

The Basics of Storytelling

Compiled from course notes for LIS510: Storytelling, 2008

Values of Storytelling

- ★ Establishes positive relationships
- ★ Mechanical difficulties of reading put aside
- ★ Listener has active role
- ★ Creates bonds
- ★ Participating in group, but interacting with story personally
- ★ Developing an imagination
- ★ Listening skills
- ★ Introducing new models of behavior

Characteristics of Oral Stories

- ★ Single theme, clearly defined
- ★ Well-developed plot
- ★ Brief opening intro
- ★ Almost immediately plunges into action
- ★ Vivid and clear-cut images
- ★ Little explanations
- ★ Movement of story depends on events
- ★ End resolves conflicts and loose-ends
- ★ Characters believable or represent qualities
- ★ Faithfulness to source material
- ★ Dramatic appeal
- ★ Right match between audience and story
- ★ Suitable for time available

Story Adaptations

1. Contracting (shortening a large story):
 - a. drop episodes, characters
 - b. reduce description
 - c. leave point implicit
 - d. shorten opening/closing
2. Expanding a story:
 - a. invent/realize more fully description
 - b. add dialogue
 - c. add episode
 - d. introduce new characters
 - e. invitation for audience to respond
3. Substitute
 - a. characters change (gender, etc)
 - b. setting, time
 - c. tell the story from another point of view

The Act of Storytelling

Always start with an opening, which signals that “storytelling is about to take place”

Purpose of the opening:

- ★ Transports teller/listener into world of story
- ★ Establishes relationship with the audience
- ★ Audience able to get ready to listen
- ★ Mood creation
- ★ Clues to upcoming story
- ★ Arouses curiosity

The opening should include:

- ★ Indication of relevance to audience
- ★ Why, how it’s important to you, why you chose the story
- ★ Introduce unfamiliar words
- ★ Cultural setting
- ★ Background that audience needs to know

Never give abbreviated version of the story, title, or tell what you think story is about.

After the story has been told, be sure to have a closing.

Notes about Closing:

- ★ Relate story to experience of audience
- ★ Sometimes—long pause, and “that the story of...”
- ★ stay until clapping is done
- ★ Be careful about adding a moral

Opening and Closing should mirror each other, so include elements of opening at the end.



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