

INSIDE OUT: Stories of Identity
District-wide initiative for March 21st,
International Day for Elimination for Racial Discrimination

Storytelling Activities & Lesson Ideas

STORY LINE

MATERIALS:

- 3 to 5 feet lengths of rope (1 rope for every 2 students)
- If you do not have ropes, you may use string or ask students to draw lines using markers on flip chart paper or using sticks on the gravel/dirt field. Be creative!

INSTRUCTIONS & FACILITATOR NOTES:

- This processing is called a story line, an active reviewing activity.
- It is effective for the teacher/facilitator to share his/her own story and personal lived experiences to model this activity. You may give students examples of some 'peaks' (ups) and 'valleys' (downs) in one's life.
- Ask students to choose a partner.
- Once they have a partner ask them to take the next 10-14 minutes and share their story of that activity.
- Here is how they will share their story.
 - Ask students to label themselves A and B.
 - Ask partner A to use the ropes to create a squiggly line with peaks and valleys.
 - Partner A will then walk along the line sharing his/her story (personal ups and downs) while walking along the ropes. The other partner just listens without making any comments until the partner has completed sharing the story. Once the story is shared, partner B may ask questions to learn more about the story.
 - Partner B then creates a new squiggly line with peaks and valleys and while walking along the line, shares his/her story, personal ups and downs. Partner A just listens and may ask questions after Partner B has finished sharing.
- Following the 15-20 minutes (depending upon the group) ask if any partners wish to share their stories.
- Invite students to do a 'quiet write', writing down the stories they shared with their partners.

IT'S OKAY TO BE DIFFERENT

- This activity works well with primary/intermediate buddy classes.
- Read Todd Parr's 'It's Okay to be Different' picture book (or another book that highlights the importance of embracing our diversity).
- Ask a few students to summarize a few of the ideas from the book, "It's okay to . . ."
- Invite the primary students to share (with their intermediate buddies) 3 things about themselves that they think make them special or unique.
- Invite the primary buddies to write these 3 aspects/characteristics on a 11X14 sheet (with help from their intermediate buddies) and to draw a picture for each.

The following collection of storytelling activities are developed by storyteller/author Heather Forest: <http://www.storyarts.org/lessonplans/index.html>

Collecting Family Stories

Have students collect true tales about the "old days" by interviewing older relatives. Have students find out about the history of their families as far back as anyone can tell them. See Collecting Family Stories: <http://www.storyarts.org/classroom/roots/family.html> for an assortment of effective interview questions to gain stories from older family members.

A Picture is Worth 1000 Words

A class selects a classical painting. Looking at the painting for inspiration, the class constructs the first few sentences of a tale through group discussion and suggestion. The paragraph is then sent on to another class which reads the first paragraph and adds on another. The process is repeated including as many classes as possible until the tale seems finished. All the classes then gather to hear the result of their group effort read out loud and to see the painting that inspired the story.

Story Circle

One person begins a tale and stops after a few sentences. The next person picks up the story thread and continues it, then stops. Next person adds to it and so on until the tale comes to a resolution. The story could begin with a pre-selected title or subject to guide the improvisation. Try recording the story circle on a tape recorder for later listening.

The Autobiography of Anything

Everything has a story! Everything comes, in its elemental origin, from the Earth. Collect an assortment of "things:"

- Piece of Paper
- Shoe
- Sneaker
- Match

- Rubber Band
- Paper Clip
- Woolen Socks

Imagine the life story of each of those "things." Describe their history backwards through the personal use, purchase, manufacture, to original natural resources from which it or its components were made. Personify the thing and tell its story like an autobiography.

Example:

1. Tell the tale of a piece of newspaper back to the tree in the forest.
2. Tell the tale of a plastic toy's life, tracing its history back to the oil that became plastic and then back to the prehistoric plants that created the oil.

Spontaneous Poetry

Four poets sit together. Each takes a turn spontaneously reciting an improvised poem after someone has "thrown" them a first line. The "poet" speaks the first line and leaps into improvisation at the end of the sentence. The poem does not need to rhyme. The poem must have a vivid image somewhere in it and a sense of finality, or closure, when it is done.

Storytellers on Tour

Have students practice retelling folktales in their classroom. When students feel confident, teams of three or four students at a time can then take their tales to other classes for a storytelling concert. If older students are sent to the younger grades, ask the younger grades to thank the storytellers with drawings inspired by their stories.

1001 Nights Festival

This is a continuing storytelling session in which a story is begun and then left open-ended at a crucial point. The next day the story is completed and a new one begun and left open-ended at an exciting moment. Stories could be selected from the Tales of the Arabian Nights and told in this fashion, as in the style of Shahrazad, its great storyteller. According to legend, she told stories in this way to a sultan for 1001 nights, which is why the stories of the Arabian Nights is also called "1001 Nights."

Finding Stories in Songs

Find and learn songs which tell a story. Folk ballads to contemporary songs often suggest a larger tale. Listen to records and then have students retell the story in the song in their own words. Or have a "storysong" concert.

A Story Treasure Hunt

A class selects a well-known fable or folktale. The plot is simplified into a sequence of events that can be transcribed onto cards with short sections of the tale on each. Students hide the cards out of sequence throughout the school or classroom. A treasure map showing the

exact location where all the cards are hidden, is given to another class (Or, with clues, one card can lead to the next). Groups of students must find the cards and assemble them in correct order. The treasure is finding the WHOLE story. Two classes can trade treasure hunts by putting the stories on two different-colored cards. The treasure hunts can go on simultaneously and, when each class has found the other's story, they confirm it by assembling it, learning the plot and sending representatives to retell it, or to act it out as a skit to the other class.

Old Time Radio Show

Using the PA system like an old time radio show, have classes create a story broadcast at a special time each week for the whole school to hear. This could also be an ongoing project. Use a tape recorder for rehearsal so that students can hear how the program will sound. The show could have a magazine format, featuring interviews with teachers, student stories or poetry, or discussion of the latest school issues.

Local Historians

Have students collect stories about their town from older people. Have students find out how the streets were named. Are there any interesting people or legends to which the street names refer? Are there any local places in town about which people tell stories? Any haunted houses? Have students find out when the town was founded and by whom? Visit a local historical society to see old photographs or artifacts.

Have student create an original historical fiction:

Describe the town from the point of view of a fictitious citizen who might have lived in the town long ago. Include local issues of the time in the story. Tell the story of the town from the fictionalized point of view of a resident who actually lived.

Puzzle Tale: Putting the Pieces Together

Copy a folktale from a printed anthology and cut it up into sections or scenes. Paste each section on a separate page. Give out the sheets to students who each prepare to retell their small piece of the whole story. Assemble the story by having each student retell his or her part in the plot's sequence. Have students keep the flow going as the story is told so that the performance moves along as though one person were telling it. Do a second round by giving students different sections to retell. Notice how differently students retell the same sections!

Front Door: An Imaginary Journey

Working in pairs consisting of a listener and a speaker, have each set of students imagine that they are standing outside of the speaker's front door. Have the speaker verbally give the attentive listener an imaginary errand to do. The speaker must carefully explain to his or her partner how to go into the house, travel to the bedroom, and, once there, describe where to find a special treasure somewhere in the room. Have the speaker tell the partner a

story about why the thing to be retrieved is special and then have speaker verbally explain how to travel back to the front door to bring the special thing out to where the speaker will be waiting.

This improvisational speech exercise encourages confidence in one's ability to describe a sequence of events. The journey from one's own front door to one's bedroom is well known by the speaker. The speaker may discover in discussing this exercise afterwards, that he or she imagined the house clearly and "saw" more detail than was mentioned. Telling a folktale has a similar process. The teller imagines the landscape of the tale and guides the listeners on a mental journey.

Chain Sentence

Teams of two students orally construct the first sentence of an invented story. To orally make the sentence, each says one word, trusting their ears to recognize conventional grammar, until a long sentence evolves. Shape the improv by setting the tone of the sentence. Make the first sentence of:

- a ghost story
- pirate story
- love story
- mystery
- any story, etc.

Beginnings:

This exercise can be used to generate the first sentence of a Chain Story where each participant adds a section to a tale.

Endings:

The chain sentence exercise could generate a "last sentence." This sentence is written on a piece of paper and placed in the middle of the story circle. The game is over when the story has woven around to the point where someone can say the "last sentence."

Describing a Stone

Pass a stone around a circle of students. Each student must say one word describing the stone without repeating what has been said. See how many times the stone can go around the circle without repeating words. Adjectives such as hard, smooth etc., are a start, but any word that comes to mind is acceptable as long as it is inspired by the stone. For example, a smooth, round, white, oval stone could suggest "egg."