

Storytelling



Our culture is defined by the stories we tell. We tell stories that have been passed down through time, known as folklore (literally, “knowledge of the people”), but we also tell stories about what happens in our daily lives. In fact, much of our daily conversation consists of relating events that have happened to us or to people we know. So many of these stories get lost – they aren’t good enough to bear retelling. But some stories stick with us – the interesting ones, the ones that are particularly funny, or exciting, or life-changing. People will ask you to retell them (“Hey, tell them about the time you...”). We build up a repertoire of our favorite personal stories, ones that grow and gain embellishments as they are retold.

Sometimes, if a story we hear is particularly interesting, we retell it even though the people involved aren’t around. We may not get all of the details right, or may change things to make it a better story. And, for all we know, the story may get passed on from our retelling of it, and it gains a life of its own. Eventually, these stories may get passed around enough to become part of our folklore, where their sources are lost, but the messages they convey remain intact.

For our storytelling unit, we will be listening to stories, collecting stories, writing them down, and passing them on. We will look at some techniques used by storytellers to enhance a story, and practice using them to tell stories. We will see how stories change, how the quality of a story is affected by the teller, and examine old and new folklore.

For this unit, you will be required to do the following:

- 1) Choose one of the following for the first activity:
 - a) Collect three short stories as told by friends, family, etc. Write down the stories themselves, who told them, and the context of their telling (For example, “This story was told by my father on January 15th at the dinner table when my mother asked him if anything happened at work,” as well as the story itself). Each story should be at least a page long. Each story is worth a check grade.

These stories are to be TOLD TO YOU or in your presence. They are NOT your own personal stories. It is okay to ask people to tell you stories. You MUST have who told the story, when, and why, or you will lose 25% on each story missing this information. Get started on this assignment right away to make sure you can get three longer stories in the time you have been given.

- b) Go to storycorps.org – it is an ongoing project where they are collecting people’s stories in the Library of Congress. Click on “Listen to Stories.” You will find 33 pages of stories, each of which is a few minutes long. You can also organize the stories by category. Listen to 6 stories that interest you. For each, write down the quote used as the title of the story, what the story was about, and what you did/didn’t like about it. Rate each of your stories, making the best #1 and the worst #6. These stories are worth a total of three check grades.
- 2) Tell a (clean) joke to the class from memory. This joke must first be submitted in writing and approved.
- 3) Listen to a story in class and show its structure on a storyboard (to be provided)
- 4) Write a story of your own. This story may be based on your own experiences, based on your collection from #1 above, or it could be entirely fictional. Your story should at least 400-600 words long (2-3 pages), typed, with two copies – one with your name, one without.
- 5) For the story you are writing, show its structure on a storyboard like you did for #3 above.
- 6) Learn and tell a story written by someone else. You will be given the story (from #4 above) written by another student and then be asked to retell it from memory. Because the quality of story you are given may vary, you may feel free to change it, embellish it, and make it your own as long as you stay true to the intent of the original story.
- 7) For the story you are telling, show its structure on a storyboard.

Ten Story Types

Below are ten common story types. Use them as ideas for the kind of story you want to write. These will also be on the final test.

1. **Circle story:** A tale that follows a circular pattern, ending just as it began. The main character learns by the end that the original situation is the best after all.
2. **Chain story:** A tale whose form is based on a series of interrelated events. Each is a consequence of the event that precedes it (*The Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, *The House that Jack Built*).
3. **Fable:** A brief story designed to teach a moral, usually by using animal characters. Aesop's and Arnold Lobel's fables are good examples (*The Fox and the Grapes*, *The Tortoise and the Hare*).
4. **Ghost story:** A tale about a supernatural apparition. Often the apparition returns because of some unmet need – revenge, lost love, to give a warning, or to regain a misplaced object.
5. **Scary story:** A tale that focuses on fear – such as finding crocodiles in the sewer or being pursued by a one-armed man.
6. **Tall tale:** A story in which bravado and exaggeration are the main element, like tales about Paul Bunyan or Pecos Bill.
7. **Pourquoi, or “why” story:** A tale that explains the origin of some characteristic (why cats have nine lives), event, or creature.
8. **Myth:** A story, usually about gods or demigods, that explains a natural event, the creation of the world, or the existence of a race of people. Myths differ in scale from “why” stories, dealing with the creation of worlds or cosmic events rather than the origin of traits.
9. **Fairy Tale:** A story, usually set in a magical medieval past, often involving royalty and/or peasants, with a human main character and some non-human or magical characters, and practically always beginning with “Once upon a time.” Many fairy tales as we know them can be traced to the collections by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, Joseph Jacobs, or Andrew Lang.
10. **Urban Legend:** A story that seems realistic and is often told as being true and connected to some trustworthy source (a friend, relative, the news) that, when examined further, is shown to have little connection to reality. These stories often resurface with variations and are told as cautionary tales. The website www.snopes.com is a good source for verifying the truth behind these stories.

Telling Your First Tale

Taken from *Storyteller*, by Ramon Ross, pp. 52-58

1. Read the story you want to learn out loud several times

Listen for its internal rhythm and style. What kind of story is it?

2. Think of the major “bits” of the story, finding where one bit ends and another begins.

A “bit” is a piece of action or scene. Breaking the story into bits allows you to develop an outline of the tale. You can use words or pictures to develop your outline.

3. Develop a sense of the characters in the story.

Who is in the tale? Who is just outside the story, but may be important to know about? What do they look, smell, sound, and feel like to you?

4. Think through the setting of the story.

We are creatures of the earth. Setting pervades everything. Is it hot, cold, sunny, hilly, forested? What are the buildings like: log, mud, close together, tall, flat-roofed? What time of day or year? Is there a festive mood? Or funeral? Map out the movement of the story.

5. Find phrases you wish to use for your own telling.

What words or phrases are indispensable for you to tell this tale with integrity? Jot these down and practice saying them so they roll off your tongue easily.

6. Tell parts of the story to yourself, testing out different ways of saying the same words.

Is the speaker excited, angry, scared, shy, bold, soft-spoken, or have an accent? Is it a high- or low-pitched voice? Is the speaker old or young, weak or strong, gruff or pleasant? Do they speak slowly or quickly? Try out different ways of saying the same words.

7. “Block” the story, including postures, actions, and gestures you wish to include.

These help you to define the various characters in the tale. As a general rule, *understate gestures* in a story rather than overstating them. But do incorporate them – don’t just stand stiffly.

8. Prepare an introduction and a conclusion

Most listeners need a period of time to ease into the tale. They need a “hook” to grab them and spark their interest. In the same way, you want to end the story well, so it’s clear when you are done and the applause can begin.

9. Finally, practice the entire story.

You want the whole thing to be smooth and seamless.

Rubric for Story Writing

Name: _____

A zero in any category will require you to rewrite your story.

Plot

- has a central problem/conflict....._____ (10)
- includes necessary details_____ (10)
- does not include unnecessary details_____ (5)
- has a point/reason for existing_____ (10)
- makes sense....._____ (10)

Organization

- has a clear beginning, middle, and end_____ (5)
- details progress logically....._____ (10)
- doesn't jump around_____ (5)

Language

- uses appropriate language_____ (5)
- clearly shows what is happening....._____ (5)

Conventions

- spelling....._____ (5)
- punctuation....._____ (5)
- paragraphs_____ (5)
- grammar_____ (5)
- typed format_____ (5)

Total _____ (100)

Rubric for Storytelling

	6	5	4	3	2	1
Physical Deals with the use of physical actions to convey details of story, eye contact with audience, and posture of teller	Uses appropriate actions (hand movements, posture) to convey details of story; Looks at audience; Strong, confident posture	Uses some appropriate actions to convey details of story; Mostly looks at audience; Fairly strong, confident posture	Tries to use actions to convey details of story; Looks at audience sometimes; Good posture, may lean or slouch	Some attempt to use actions to convey details of story; Seldom looks at audience; Often leans or slouches	Little attempt to use actions or uses inappropriate actions; Almost no eye contact; Poor posture	No use of actions or inappropriate actions; No eye contact; Alarming posture
Vocal Deals with loudness, clarity, and enunciation; variation in tone of voice; “verbal noise” (“um,” “like,” “y’know”); pace; and pauses in telling	Confident and clear voice, easily heard; Varies tone of voice appropriate to actions of story; No verbal noise; Doesn’t rush or go too slowly; Pauses only for effect	Strong and clear voice, easily heard; Varies tone of voice appropriate to actions of story; Little verbal noise; Doesn’t rush or go too slowly; Few empty pauses	Good voice, some lack of clarity; Tries to vary tone of voice appropriate to actions of story; Some verbal noise that doesn’t interfere; May rush a little or have long pauses	Voice is too quiet or indistinct; Little variation in tone of voice; Some verbal noise that may interfere; Rushes or goes too slow; Long, uncomfortable pauses	Hard to understand what is being said; No attempt to vary tone of voice; Verbal noise is distracting; Rushed or too slow; Story stops frequently	Unable to make out what is said; Monotone; Verbal noise is main component; Story is unintelligible; Stops abruptly
Content Deals with the story itself, its ordered and logical plot, use of descriptive details for visualization, and ability to engage the audience with the story	Tells the story in an ordered, logical way; Few or no errors in details of story; Includes descriptive elements that allow visualization; Engages audience	Tells the story in an ordered, logical way; Few errors in details of story; Includes descriptive details; Engages audience	Tells the story clearly, may be some disorganization; Some missed details or afterthoughts; Tries to be descriptive; Audience mostly engaged	Story is somewhat unclear and/or disorganized; Many missing details or afterthoughts; Little description; Audience is barely engaged	Plot is hard to determine; Important details are left out; No description; Audience is not interested	Plot makes no sense; Audience ready to revolt

Storyboard

Title of Story: _____

Name: _____

<p>Characters <i>Who is involved? A short story should have only a few.</i></p>	<p>Setting – where and when <i>There may be more than one, but this should be limited.</i></p>	<p>Central problem/conflict/source of tension <i>What is at the center of the story that causes a problem that needs to be resolved? What forces come into conflict?</i></p>
<p>Beginning/exposition/how it starts <i>How do you introduce the characters and the central problem?</i></p>	<p>Middle/climax/turning point/crisis <i>When does the central problem come to the point where it needs to be solved?</i></p>	<p>Resolution/ending <i>How is the central problem solved and what happens to bring the story to a close?</i></p>

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