

STORYTELLING FROM THE CURRICULUM

A Workshop with

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INTRODUCTION:

I would like to engage you and your students in my favorite activities, telling and writing stories! The goal of this workshop is to make writing more accessible for all learners. The objective is for each student to create an original story. This story is fiction based on facts taken from a topic of study. This is storytelling and writing in the content area. Because they are creating something from what they know, this method of writing challenges the students' higher level thinking. My hope is that teachers and students will use storytelling with writing in many subjects all year long.



LET'S GET STARTED!

Model a story from the subject area you have chosen.

The best role models are live storytellers. Tell the story yourself or invite a guest teller. Other great models include story recordings (see references) and related books read with passion and expression. Both picture books and chapter books can fill the listener's mind with important images they need to make their story come alive.

Reinforce the basic story elements. Every story needs a problem and a solution.

What were the problems in the story you just heard? How did the characters solve their dangers and challenges? Who/what were the characters?

Pretend you have a movie theater inside your forehead. The pictures move in live color and sound. Sometimes you can even smell things.

Create a class story.

The setting is very important to get ideas flowing. Imagine what the world looks like in the chosen place and time. The story leader begins the class piece by describing this imagined world. It could be that the setting is the cool, moist darkness of an earthworm home. It could be the gurgling, breathing, beating human body. It could be the tense, constricted water which turns a turbine and launches a live kilowatt on its journey along a wire pathway. It could be the smell of buffalo skin and smoke and cottonwood beams from the inside of a Mandan earth lodge. It could be anything. Get a strong picture inside your mind.

Choose a character. It may be human or animal, live or inanimate. It goes with your story. The character belongs in the setting and must be believable. No cartoons or super heroes allowed.

Play “I Was There!” Once the students have the setting in their minds, they can begin to imagine the character moving about. Have the students contribute their ideas about what they see and what is happening. If you like, you can have them raise their hands and say, “I was there!” before giving their idea. Keep the story true to the facts you have been studying. Students may need guidance with this, but it is a great way to check their knowledge. Make sure the class story has a problem or danger and a way to get out of it. Find a way to end the class story.

Make a simple sketch of the class story, a map of the story events. You may also choose to have students act out their story. Enacting a story is a great way to engage your kinesthetic learners.



Create individual stories.

Ask the students to think of their own story character and problem. It is useful to have a brief discussion and hear some of the ideas to help those who may be struggling.

Have paper and pencil ready.

Have the students to close their eyes and pretend to turn on their theater of the mind. Here are questions to make their 'forehead movies' better. These questions are not for answering out loud, they are for changing the quiet picture inside.

Go for a sensory walk.

Pretend that you are in the place of your story.

What do you see around you? What is the weather like?

What time of day is it? What colors do you see?

What do you hear? nearby sounds? far away sounds?

What do you smell?

Is there something in that place to touch or pick up? It is rough or smooth or hot or cold? Is it heavy or light?

Is there anything to eat? How does it taste?

Imagine the story happening while you pretend to be in the story environment. What is happening to the character/s? How do they survive or solve the problem?

How does the story end?

When you get a good picture in your mind, make a sketch of what happened in your story.

Tell your story idea to a partner.

Your partner may ask a question about your story to help them understand it better. This is usually a good piece of information to add to your story. Take turns.

Write your story.

Tip: to make rewrites less painful, get an aide or volunteer to type the first drafts on computer. Make editing changes on the typed pages. Students often find it fun to update their drafts on the computer. It helps them focus on the story and the writing itself.

Extensions:

Illustrate and publish your story in a handmade book.

Dramatize your story.

Tell your story aloud with sound effects, gestures, and expression.

Celebrate your young authors with a party!

