Tell a Tale!

“Stories build bridges from person to person and generation to generation.” (Bill Wood, storyteller)

Whether true or imagined, stories are captivating. Storytelling in many parts of the world is the primary way that family history, cultural practices, and values are passed from one generation to another. Stories bind people together and remind them who they are.

In early care, teachers can model oral storytelling and nurture that skill in children. Both telling and listening to stories develops valuable skills. NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) encourages staff to involve families and to help children stay “cognitively, linguistically, and culturally connected” to their home language and culture. (NAEYC 2009) Storytelling can help meet those goals.

Storytelling Development Advantages:

When children use their minds to create images based on words (rather than being provided with images in a book or on screen), they develop abstract thinking skills – being able to think about something without a real object in front of them. These skills improve language, math, and science learning where abstract concepts are frequent and where symbols represent ideas. Each new story requires a child to form new brain connections. (Wood) Listening to stories also contributes to social and emotional development as children feel for the characters. “Listening to stories also helps children become more confident, creative and resilient.” (Wood)

Storytelling Tips:

Model Storytelling – Teachers can tell stories rather than always reading from a book. Ask family or community members to share a story or a riddle or a ballad that they learned as a child. Ask older children to retell stories they know to younger children – famous nursery rhymes or fairy tales. This works especially well in OST (out-of-school-time) programs during transitions. Memorized silly poems like ones by Jack Prelutsky or Shel Silverstein can be the basis for impromptu stories.

Use Story Starters –
- “When I was your age.....”
- Post card or photo album ideas.
- Use the word of the week as many times as possible in a story.
- Story Bag (tell a story based on objects drawn from a bag).

Appeal to Many Learning Styles –

“Storytelling allows you to engage all ways of knowing – the whole brain – what Howard Gardner calls the Multiple Intelligences.” (Norfolk 2009) It is especially appealing to children who have print-processing challenges, like children with dyslexia. These children's brains struggle to receive letters and words in typical ways, so hearing a story rather than reading one is easier and more enjoyable. “Most African storytellers innately integrate all forms of art into the process of conveying their story.” They use song, percussion, dance, and drama to enhance the words of the story as it is told. (Burnett 2010) Keep a basket of props, instruments, and fabric ready. Fabric can become a table cloth, cape, apron, blanket, or animal's skin. Encourage children to change their voices with each character. As one person describes
the scene, listeners can become actors, acting out what they hear. Stories can be sung, for example, “John Henry” or “There’s a Hole in the Bucket.”

“If we … recognize and respect the fact that … [listeners] possess various types of learning intelligences such as oral, tactile, kinesthetic learners, etc., we are compelled to connect with them in our storytelling through various types of art expressions such as singing, drawing, dance or movement, etc.” (Burnett 2010)

**Encourage the Timid** – For a hesitant child, a teacher could use a question and answer format. Open-ended questions avoid quick “Yes” or “No” dead-end responses. Modified show-and-tell, where two or three children share each day, gives children a familiar item to tell a story about. To share the responsibility, one person holds a token and begins a story, then passes the token to the next person in the group who adds a sentence or two. The story continues until each person has added a portion to the tale. Children can work in pairs or trios to build confidence. Stories can be told in a smaller venue like a story corner rather than the stage prepared for the more practiced child.

**Tap Into Technology** – Digital video cameras can be used to record oral tales. Allow children to listen to them frequently and fine-tune their craft. This appeals to the auditory learner. Exchange recorded stories with students from another area. Ask an international student to video chat and tell his or her story. Hearing a real life story can deepen understanding. “We could have read several novels and looked over historical documents …, but the power of learning through this impromptu interview and exchange far surpassed the learning opportunities schools usually offer students.” (Ryan)

“**A well told story can make children laugh, squeal, gasp or cry.”**

*(Bill Wood, Storyteller)*

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**Works Cited:**


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**For more tips on storytelling in early childhood classrooms, check out:**

“Stories to Act Out” at http://www.betterkidcare.psu.edu/TIPS/TIPS0707.pdf
