

## ENERGIZE WITH A PARENT-TELLER PROGRAM

by Judy Sima

**S**torytelling has been part of my life for years, both in my work as a media specialist and free-lance storyteller. I've long been aware of the importance of storytelling in the classroom, but I was becoming increasingly frustrated with my own limitations of time and energy for classroom tellings. In 1987, I decided to take action by forming a corps of volunteer parent storytellers called the Fitzgerald Parent-Tellers. The program involves systematically training parent volunteers to become classroom storytellers in the Fitzgerald Public Schools of Warren, Michigan.

### Getting started

How do you start a Parent-Teller program? Getting the parents to volunteer is the first step. I began by telling stories and sharing my vision at parent group meetings. This approach initially brought four moms into the program. Six years later, we have 10 committed Parent-Tellers.

Who can join the group? Anyone with an interest in stories and a desire to work with kids. Adults who work part-time or retirees are good candidates. Our current Parent-Tellers come from a variety of backgrounds. Some have a good deal of drama experience, and others have performed as clowns. We even have retired teachers. One parent knows French and Spanish, and her French tellings of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" are favorites schoolwide. In another case, a mother, who is talented in costume design, teamed up with a parent who does terrific accents. Together, they never fail to surprise and delight the kids.

### The weekly meetings

Parent-Teller meetings are held for one hour each week at the middle school's media center. After the Parent-Tellers select stories for telling, I take them step-by-step through the story-learning process. During these sessions, story visualization is stressed, as well as the importance of telling in one's own words. A considerable amount of time is also devoted to practicing before the group. Positive feedback is given routinely, with suggestions for improvement offered only upon request.

(continued on page 2)



**NEED HELP WITH  
YOUR CLASSROOM  
TELLINGS? SET UP  
A PARENT-TELLER  
PROGRAM. YOU'LL  
FIND WELCOME  
HELP AND A WEALTH  
OF ENERGY.**



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INFORMATION  
ABOUT STORYTELLING**

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### The first tellings

After the Parent-Tellers have prepared a couple of stories, they are given the opportunity to present several, half-hour performances for groups of 80 to 100 students. After this initiation, the tellers are ready to fill teacher requests for classroom visits. This is done via a request form (see page 3) that is distributed to the teachers. On the form, teachers can indicate what is currently being taught in their classrooms, what maps are available, and when the tellers can come to their classrooms.

### Follow-up activities

To better connect the stories with classroom studies, we've also developed a follow-up activities sheet (see page 3). Using the sheet, the tellers develop one or two activities to go with their stories then leave the sheet with the teacher. Forms for evaluating the Parent-Teller visits are also left.

### Scheduling

We schedule the teacher requests for storytelling by sitting down with our individual calendars. Programs are approximately 30 minutes in length and scheduled back-to-back at the same schools. Beginning tellers are usually paired with experienced ones.

### Expenses

The cost of the Parent-Teller program is minimal. The main expense is a pot of coffee at our weekly meetings. A large cart is provided, filled with folklore and picture books and storytelling cassettes (borrowed from the school media centers)—all of which the Parent-Tellers may borrow. A copy machine is also available.

### Expanding the circle

I also feel making the Parent-Tellers part of the school community is important. Each month, I provide a calendar of the school media center's events and invite the Parent-Tellers to attend the happenings. I also relate information about local storytelling events and encourage the tellers to attend with their families. If there's a story swap, I encourage them to go beyond their comfort zone and participate.

My dream of expanding the circle of storytelling in the Fitzgerald Public Schools has been successful—and extends even beyond the classroom. Several of the Parent-Tellers have been invited to perform at book stores, public libraries, and neighboring schools. Some have influenced their own children to join my middle school storytelling troupe. Best of all, our storytelling efforts have culminated for the past two years in a Fitzgerald Family Storytelling Festival where parents, students, and teachers can perform for the community.

*Judy Sima has been a media specialist in the Fitzgerald Public Schools of Warren, Michigan, for 23 years and a professional teller for five. Her Parent-Teller program was included in Storytelling Pathway to Literacy, a book developed by Sheila Dailey for the Tennessee State Library Association and National Storytelling Press.*

## SUGGESTED BOOKS AND STORIES FOR PARENT-TELLER PROGRAMS

- Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown (Scribner, 1947).  
*The Cow-Tail Switch* by Harold Courlander (Holt, 1949).  
*Anansi and the Moss Covered Rock* by Eric Kimmel (Holiday House, 1988).  
*The Dark* by Robert Munsch (Annick Press, 1979); other titles by Munsch: *Thomas' Snowsuit*, *Pigs, I Have to Go*, *Show and Tell*, *Moir's Birthday*.  
*If You Give a Moose a Muffin* by Laura Numeroff (Harper, 1991).  
*We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen (Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1989).  
*The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka (Viking, 1989).  
"The Tailor" from *Just Enough to Make a Story* by Nancy Schimmel (Sister's Choice Press, 22027 Parker St., Berkeley, Calif. 94704; 1982).  
*Stories to Solve: Folktales from Around the World* by George Shannon (Greenwillow, 1985).  
*The Squeaky Door* by Laura Simms (Crown, 1991).



*Parent-tellers provide a pleasant change of pace for children, and a welcome back-up for teachers.*