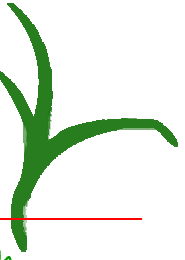


Priscilla Howe

storyteller



All my stories start with a seed of truth.

Why tell stories?

Storytelling:

- reflects the world in a safe way
- creates connections between the teller and the listener
- builds community within the group of listeners
- improves listening comprehension, a vital pre-reading skill
- expresses the beauty of oral language
- reinforces our natural sense of rhythm, with familiar and new language patterns
- introduces us to literature we may not be familiar with
- takes us on journeys to inner lands
- provides a needed break from stress
- gives us the hope of “happily ever after”
- teaches all kinds of information subtly
- whets our appetite for further literary experiences
- introduces us to characters with whom we can relate
- has passed on the values and morals of families and peoples for centuries
- increases our understanding and awareness of the world’s diverse cultures
- is an ancient artform
- develops our ability to imagine, another skill necessary for reading comprehension
- reaches listeners who use various learning styles (visual, aural, kinesthetic, etc.)

And perhaps the best reason of all:

- storytelling is fun!

Thanks to Susannah Holstein (Granny Sue) of the storytelling listserv for the core of this list. For more information, check out the position statement from the Committee on Storytelling of the National Council of Teachers of English:

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

347 Elm St., Lawrence KS 66044 • 785-832-1294

www.priscillahowe.com • priscilla@priscillahowe.com

Before the stories

Storyteller Priscilla Howe will be coming to share stories with the students. Here are suggestions for activities before she arrives.

- Discuss the art of storytelling. Did any of the kids attend preschool storytime at the public library when they were little? Did the librarians tell stories or read aloud, or both? Do their parents or grandparents tell stories of "the olden times"? Have they ever heard a storyteller? Do they remember the stories? What stories do they know already? Is there a student in the class who is known as a joke teller?
- Ask them to retell a familiar story, such as Little Red Riding Hood. Then have them act it out, draw pictures of it, tell the story from another character's point of view, or continue telling what happened after the story was over. Did Little Red grow up to be a famous zookeeper? Did she become a singer in a band that raised money to help the endangered timberwolf? Did she have brothers or sisters?
- What do the students think makes a good story? What makes a good joke?
- Priscilla often tells stories from around the world. What are the countries the students are familiar with? Find them on a globe together. If you have time, read some picture books of folktales from various countries or tell them without the book. Here are some suggestions (these are **not** stories Priscilla will tell):
 - Lon Po Po* by Ed Young (China)
 - Rumpelstiltskin* by Paul Galdone (Germany)
 - Borreguita and the Coyote* by Verna Aardema (Mexico)
 - Iktomi and the Ducks* by Paul Goble (USA)
 - Pecos Bill* by Steven Kellogg (USA)
 - Momotaro, the Peach Boy* by Linda Shute (Japan)
 - Traveling to Tondo* by Verna Aardema (Zaire)
 - Anansi and the Moss Covered Rock* by Eric Kimmel (Ghana)
 - Strega Nona* by Tomie DePaola (Italy)
 - Lazy Jack* by Tony Ross (England)

You'll find many more in the library in the 398.2 Dewey Decimal section. Take the students on a tour of this section in the library. There's hidden treasure there!

After the stories

Here are some suggestions for activities to do after the students have listened to Priscilla's stories.

- Find out which were the favorite stories told. Why? Did everyone remember the names of the stories? Was there anything in the stories that seemed unusual?
- What did the listeners notice about the difference between storytelling and reading aloud? Could they see the stories in their imaginations? [This is not meant to diminish the importance of reading aloud, by any means!]
- Have the listeners draw scenes from the stories. Make comic books of the stories. Or have the students map out the setting. Prompt them to be specific.
- Can the students describe the characters in the stories using at least five descriptive words? Have them write a different story with the same characters. Or mix up the characters from different stories—like putting Goldilocks into the story of the Three Billy Goats Gruff. What would happen? Write poems about the characters or the setting.
- Have the students write headlines about one of the stories, and write newspaper reports of that story. Or write personal ads for characters, real estate ads for settings, etc.
- Have the listeners write a letter to a character in one of the stories, telling that character what they would have done differently. How would the character respond?
- Ask the class act out one of the stories Priscilla told. Emphasize that they don't need to memorize, and stress the importance of gesture, voice, and details.
- What happens when the class changes the ending--does it work, or does the story fall flat? Change the gender of the characters or the setting or the time period. Does it make a difference?
- Have the listeners pantomime the stories. Or try doing the story like an old-time radio show, complete with sound effects. Or make it into a puppet show.
- We often say, "Once upon a time..." and "...they lived happily ever after." Some cultures use "Once there was and was not..." or "In a certain kingdom, in a certain land, in a little village, there lived..." In Haiti, before beginning the story, the teller says "Cric!" and the audience says "Crac." If the "Crac" is not loud enough, the teller refuses to tell the story. One ending is "Snip, snap, snout, this tale's told out!" Have the listeners make up signals for the story to start or end.
- Pass a story around the room: start the story, and have each student add a line or even just a word to the story. Pass a ball of yarn around as the story goes around: the person beginning the story holds the end, and passes the ball to the next teller, who passes it on, and so forth. Or pass a story stick around; whoever is holding the stick has permission to tell while the others listen.
- Encourage the students to retell the stories Priscilla told at home.

Miscellaneous tips for telling stories

Relax! Before you tell a story, take a deep breath. Set your intention to have a good time.

THE BIG RULE: Only tell stories you love. If you don't like your story, neither will the listeners.

Know your story (unless you happen to be making it up on the spot). **The good news is that you don't have to memorize the words**, just know the events, sequence, character and setting. You may want to memorize beginning and ending phrases, or a set phrase in the middle of the tale, if the language of the phrase is essential to the story.

Imagine the people, places, objects and actions fully, but remember, you don't have to tell **all** you know. Experience the story clearly in your own mind so the listeners will experience it as well. Use all your senses to imagine the story.

Practice. Some tellers find it useful to tape their stories in practice or performance. Be gentle to yourself. Look especially for the parts you did well.

Look at your audience. Storytelling is about connection, so you want to connect with the listeners. Good eye contact helps the listeners know you want to connect.

Vary your voice and your body language as the story demands. Pay attention to the movements you make. Your gestures should add to the story, not detract. Some stories and some audiences demand more subtle gestures than others. Consider practicing in front of a mirror.

Don't worry if the listeners don't get the same meaning from the story that you do. As storyteller Donald Davis says, "Meaning is the property of the listener, not the teller."

Know that the listeners have never heard this story told this way. Every storyteller is different, every story is different, every telling is different. Even if you think you have made a mistake, most listeners won't realize it. You can usually backtrack if you've left something out.

Know that the audience just wants to hear a good story. As the storyteller, you're the bearer of this good story.

Give credit: if you didn't make the story up, tell the audience the source. By respecting the author or the culture of the story, we also respect the story and the audience.

Have fun!

Books on storytelling

Here are just a few books available on storytelling. Most of these include lists of stories to tell or collections to use. To find folktales, haunt the 398.2 section of the public library, in both the children's and adult collections.

Who says? Essays on pivotal issues in contemporary storytelling edited by Carol Birch and Melissa A. Heckler. August House, 1996. These are chewy essays on the philosophy of storytelling and the storytelling revival. Birch also wrote *The whole story handbook: using imagery to complete the story experience*, a book useful for working on stories.

Telling your own stories by Donald Davis. August House, 1993. In this great little book, Davis' story prompts draw out your personal stories. He also has a nice story structure outline.

Storyteller, storyteacher: discovering the power of storytelling for teaching and living by Marni Gillard. Stenhouse, 1996. Not a how-to book, but a wonderfully warm "learner's journey," this is one storyteacher's tale, told to encourage us all to tell stories.

The storytelling coach: how to listen, praise, and bring out people's best by Doug Lipman. August House, 1995. You'll find a very useful structure for encouraging others to tell stories here.

The storyteller's guide by Bill Mooney and David Holt. August House, 1996. Holt and Mooney interviewed storytellers around the US for this book, which houses a wealth of information on the art, craft and business of storytelling.

Storytelling: process and practice by Norma J. Livo and Sandra A. Reitz. Libraries Unlimited, 1986. (See also *Storytelling activities* by the same authors.) You'll find nuts-and-bolts advice on storytelling in this valuable tome.

The storyteller's start-up book by Margaret Read MacDonald. August House, 1993. (Also look for other collections by this storyteller.) I recommend this simple how-to book for beginning storytellers.

The grammar of fantasy: an introduction to the art of inventing stories by Gianni Rodari, translated by Jack Zipes. Teachers and Writers Collaborative, 1996. This is a quirky, funny book, full of ideas on how to play with stories in unusual ways.

The way of the storyteller by Ruth Sawyer. Viking, 1942. A classic in the field, this book is as readable and insightful today as it was when it was first published.

<http://www.storynet.org/>

<http://www.storyarts.org/>

<http://www.storyteller.net>

There are also storytelling mailing lists on the Internet. For information on the largest, visit <http://www.libraryschool.net/storytell.htm> or contact me for instructions on how to subscribe.

Storytelling links

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

Story Arts Online—<http://www.storyarts.org/>

Storyteller.net—<http://www.storyteller.net>

There are also storytelling mailing lists on the Internet. Storytell is the largest, and you can find others using Google Groups or Yahoo Groups searches.