
Parent Storytellers— Expanding the Library's Circle of Stories

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The magic of storytelling has been a part of my life for many years, both in my work as a media specialist and as a freelance storyteller. Being aware of the power and impact of stories in the classroom, I realized I could only go so far with my own telling. What I needed was a corps of volunteer storytellers who were readily available to go into classrooms and tell stories on relatively short notice. The Fitzgerald Parent-Tellers was the answer. For six years, these parents have worked closely with the library to the delight of students in our school district.

To encourage volunteers and entice them into joining, I told stories and shared my idea at parent meetings. While attendance has fluctuated over the years, our group has grown from the original four parents to about 10 committed tellers.

Anyone with an interest in stories and a desire to work with kids is encouraged to join. Retirees are welcomed. Parents with preschool children can bring them to our weekly meetings. The meetings, held in the backroom of the middle school media center, are scheduled for one hour, but they occasionally stretch out to two hours. While there is no set format, our meetings consist of lots of idea sharing, practice, and helpful suggestions.

The first few meetings always include introductory lessons on how to select and learn stories. I model a variety of different kinds of stories and teach at least one story that the tellers can take home with them and begin telling immediately.

After the parent-tellers select their own stories, I take them through the process of learning their first story step-by-step. Visualizing the story is stressed, as is telling the story in their own words rather than memorizing the words in the book. They practice in front of the group and are given suggestions for improvement only if they ask for it. For many of the volunteers, this is their first time per-

forming in front of an audience. Topics for other meetings include learning string stories, participation stories, the use of props, and strengthening skills. Of course, lots of time is devoted to practice before the supportive, nonjudgmental group.

Once the parent-tellers have prepared one or two stories, I take them to one of our elementary buildings where we give several half-hour performances for groups of 80 to 100 students at different grade levels. After they've "gotten their feet wet," the tellers are ready to fill teacher requests for classroom storytelling visits.

On a request form, the teachers in our three elementary buildings let us know what their classes are studying and what maps are available in the classroom for locating countries of story origins. Teachers also note the day of the week and time they prefer. The parent-tellers with a wider repertoire can usually find a story or two to go along with what the class is studying.

While classroom visits have been accepted enthusiastically both by students and teachers, I wanted to establish

Suggestions for Follow-up Activities in the Classroom

1. Write a short sequel to the story.
2. Retell the story to a partner or in a group of three or four.
3. Do an art activity, such as a book, a placemat that reflects the action of the story, or a poster.
4. Point out where the story takes place on a map or globe, locate other interesting facts about the story's setting.
5. Re-enact a scene.
6. Write a letter to a character in the story or to the author.
7. Read related stories, by the same author or with the same setting (other folk tales from the country of the featured story).

a greater classroom connection. To make the stories more closely related to what was going on in the classroom, we developed a generic list of follow-up activities that may be used with the stories (see boxed copy). The tellers select one or two of these activities and then tailor the activities to their own story. After performing the story, the teller leaves the activity sheet with the teacher. An evaluation form is also included, which helps us improve our service.

To fill teacher requests for classroom storytelling, the parent-tellers and I sit down with our individual calendars. Each program is approximately 30 minutes long. I try to pair a beginning teller with an experienced one. I also try to schedule the programs back-to-back at the same school to reduce the number of times that tellers must go out.

Our main expense is a pot of coffee each week. I keep a book cart filled with folk lore and picture books as well as storytelling cassettes, all of which the parent-tellers may borrow. A copy machine is available for their use as well.

The tellers come with many interests from a variety of backgrounds. Some have had a great deal of drama experience. Several have performed as clowns. Some are retired teachers, and still others have worked in adult literacy programs. One parent was a French and Spanish major in college. Her telling of Goldilocks and the Three Bears in French continues to be one of the students' favorite stories. One of the mothers who likes to create costumes teams up with another who is skilled in imitating different accents. They have formed a team that never fails to surprise and delight the children.

I feel it is important to make the parents feel part of the school community. Each month, they are given a calendar of the school's library events and invited to attend the happenings. I also use the meetings to share information about upcoming storytelling events in the area. I encourage the tellers to attend these events along with their families. (If there

is a story swap at these events, I encourage our parent-tellers to go beyond their comfort zone and participate in the swaps.)

The storytellers have gone well beyond the classroom. By taking their stories home, many of the parents have inspired their children to join the storytelling troupe at the middle school. Several parent-tellers have been invited to book stores, public libraries, and other schools to tell stories. Best of all, for the past two years our storytelling efforts have culminated in a year-end, district-wide family storytelling festival where parents, students, and teachers perform for the entire community.

Some of our favorite books and stories are:

Anansi and the Moss Covered Rock by Eric Kimmel (Holiday House, 1988).

The Cow-Tail Switch by Harold Courlander (Holt, 1949).

The Dark by Robert Munsch and other books by Munsch such as *Thomas' Snowsuit*, *Pigs, I Have to Go*, *Show and Tell*, and *Moira's Birthday* (Annick Press).

If You Give a Moose a Muffin by Laura Numeroff (Harper, 1991).

Stone Soup by Marcia Brown (Scribners, 1947).

Stories to Solve: Folktales from Around the World by George Shannon (Greenwillow, 1985).

"The Tailor," from *Just Enough to Tell a Story* by Nancy Schimmel (Sister's Choice Press, 22027 Parker Street, Berkeley, California 94704).

The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka (Viking, 1989).

We're Going on a Bear Hunt by Michael Rosen (Macmillan, 1989).

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Celebrate School Library Month!

Thanks to the American Library Association and the American Association of School Librarians, there's an opportunity for publicizing your library coming up soon. National Library Week is observed April 17-23, 1994, and National School Library Media Month throughout April. Write to ALA Graphics, 50 E. Huron Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611 for a catalog of publicity materials.