

Supporting all Children as Storytellers

Storytelling/Story acting is a movement that encourages language and community development for all levels of learners in your classroom. STSA is supportive of children with disabilities, children who are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse and children who have limited language abilities. All children's stories should be read aloud and celebrated within the classroom community. When taking dictation teachers should be mindful to record genuine student language and refrain from rephrasing and correcting grammar.

Some stories may be one sentence long, and others may take up the whole page. Developmentally, teachers should expect to see different levels of narrative abilities based on the relative ages of their students. Children who are one and two years old may tell stories with one or two events. Three year old children tell narratives that can be described as "leap frogs," leaping from one topic to another that may or may not be linked. Children who are four years old tell stories that typically follow a chronology, linking many events together with "and then" and similar phrases. More classic narrative structures emerge for children who are five and six years old, but five year old's stories may typically suddenly end at a high point and have no resolution.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Children who are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) may have had many examples of storytelling from their homes and in their first language. CLD students should be encouraged to tell stories in whatever language they feel most comfortable in, especially if you have resources for helping translate those stories for your actors. CLD students' stories might not follow the typical narrative progression of native English speakers' stories. Teachers should offer very few gentle scaffolds to help all children develop their stories and assist actors on stage.

Offering Support

Children with limited language or are nonverbal may benefit from picture cues that can support their language. Picture cues for settings, characters may help children put a story together in pictures, lead to oral language development and can be used for narrative stories. Teachers may want to use pictures of children's family members, classmates or favorite storybook characters to prompt them to include characters in their stories. Images from Board Maker like characters, settings and actions may help children develop ideas and add language to their stories.

Many children may become 'stuck' in their storytelling as time goes on. Students benefit from many examples of adult modeling of storytelling to inspire their narratives. If students are telling many fictional stories, the teacher may model some personal narratives to prompt students to tell more similar stories, or the opposite may also apply. Some children benefit gentle prompts from their play that may inspire them to tell narratives during dictation. For some children, storytelling may begin with co-constructing narratives with teachers during dictation. This is an encouraged scaffold to support children who are hesitant, but like all

scaffolds should be taken away over time to provide the student with more ownership over their stories.

Stories with Violence

Teachers may feel that some stories are inappropriate to share with the whole group for story acting. The teacher should feel supported to refrain from sharing stories with the class that could be traumatizing. SEE recommends that all stories children wish to tell be taken down using dictation, but that if the story is inappropriate for the whole group, that the teacher relays this message to the student. Even if the teacher feels a story is inappropriate for sharing with the group, the child's story should still be saved, and the teacher could encourage the child to draw a picture, or something similar. The narrative for discussing inappropriate stories with children may follow the following example. "Johnny, you just told me a really wonderful story about your family and the time that your little sister was very sick. I know this story is important to you, but it includes some bathroom words that I don't think are appropriate to share with the group. This story is not one we could take to the theater. Would you like to edit this story a little bit to make it more appropriate? Or would you like to tell a different story for the theater today?"

Some children may tell stories with violence in them. While teachers feel differing levels of comfort with violence, SEE suggests that all teachers address mild violence prior to telling any related stories. Stories that include fighting may be modeled beforehand with 'play fighting' where children use open hands and stay an arm's length away from one another while they 'fight.' Children whose stories include enough violence that the teacher feels uncomfortable sharing it with the class with should be addressed similarly to inappropriate stories. A narrative for discussing violent stories with children may follow the following example. "Katie, this story that you just told me about Spiderman and Batman fighting was really interesting, and I can tell you know a lot about them just from this story. But the parts about the characters killing each other is very violent. The killing might make some friends feel very sad and confused. This is not a story we can take to the theater. Would you like to edit this story to make it less violent? Or would you like to tell a different story for the theater today?"