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STORYTELLING

TIPS & TALES

by

Mark Pierce with Karen Jennings

 GOOD YEAR BOOKS

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Where Do You the Storyteller Begin?

Step One: Create a Story Journal

You are about to embark on a journey into the world of storytelling. Before you is a road you have never traveled. Your first step is to take stock in what you have and what you will bring with you. To do this, begin a personal story journal.

Start writing about your experiences from childhood. What sort of stories did you like to hear? What stories did you hear only once and never forgot? What kind of stories did you make up? Did your dolls or stuffed animals take part in the stories that you made up? Did you have imaginary friends? Were there any stories that scared you? What stories made you laugh? Was there a member of your family who told family stories?

Remember the stories of your youth and consider why they were important to you as a child. Record your memories of these stories.

Use your story journal to relive the life of the child you once were and find what it was that drew you to the stories of your childhood. Try writing a paragraph or two about your favorite story. Write the details of your life at the time. Does this story come into play at any other time in your life? How do you feel about this story now?

If you remember and write about the stories from your past, you become aware of how important they were and are to you and to your growth. You will feel how special, vital, and immediate they were. You will also discover how meaningful it is for you to give this gift to other children. This process of personal exploration should ease some of those fears you may have about becoming a storyteller. When you write about your childhood stories, you will feel the enthusiasm you had when you first heard them, and discover the power of story in your own life.

Step Two: Immerse Yourself in the World of Stories

Once you have written about your past experiences with stories,

you will want to enter the storytelling world anew. You can do this by exploring the rich world of stories that is available at a local library.

You will find folk-tale collections in the 398.0 section, which includes folk and fairy tales from around the world. Collections are located in both the children's and adult's sections of the library.

When you examine collections of folk tales, the best place to start is with the table of contents. Most folk-tale anthologies are divided into story types, typically beginning with creation stories and tales of wonder. Compare the table of contents of two or three anthologies, and notice the similarities among story types as well as the differences. For instance, in some cultures, tricksters figure prominently, while in other cultures the role of the lucky fool is dominant. Some have fairies, and others have sky gods.

After you have taken time to examine the table of contents, pick a story from one of the title headings and read it. When you have finished, read another story from the same collection but from under a different heading or read the same kind of story from another culture. Note in your journal the similarities and differences. You will start to discover how much can be learned about a culture from their traditional tales, and you will notice many similarities in tales told from different cultures all around the world.

Sample Story Types

Fairy Stories

Fantasy Stories

Fools

Funny Stories

Ghost Stories

How (and How Not) to Act

Legends

Life Lessons

Monster Tales

Mystery Stories

Nonsense Tales

Riddle Tales

The Strong and the Clever

Tales of Wonder and Creation

Tall Tales

Three Brothers

Trickster Tales

The Warrior

The Wise and the Foolish

Why Things Are

Read as many stories from varying collections as possible. Your goal is to become immersed in the world of stories. Do not limit yourself to a single culture or type of story. Take in as many stories as you can. As you do, start to evaluate the elements of story structure in different types of folktales. Write about your findings. Then when you make the stories you tell come alive, you have a storehouse of knowledge to guide you.

A librarian will be able to help you locate story collections to fit your needs. You may also want to examine the resources available that index story types and motifs. These reference materials provide information about types and variants of folktales throughout the world. The most popular of these indexes are: D. L. Ashliman's *A Guide to Folktales in the English Language: Based on the Aarene-Thompson Classification System*; Margaret Read MacDonald's *The Storyteller's Sourcebook: A Subject, Title and Motif Index to Folklore Collections for Children*; and Antii Aarene and Stith Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale*.

If you wish to start your own folk tale library, there are many wonderful books on the market right now. Check the bibliography in the back of this book. You may also wish to check your library's audio-visual department for stories on cassette tape and videotape. The Internet is also a good resource for information on live storytelling shows, conferences, and articles, as well as story resources.

During your initial exploration into the world of stories, use your journal as a place to record outlines of stories you have found and enjoyed. Make notes about the stories so you have a place to turn to when looking for something new to tell. You can also use your journal to record information about stories you recall from your own memory or imagination that you would like to develop.

After you have told a story, keep a written record of the story in your story journal. It can cause much headache and heartache when you haven't told a story for a while and you can't find it anywhere. Use a journal as your memory. Record the details of the story and any personal touches that you added to make telling it more fun. You may also want to note certain sticky parts of the story where you tend to confuse events or forget small details that can make a big difference.



That way, when you choose to tell it again, you can avoid these problems.

You can also use a story journal to make notes about how your telling affected the audience, interesting discussions that took place, or ways of improving the story in the future.

Often after telling a story, a listener will have a question about it or an idea that you will want to add to the next telling. Make note of this. Your story journal is a place for you to reflect, connect, and collect stories.



Tips for Telling: Basics for the Beginning Storyteller

1. How to Pick a Story

How do you determine if a story will work for you? As a beginning storyteller, you must go through the exciting but time-consuming task of finding a story you want to tell. There are thousands to choose from, so how do you narrow your search? Begin by seeking out a story with a simple, straightforward narrative and few characters and plot devices. Make your approach to these first stories straightforward and simple so that you and the listener have fun. Make sure that the story is not so long that it will be difficult to tell it well, and remember that children enjoy stories with lots of action.

In your search for stories to tell, seek out stories that surprise you. You will find that what surprises you can vary. Sometimes it might be a unique retelling of a familiar tale or perhaps a wild twist in the plot. Surprise endings are always fun. Whatever it is that surprises you about the story is what is going to help make telling the story enjoyable for you.

Conversely, if you know a story's ending from the very beginning, it will be difficult to create excitement in your telling. If you were not dazzled by some aspect of the story, your listeners won't be either and your performance may be listless.

Never tell a story you don't like. There are enough stories out there that you will eventually discover one you are drawn to and wish to share.

Think of stories like jokes—if you heard a joke that you didn't think was funny, you wouldn't pass it on, would you? But if it made you laugh, you can't wait to tell it to another person. A story is a gift you can't wait to share.

2. Look for Meaning in Stories

When you have found a story you would wish to tell, write down your impressions of the story. Specifically, "Why am I telling this story? What is it about that tale that makes me want to tell it?" It may be the sense of humor, the characters, or the twists and turns in the plot. It may also address issues that you have