

## Guide: How to Start a Storytelling Club in Your School

*“Believe the story you are telling, while you are telling it,  
and the listeners will be right there with you . . .”*

*— Storyteller Jamie Oliviero*

### Introduce your students to storytelling

There are many ways to introduce your students to storytelling; inviting a Storyteller to perform in your school, researching folklore and oral traditions of different cultures throughout the world, doing activities in which students have the opportunity to create and share their own personal stories are some of the many ways you can give your students their first glimpse into the wonderful and ancient tradition of storytelling.

### Organize a club

Once students have a general understanding of the both the power and accessibility of storytelling, organize a routine at your school in which students get together to work in groups and learn new stories. It can form part of the official academic program or be an extracurricular activity, after school hours. Students can practice both researching and learning folktales and narratives from cultures around the world and writing and structuring their own stories, with the goal of presenting them to the peers. It is important that the club meet regularly, at least once a week, so students have the opportunity to both expand and evolve the stories they research and create, and to develop their confidence and comfort level when telling for others

### Helpful tips and advice from Storyteller Priscilla Howe:

- **THE BIG RULE:** Only tell stories you love. If you don't like your story, neither will the listeners.
- Relax! Before you tell a story, take a deep breath. Set your intention to have a good time.
- 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. It's as if you are watching a film in your head and are telling the audience this film. 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. Experience the story clearly in your own mind so the listeners will experience it as well. Use all your senses to

imagine the story. Remember, though, that you don't have to tell all you know—too much detail can bore the listeners. You're painting a picture with your words and gestures.

- 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 your movements so that your gestures 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.
- Don't worry about being perfect. 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 or it isn't from your life, 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!

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### **Find new challenges**

Once your club has practiced and prepared a repertoire of several stories, you can look for new ways and new environments for them to implement and share their storytelling skills. Some examples include:

- Organize an event for parents in which students perform the stories they have researched and created.
- Practice telling stories in a foreign language that the students are studying

- Visit the classrooms of younger grades to share stories and demonstrate the importance of language and oracy
- Organize an event at a local library, park or community center where students go to perform the stories they have practiced
- Take a field trip to visit a storytelling performance in your city
- Invite a Storyteller to your school, not only to hear his/her stories, but to give the students an opportunity to share theirs as well with a professional Storyteller.
- Contact other local schools to see if they are interested in doing a story exchange, in which students from each school visit to share their stories.

*"The shortest distance between truth and a human being is a story."  
—Anthony De Mello*