



STORY

Session

This session will invite the children to devise their own storytelling techniques and will explore the concept of 'story' itself. Explain to the children that they will be given a special task this week: to tell a story to someone else (works well for National Storytelling Week, usually end of January). Explain that they could tell whichever story they like but, to make things easier for them, say that you are going to give them a 'scary story' to tell that shouldn't be too difficult to remember.

Make sure everyone is settled and ready for a story. You could dim the lights to help create an atmosphere. When they are ready tell the following story:

A long time ago there was once a man who lived by himself in a big house. One night he woke up sweating and terrified that there was someone else in the house with him. He scrambled around for some matches to light a candle... and in the darkness the matches were handed to him!

Task Question 1:

Can anyone say back to the class what happened in the story?

Task Question 2:

When you tell this story to someone, how can you tell it so that it will work really well?

In pairs or groups the children should be given a minute or two to think of different ways that they can tell the story effectively.

Suggestions I have heard from some Year 3 classes have included:

- ✓ Lower your tone
- ✓ Use more description
- ✓ Get a friend to make some sound effects while you tell it
- ✓ Turn it into a play
- ✓ Turn the lights down
- ✓ Speed up at the exciting bit ('He scrambled around for some matches to light a candle...')
- ✓ Turn it into a comedy ('...and then his mother's voice said, "Are you still up, you should be asleep!"')
- ✓ Give the story an ending.
- ✓ One very interesting suggestion was that you should say when it happened so that people would know that there were no electric lights, providing a reason to the listener why he didn't just switch the light on.

Whenever the children make a suggestion ask them to demonstrate it to the class. Because the story is so short this not too difficult for them to do. Some of these suggestions are more controversial than others. It is often a good idea to engage the children in a discussion about the more controversial ones. If someone says 'use more description' or 'give the story an ending' ask the class what they think about this and allow different points of view to be voiced.

E.g. (Year 3) 'It should have an ending because it's boring if you don't know what happens at the end.' / 'It shouldn't have an ending because it keeps people wondering about who or what is in the room and that's more exciting.'

I offer some of my own hints for storytelling to the children (to add to theirs, if they haven't said them already):

1. Split the story into three parts: a beginning, a middle and an end. (Ask the children to say what these are in the story)
2. Suggest that they try not to say 'and then...' Demonstrate this by telling the story with 'and thens' and then (!) telling it without them.
3. Insert dramatic pauses between the three sections instead of saying 'and then'.
4. Try telling the story in lots of different ways to find out which way works best (list the suggestion the class has already made here).

Ask them to report back to you the following week about how their storytelling went and about which storytelling method worked best with the story.

Story Enquiry

This enquiry stimulus came from Dylan (Year 3).

Explain that you are going to tell them another story and then say the following:

Once upon a time, the end.

Task Question:

Is this a story?

The underlying question here is: What is a story?

Whatever answers they give in answer to the task question simply say 'If so, why?' or 'If not, why?'

Draw up a concept map around the word 'Story' as they go: E.g. (Year 3) A story has...

- ✓ Got to be about something or someone. (Subject)
- ✓ Got to begin with 'Once upon a time' and end with 'The end'. (Formal)
- ✓ Got to have a beginning and an end.
- ✓ Got to have a middle too.
- ✓ Got to have a problem in it. (Content)
- ✓ If you say something (anything!) it's a story. (Utterance)
- ✓ Something's got to happen. (Sequential)
- ✓ More than one thing has to happen. (Sequential)
- ✓ There has to be action.
- ✓ It's a story if the teacher says it is. (This was said because I had said 'I'm going to tell you another story.') Question to the class: 'If I say it's a story, does that make it a story?'

As you can imagine many of these ideas generated a great deal of debate. For example, many of the children did not agree that a story is anything you say and many disagreed that a story is merely formal.

Once this enquiry has been conducted return to the story about 'the man in the house' and ask: Was that a story? If so, why? If not, why not?

End the session by telling them a proper story (one of your own favourites). Invite them to tell this story too.

Extension activities:

1. Tell a longer story using the techniques learned in the session:
2. Take a longer story and chop it up into lots of little bits.
3. Give out the story in bits to pairs of children.
4. Set them the task of learning their bit and telling it without reading it off the page!
5. Tell the story around the whole class.

Ask them to say what it was that handed him the matches in each of their own imaginations. Endings suggested by a Year 3 class:

- ✓ A werewolf
- ✓ A ghost
- ✓ His mother! (Comedy ending)
- ✓ The air itself
- ✓ Aliens

Are these stories?:

- ✓ Once upon a time there was a twig.
- ✓ Once upon a time they lived happily ever after.
- ✓ Once there was a boy. He was happy. Then he wasn't happy. But eventually he was happy again. The end.
- ✓ The Hobbit: there and back again.

Play some storytelling games. There are some good story games in Robert Fisher's 'Games for Thinking' and in Taffy Thomas and Steve Killick's 'Telling Tales'. Or try the 'Group Story' games in our Thinking Games section (<https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/games-for-thinking>), and for older children try 'What Happens Next?'.