the setting for the story *Little Red Riding Hood*?

.....

Diction

Diction is about speaking clearly. Even though children may not fully understand every word they hear in a story, the storyteller needs to speak clearly and possibly more slowly than they usually would. There are also other aspects of voice use that can improve storytelling – such as change in the volume (loudness) and pitch of the voice to indicate different characters and their emotions.

Describe good diction by a storyteller in an ESL setting?

.....

Length

No matter how well the storyteller is, young children only have a limited attention span. Also, a longer story is likely to contain a great many more twists and turns and complications. However, by interspersing movement and activities, even young children can remain interested for longer.

How long should your storytelling session go for with young children?

.....

Illustration

When children look at a book (and likewise for many adults!) the first thing they look for is pictures. Story illustrations can be line drawings, colourful paintings, photographs, or even diagrams or maps. When telling a story aloud, the children look to the storyteller's face for illustration of emotions about the story. Sometimes the storyteller will also have pictures or photos to show, and/or realia, costumes, or puppets. Even the storyteller's movements, gestures and actions serve as an illustration to the listeners.

Give examples of 3 different kinds of illustrations for a story:

.....

Works Cited in this Topic

Cox, C. (2008). *Teaching Language Arts: A student-Centred Classroom (6th Ed.)*. Boston: Pearson Education.

Green, M. C. (2003). *Storytelling in Teaching*. Retrieved July 2, 2012, from Psychological Science: <http://psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.cf?id=1562>

Story Arts. (2000). *Getting Started*. Retrieved June 20, 2012, from Story Arts: <http://www.storyarts.org/classroom/retelling/getstarted.html>

Wilson, J. (2006). *Great Books to Read Aloud*. Retrieved July 4, 2012, from Random House: <http://www.randomhouse.co.uk/childrens/GreatBookstoReadAloud/>

Wright, A. (1995). *Storytelling with Children*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.