

GSTESOL Storytelling and Role-play

Reading for Week 6

Bring your English storybook to next class and be prepared to practice telling your story.

Use this reading text and the storytelling checklist for preparation.

Prepare to Tell a Story

Once you have chosen the right story, the next step is to prepare to tell the story effectively. As Brewster, Ellis, and Girard (2004) point out, “Simply reading a story aloud to a class without preparation could be disastrous, with a loss of pupil attention, motivation, and self-confidence. Pupils’ enjoyment will increase enormously if we ensure their understanding is supported in several ways.

Pupils will also need to feel involved and relate the story to aspects of their own experience” (p. 192). This section will explore how to prepare for successful storytelling.

Alton Chung is a famous Hawaiian storyteller of Korean and Japanese heritage who uses body movement, facial expressions, and voices to make stories come alive. This multicultural storyteller engages listeners with his theatrics. Chung describes his style of storytelling as being influenced by “talk story,” a form of oral history found in Hawaiian culture. Talk story is the way Hawaiian people converse and share stories, a style that emphasizes collaboration and cooperation. In talk story, a person shares a story while others corroborate or add to it as it is being told (Taosaka, 2002). Chung embraces this act of collaboration in his storytelling.

Although talk story is specific to Hawaiian culture, this example of storyteller Alton Chung shows how important it is to use storytelling techniques that appeal to your audience. The human connection between storyteller and audience is key for holding the audience’s attention. As such, teachers should consider the characteristics of their young learners and use storytelling techniques that are relevant to them.

Some teachers feel anxiety over storytelling because they feel that they have no natural talent for it, or they lack confidence in their own English language skills. However, with thoughtful preparation and practice, *all* teachers can create a successful storytelling experience for their students.

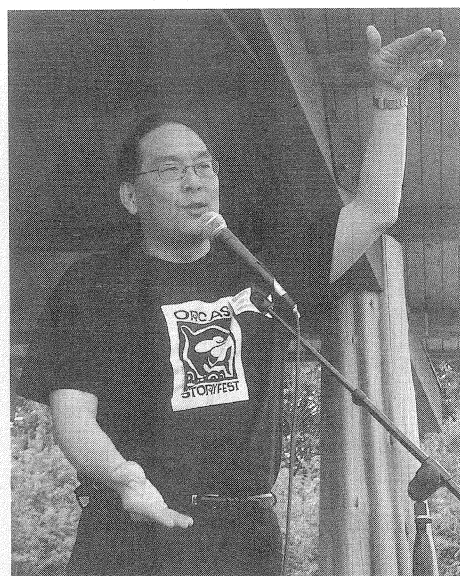


Photo courtesy of Anne Shimojima

Storyteller Alton Chung describes his style thus: “When performing, I try to connect and be fully present with the audience—to be in the here and now. At times, audience members, especially young people, seem to hunger for the connection and stories, as if they can never get enough. I believe that there is a need for true human connection and story in our society.” (www.altonchung.com)

To make your storytelling engaging, prepare these four elements: theatrics, props, script, and rehearsals.

Aim to include aspects of these four elements in every storytelling session. If this is a new concept, start small and build up your skills slowly. As you gain confidence using one aspect, add another to your repertoire. The theatrics and props are particularly important as they help to generate interest and enjoyment in learners, and they make input comprehensible.

Consider the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Children love to hear stories told with different character voices, so you could use a young girl's voice for Goldilocks; a squeaky voice for Baby Bear; a sweet, soothing voice for

Theatrics

- Gestures
- Body movement
- Dramatic pauses
- Character voices
- Facial expressions
- Speaking slowly and clearly

Props

- Visuals for setting and characters
- Realia
- Masks for role play
- Costumes for role play
- Hand or finger puppets
- PowerPoint slides or storyboards

STORYTELLING PREPARATION

Rehearsals

- Memorize the text, including questions for students
- Use cue cards if necessary
- Practice in front of the mirror
- Record/videotape yourself
- Rehearse using props
- Practice, practice, practice!

Script

- Use illustrations from the storybook
- Adapt the script to learners' levels
- Create roles students can play
- Integrate songs or chants
- Prepare places in the storytelling for questions and predictions

Mama Bear; and a rough, deep voice for Papa Bear. In addition, you could use hand puppets and a drawing of the Bears' house on a poster or in a PowerPoint presentation along with the character voices. The combination of voices, puppets, and the background drawing would make the storytelling fun and entertaining and would also help students understand the story better. Use a variety of theatrics and props to keep each storytelling fresh and new for learners.

Another storytelling element to consider is the script, which should be carefully prepared to be just above the learners' level of English and to incorporate both new and known vocabulary and grammatical structures. Furthermore, script preparation should also build in time for student participation and comprehension questions throughout the storytelling, which will help keep the level of student engagement high. Children can role play with the script by playing the character parts in skits or Reader's Theater activities. The script can be simplified to adjust to the learners' level to help with this.

Finally, it is vitally important to rehearse the storytelling before class. Although it is best to memorize as much of the text as possible, it can be helpful to prepare cue cards (cards with key words and plot elements from the script) to help guide your "performance." In fact, preparing cue cards that are colorful and have pictures that relate to the story can actually add more excitement to the storytelling process. Preparation for the first time you tell a particular story can take time; however, the props and activities can be reused, so you will find that the next performance of that story takes much less preparation. In the end, the smiles on the faces of your young learners will make all the effort worthwhile.

■ Effective Storytelling Activities

In order to design effective storytelling activities, it is important for teachers to think about activities before, during, and after the storytelling. In addition to the preparation for making the story come alive, the teacher needs to prepare students with the language to understand the story. Activities to keep students active and engaged in class at every stage of the storytelling should also be planned.

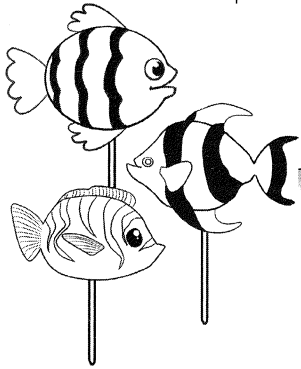
In the next sections, numerous activities are suggested for use before, during, and after the storytelling.

Activities before Storytelling

Before-storytelling activities are designed to aid comprehension, create interest and enjoyment, make the storytelling more meaningful, and encourage critical thinking.

Capture their attention:

Use pictures or realia to introduce the story in a fun and interesting way. You can use the cover of the storybook to capture the attention of students or create fun visuals. To make the characters come alive, the teacher could make finger or popsicle stick puppets of the characters and introduce them to the class. To draw students into the scenery of the story, the teacher could make a background on poster paper and put it up on the classroom wall, or project the scenes from a laptop onto the wall.



For example, for the story *The Rainbow Fish*, the teacher could use an underwater scene from the storybook and popsicle stick puppets of the fish. The brightly colored puppets would include different-colored fish and a multicolored Rainbow Fish with shiny silver scales. The puppets can be used with the background to excite the students for a storytelling that has a bright scene and puppets to hold and play with.

Connect to prior knowledge and experiences:

It is important to connect students' lives to the story. This includes introducing the main ideas, concepts, or characters to students. The choice of concepts the teacher introduces depends on the students' background, experience, and culture.

For example, if the story is *Cinderella*, the teacher may prepare students by introducing the concept of family since the story's main characters are Cinderella, her stepmother, and stepsisters. In addition, the story includes interaction between different classes of people (i.e., royalty and common people), and the teacher could explain this by introducing the characters and their backgrounds. Another way to connect to students' background knowledge could be to ask students about their own country or culture's *Cinderella* story since many countries have similar fairytales or folktales.

Review language students have learned:

If a story contains vocabulary and structures that students have already learned, it can help to review this language before telling the story. This is especially important when the story is a part of a larger thematic unit and recycles language previously learned. The review of language is often related to background knowledge and experiences. Since young learners don't have much experience in the world, they often learn language, both native language and English, while learning about concepts.

In Chapter 3, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* was used as the basis of a unit on nutrition and foods. It is a commonly used storybook for young learners. It has vocabulary for food, numbers, days of the week, and the life cycle of a butterfly. The teacher may connect to students' background knowledge of food, numbers, and days of the week, which is also a review of the vocabulary associated with those concepts.

Pre-teach new vocabulary or expressions:

If there are key words or structures that are necessary to comprehend the story and cannot be inferred from the context, it is better to teach them before the storytelling. Try to do this in the context of connecting to prior knowledge.

For example, in the story *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, the teacher could make a bright colorful poster or PowerPoint slide of the house with the different rooms, then review the known vocabulary and pre-teach new vocabulary. Students may already know words like *chair*, *bed*, and *bowl*. However, they may not know the room names, like kitchen, living room, and bedroom, and may not be familiar with porridge. In this way, the teacher can capture attention, introduce the context, review known words, and then pre-teach vocabulary.

Ask students to predict what will happen in the story:

It can be fun and helpful to encourage students to predict what will happen in the story. Prediction is a good critical thinking skill to encourage. Be sure to record the predictions to check whether they are correct later. Students could write one sentence they think will be in the story and put it in a prediction box. Then at the end of the story, the teacher can read the sentences out loud for fun. If students are at a lower level, the teacher can write three sentences on the board, then students can choose the ending by writing one of them.

For example, for Aesop's fable about the Lion and the Mouse, the teacher could give these three sentences for students to choose and write:

- The lion eats the mouse.
- The mouse saves the lion.
- The lion saves the mouse.

Making a prediction helps young learners pay attention to the story and think critically to check their predictions during the storytelling. This is not necessary for all stories, but it can add a level of interest and engagement where appropriate.

Give students a purpose for listening:

Before you begin telling a story, give students a purpose for listening (in addition to pure enjoyment). This can help them stay engaged and make them more active listeners during the storytelling. Perhaps the purpose is to check their prediction as mentioned earlier. If the story has a lesson (or moral) to learn from, tell your students to listen for it.

Be sure to ask them for it at the end of the story. If there are songs, chants, or lines from the story that children can repeat, teach them before the story. Then give students a cue for participation that they can listen for.

For example, when students listen to the story of Chicken Little, the teacher can ask them to make an animal sound when they hear the name of an animal.

- Henny Penny: "Cluck cluck"
- Ducky Lucky: "Quack quack"
- Loosey Goosey: "Honk honk"
- Turkey Lurkey: "Gobble gobble"

In the storytelling, the teacher will say lines like, "Along the way she met Henny Penny," and then students can say "Cluck cluck!" Then when the teacher says "Soon they met Ducky Lucky," students can call out "Quack quack!" This keeps students listening for the animal, shows their comprehension of which animal it is, and makes the storytelling more active and fun.