

Telling and Retelling Stories

Telling Life Tales

A child's identity, culture and origins will be revealed in each story told, and the resulting experience will give the original tale a pattern and texture that will enrich both the teller and the told. We need to revel in the identification and personalizing that a child has made with a story. Each retelling may incorporate a new dialect, different syntax, unique rhythms, particular observations, emotional shadings, specific locales and alternative time frames. The story fabric becomes elaborately embroidered as each child weaves a personal retelling.

We can strengthen the children's story lives by making the classroom a safe place and a starting point for sharing life tales:

- encouraging spontaneous personal storytelling on each occasion when it is appropriate;
- asking children to connect their own experiences to what they have read about or listened to;
- using special events (a touring play, a professional storyteller, a visiting guest) as an occasion for sharing memories stimulated by the experience;
- allowing time for children to recount life stories formally during current events, or informally on rainy day recesses, or at clean-up times;
- using polished life tales as building blocks for personal writing, for painting or inside the safety of roleplaying in a drama lesson;
- helping children to use real-life stories as the basis for their fiction creations, both strengthening the believability of their writing and offering them a means for handling issues too sensitive to be told in a straightforward manner;
- designing opportunities for deep listening on a visit to a home for senior citizens, or a hospice;
- arranging for sharing stories with a buddy class of different-aged children in the school, or having a local high school class come and tell polished life tales about their years in elementary grades;
- sharing stories for each and every celebration involving different members of the class;
- family stories (with permission) to be retold for parents' night;
- bravely telling your own life tales from both your professional life and your personal life to strengthen or model a point that arises during a discussion or a shared reading. Swapping tales is still the best way of motivating your students to tell their stories.

The stories which our students tell about themselves should be honoured in our classrooms, for it is through their stories that they build their self-esteem and sense of belonging in the world, and of course, how they come to understand how stories work.