

Everyone likes to hear a story. Perhaps as a child you remember the magic of the words “once upon a time” that began a strange tale of mountain men seeing the Northern lights, talking animals, and fairy godmothers. But you don’t need to be a child to hear stories. You find a form of storytelling everywhere—at lunch where your friend “bends” your ear as he relates an adventure, as you sit at your desk and tell a friend about a “funny thing that happened the other day,” around a campfire where the glowing coals add believability to the tall tales, or a late evening where low lights set the mood for a spooky ghost story that tingles the spine.

Everyone is a storyteller, repeating adventures as soon as speech is learned. The difference among storytellers is quality. Some people are so poor at telling stories that their listeners are bored. Others re-create tales so vividly that listeners find the experience is exciting and stimulating.

It is this invigorating quality that makes storytelling so rewarding. If you become effective at relating a tale, your audience, whether adults or children, will give you such a wholehearted response that you will have an exhilarating sensation of delight and accomplishment.

Also, storytelling is a communication exercise that helps you develop vocal skills. And its informality assists you in controlling stage fright.

As you retell stories your purpose is similar to that of the oral reader. You must imaginatively suggest the characters, mood, and situations so that they appear real in the minds of the audience. You differ from the oral reader, however, in that you commit to memory the outline of the written story and retell it in your own words.

## How to Tell a Story

### 1. Select the right story to tell.

Selection should be based on the nature of the audience, the purpose of the event, and the style and skill of the storyteller.

#### The Audience

- Does the listener have the background and the vocabulary to follow the story?
- Will the listener be able to follow the plot or plots with relative ease?
- Will the plot, characters, and descriptions hold the listener’s attention?
- Will the listener in some way “identify” with the story to get “hooked”?
- Does the story lend itself to adaptations that will appeal to the audience?

#### The Purpose

- Is there a theme to be used (i.e. ghost stories, nature stories, tall tales, etc.)?
- Is there a particular message to be communicated (i.e. honesty is the best policy, it is better to give than receive, goodness will prevail over evil, etc.)?

#### The Storyteller’s Style

- Is your style more suited to ethnic stories or generic stories?
- Do you prefer to “ham it up” or tell it straight?
- Do you feel comfortable using action and visual cues?
- Can you “work” an audience to participate in repeated phrases or actions?
- Can you use dialects effectively?
- Do props (i.e. hats, costumes, puppets, flannel boards, etc.) work for you or distract you?

- Does the story demand a certain style or can it be adapted to fit your style?

## 2. Learn the story

- Listen closely to the story (if is being told) or read and then re-read the story.
- Block out the structure – plot, progress of the action, and sequence of events.
- Visualize the setting and characters in your mind’s eye.
- Note any important details, phrases, or descriptions – remember them the way you remember best ( i.e. write out the complete text, write an outline, retell it, record it on audio tape, etc.).
- Rather than memorize the story, visualize it so clearly that you recreate the happenings.
- Tell it soon to someone or something (a pet, a tape recorder, your friends).
- Let it rest then tell it again.
- Tell it to an audience and judge the telling on the basis of (use this order) 1. the listener’s reaction, 2. your own standards, 3. as compared to the source.
- Tell the story at least twice before deciding to keep it or not. If your audience enjoys hearing it and you enjoy telling it – record it in some way so you can recall it when needed.

## 3. Tell the story.

- Look at your listeners. Make sure listeners are comfortable, that they can see you and that you can see them.
- Catch the listeners’ attention with a good opening sentence, statement, sound, or look.
- Speak clearly and slowly so you can be understood. Let the listener get accustomed to your voice and accent.
- Make sure that you re-establish the listeners concentration as you get to the all important climax of the story.
- Other hints:
  - Listeners generally prefer stories with dialogue to those that are only narration.
  - Keep the plot simple and clean and avoid too many characters.
  - Memorize only those phrases or details that are essential to the story. Don’t try to memorize the entire story (unless the language demands it and you are really good)
    - It is OK to shorten a story or delete certain passages if circumstances dictate.
    - Use gestures carefully. Gestures can distract from the story.
    - If a listener is distracted it is OK to regain contact through rhetorical questions like “Then Jenny, what do you suppose happened next?”

When selecting stories several considerations should be given.

Audience – age, interest, etc.

Purpose: Illustrating a moral, culture, setting, introducing literature, entertaining.

Your style, stories that suit your style, taste, interest.

### **Six ingredients provide the secret for retelling a story well.**

1. Select a story that lends itself to retelling. Your best choice is one with a tightly constructed plot that has an interesting beginning, a logical development of episodes, spirited conflict, and a definite climax that quickly brings out a brief, satisfying conclusion. To be memorable, your story should have a sense of earnestness about it, showing respect for character and genuine emotions.
2. Visualize every scene and character. In your mind really “see” what is occurring until you feel you have actually lived that experience.

3. Use simple, powerful language consistent with the story's style. Don't try to memorize the author's words. Use your own, except for a few phrases that you may need to retain to help the "flavor" of the tale. ("ARRR" . . . if you are telling a pirate's tale). Keep "once upon a time," for it adds a mystic touch. Keep a word like ogre which has a fuller meaning than if you changed it to "mean little man." Avoid such modernisms as "o.k.," or "cool," or "wow," for they destroy the far off illusion. Because words are your only tools for building the story, use a rich vocabulary that arouses the imagination.
4. Breathe life into the tale. Give it sparkle and spontaneity. Be enthused in your voice, in your body, in your eyes.
5. Create suspense through a varied rate. It is boring to hear anything—music, speeches, lines of a play, stories—at the same dreary pace. Variety is necessary to communicate thought and feeling. Some moments will be leisurely because the material calls for it, but as things begin to happen in the story, your tempo should increase and build toward the exciting climax.
6. Use a flexible voice. Vocally distinguish between the various people, giants, animals, and monsters that appear frequently in stories. Use a wide range of pitch, quality, force, and rate. When you turn from character to narrator, keep your voice pleasant and medium pitched for easy listening. Always articulate clearly so the audience will catch every word.

**How to Prepare**—to tell a story in such a colorful delightful way that it stirs your listeners' imaginations and makes them "live" every word you say.

1. Choose a folk tale that merits telling and meets the criteria described in this packet. Be sure to select a story you sincerely like and one that will be appropriate for your audience, occasion, and time limits.
2. You may need to shorten the story if it is too long. Cut out unnecessary information while retaining the basic story line. Sometimes you can cut a whole scene and bridge it with a sentence transition. Sometimes you have to leave out minor characters. Be wise about your cutting. Make your story meet the time limits.
3. Read the story silently for enjoyment. Why do you like the story? Be specific. Keep your answers in mind and incorporate those qualities into your storytelling.
4. Read the story slowly once or twice to visualize each scene. In your mind see what happens. See what each character looks like. Are they brown bears or black bears? Do they wear clothes or are they content in their fur? Visualize the setting until you know exactly the rooms Goldilocks visits. Sense the emotions of the situation: Goldilocks' tiredness, the Bears' surprise, etc. Accomplish this visualization by using your powers of imagination, concentration, and sense recall.
5. Close your book and think silently through the story. Usually the action divides itself into (a) the problem, (b) the complication, and (c) the solution. Attempt to see each of these developments as the plot unfolds.
6. Outline the story's sequence of events.
7. Now read the story aloud and listen to particular phrases of narration and dialogue that add color. Retain these to use with your simple, direct language. Remember, do not memorize the words of the story. Fit your own words to the events.
8. Rehearse the story aloud seven or eight times. Make it come alive. Use your voice to suggest character. For example, Papa Bear will be gruffer than Moma Bear who will in turn sound different from Baby Bear. Keep both vocal and bodily response simple and informal, yet full of vitality.

Polish the beginning of the tale, setting the mood and starting the plot immediately. Polish the end until it rings with enthusiasm and conviction. Lift out difficult sections of dialogue or emotional scenes and work on them until they come easily.

Build to the climax with a varied tempo. Learn to use the pause, a necessary tool to gain suspense or to allow an important fact to sink in before continuing to the next event.

9. Overlearn your story. Think it through.

### **How to Present**

Introduce the tale to the audience by relating it to something within their experience. Explain any unfamiliar words, to prevent breaking the story's continuity with questions. Maintain a relaxed, happy, informal atmosphere.

As you tell the story, be aware of your audience. If they don't seem to understand what you are saying, you may need to rephrase. Also, you may wish to encourage audience participation in the story with certain necessary sounds (if appropriate).

Many people balk at storytelling saying, "But I don't know any stories!" However, just a bit of reflection will dismiss this idea. Think of all the stories that you have heard while growing up.

### **Packet # 16 Questions**

1. How is the storyteller similar to the oral reader?
2. How does the storyteller differ from the oral reader?
3. What stories adapt well to retelling?
4. Of what importance is vocabulary to the storyteller?
5. What are the six ingredients necessary for effective storytelling?