Pet Tall Stories
Gail N. Herman

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Talking Truth to Tall Tales

The Tall Tale Liars Festival and
The Student Tall Tale Storytelling Festival
Other slides available in class.

G.N.Herman 2019
First I ask how many students have a pet.

After listening to a number of students, I ask all who have a dog to raise their hands; all who have a horse, then a cat, a bird, etc. So I am looking at each child.

Then I ask several children to describe their pets to us. I write the color, size, type, habits, activities, and naughty behaviors down on the board.
Then I choose one pet and challenge them to pick one characteristic to exaggerate. So if it is ‘jumping,’ then we develop a series of situations in which the pet jumped high, higher until the pet can do some phenomenal jumps and becomes famous. The students tell me what they want to put into the story. I just provide a frame. We might do one more example together, but most often they are begging to write one about something unique about their own pets.

G.N.Herman 2019
Sometimes a student doesn’t know which characteristic to pick. We just brainstorm as a group and the writer finds a fertile field of ideas to choose from.

For example, one student said his pet was always getting into serious danger. Well… that story became “The dog who has nine lives.” By the end of the story, his pet had used up all but 2!
Another student was unsure about what to write about his fish. Fish don’t do much but swim and clean. Well… that story became a story about a cleaning fish that not only cleaned his bowl but also wanted to clean the house.

Each time their pets reach a more exaggerated stage, I encouraged the students to kid with their audience by saying something like, “Now, I know it’s hard to believe this, but it’s true. He actually did ....”

Sometimes they just use the straight face approach. No matter which telling technique they use, audiences love Pet Tall Stories.
Ask the student to tell his/her story to at least five people (or animals). This helps to add details and to find the right ending for the story.

*Encourage the child to have a definite ending. “And that, my friends, is the story of ....”

Listening to stories helps students build a sense of story and of the various story structures. This helps them in writing and reading, especially in predicting.
The ending of the story must be very, very clear to the audience so that both the teller and the audience feel satisfied at the end.

A satisfied end.
If they need a suggestion, I coach my students to say, “And that my friends is how my dog became a champion jumper.” The very last sentence might be “And so if you ever want to see an amazing jumping dog, you just call me and I’ll let you know when and where he is competing next. Rumor has it that he’s going to the next World Dog Olympics.”
Children have invented all manner of ways to get their pets discovered so that their ending is really fantastic. Pets become detectives because they have such good noses, County Fair winners for pulling contests, opera singing birds, and even mimes.
2019 Awards for Storytelling Books

The Westchester Library Association’s Anne Izard Storytellers’ Choice Award Committee is pleased to announce the 14th award recipients:

The Annotated African-American Folktales by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. & Maria Tatar
Beauty and the Beast by Maria Tatar
Brave Red, Smart Frog by Emily Jenkins
Crane Girl by Curtis Manley
Daemon Voices by Philip Pullman
Dancing on Blades by Csenge Zalka
How to Fracture a Fairy Tale by Jane Yolen
Manjhi Moves a Mountain by Nancy Churnin
Norse Myths by Kevin Crossley-Holland
Norse Mythology by Neil Gaiman
Once There Was a Story by Jane Yolen
Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet by Carmen Deedy
Thank You, Omu by Oge Mora

The Award Ceremony, featuring authors, editors, and storytellers, will be held at the Ossining Public Library (53 Croton Ave., Ossining, NY, 10562) on September 14, 2019. Coffee at 9:30; ceremony 10:00-12:00.

The Anne Izard Storytellers’ Choice Award seeks to highlight and promote distinguished titles published in the field of storytelling. It is named for Anne Izard, who died in 1990; she served as noted librarian, storyteller, and Children's Services Consultant in Westchester County, New York. The two year award period recognizes thirteen titles, making it an (Augusta) Baker's dozen. Augusta Baker, another powerful storyteller responsible for training an army of librarians during the mid-Twentieth Century, served as head of services to Children at the New York Public Library.

Following are the criteria for the award:

- The primary intention of this award is to honor books that can be used with confidence as resources for storytellers.
- Stories must be entirely successful without depending upon illustrations, graphic elements, or audio-visual media.
- Collections, as well as individual picture book versions of stories, are considered.
- Folk tales should be distinguished by an outstanding style, which makes the particular version notable. Authenticity, scholarship, and documentation will be taken into consideration, but are not the sole criteria.
- Distinguished examples of original stories should preserve, promote and/or honor an oral tradition.
- Non-fiction narratives, including poetry and biography, will be considered.
- Books that deepen and enrich a storyteller’s understanding of the meaning and uses of story, as well as books pertaining to folk traditions, aesthetics, methods and study of storytelling are eligible.
Below are a few of the fascinating and different traditions from around the world.

**Chinese Shadow Puppetry** – In the world of shadow puppetry there are various styles of performance, Luanxian, a rare branch of performers who work from a written script, Traditional performance, and the classic Shaanxi. This site is full of information, history, aesthetic, performance clips, and more.
[https://www.chineseshadowpuppetry.com/](https://www.chineseshadowpuppetry.com/)

**Al Zajal: Intangible Cultural Heritage** – This ancient art can be traced back to the 12th century. “Al-Zajal is a form of Lebanese folk poetry sung at social and family celebrations and in daily life… The poets declaim verses, often in the form of challenges, which are then repeated by the singers and audience.”

**Cunto: Sicily’s Storytelling Tradition** - Cunto is the art of spoken word street storytelling. “For locals its true cultural meaning, however, goes much deeper, conjuring up thoughts of fables, fairy tales and fantastic anecdotes of chivalrous adventure.”

**Hula: Dance That Tells a Story** - In ancient Hawaii hula played an important role in keeping history, genealogy, mythology, and culture alive. With each movement a story unfolds.
[https://www.gohawaii.com/hawaiian-culture/hula](https://www.gohawaii.com/hawaiian-culture/hula) and learn more about the History of the Hula here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXtQNVXNu-A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXtQNVXNu-A)

**Kamishibai** - Kamishibai (kah-mee-shee-bye) is a form of Japanese street storytelling dating back to the 1920’s. “Most Kamishibai stories consist of 12 or 16 large, sturdy, beautifully illustrated cards. On the back is the English translation of the text, with the original Japanese beside it.”

**Something Old and Something New: Rakugo and Japanese Culture** – Rakugo, literally ‘fallen words’ traces its origins to Buddhist sermons. “The story is made up of three parts: the makura, or prelude; the hondai, or main story; and the ochi, the closing/punch line.”
You can listen to Master Storyteller Motoko sharing a story in Rakugo style here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOwDpmBYJj8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOwDpmBYJj8)

We move now from the ancient to the modern.

**TED Talks** – ”In these Ted Talks masters of storytelling share their creative secrets and explore new approaches to their age-old craft.
[https://www.ted.com/topics/storytelling](https://www.ted.com/topics/storytelling)

I have always suggested to my students that using gestures will help them remember specific parts of their story, when the gesture is tied to a specific phrase or part of the story they are struggling to remember. That was based on my own experience but today, as I was researching for an interview I came across this information from Psychology Today.

"Gesticulation helps access memories and ideas from every crevice of your mind and to turn abstract notions into logical words that flow from your mouth...gestures make people pay attention to the acoustics of speech. When you see a hand gesture, your auditory system expects to also hear speech...gestures still have a tight and perhaps special coupling with speech in present-day communication. In this way, gestures are not merely add-ons to language – they may actually be a fundamental part of it."

“What's next for the gesticulation researchers? Spencer Kelly said, “We're interested in how other types of visual inputs, such as eye gaze, mouth movements, and facial expressions, combine with hand gestures to impact speech processing. “

So there you have. Not only do gestures help the person who is speaking, but they also help the listener pay attention to the ‘acoustics of speech’ or in other words, the story we are telling. Science is finally catching on to why our storytelling tools, gestures, facial expression, and eye contact, impact speech processing. https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-athletes-way/201307/the-neuroscience-speaking-your-hands

The Neuroscience of Speaking With Your Hands
ISOLATION EXERCISES. Begin in NEUTRAL. Stand slightly forward with your feet shoulder width apart. Keep your knees loose, not locked. Tighten your stomach and abdomen. Open your chest and shoulders. Let your head rest on top of your spine. Isolation exercises involve only one body part at a time.

**Head**
1. Side, center, side, center (Focus eyes on a point in front of you and then to each side of you.)
2. Up, center, up, center
3. Maybe, center, maybe, center (Maybe= tilting head to one side on a diagonal)

**Shoulders**
1. Up, down, up, down
2. Forward, center, back, center
3. Around in a circle

**Chest**
1. Forward, back, forward, back, side, side, side, side
2. Circular (Forward, side, back, side, forward)

**Arms**
1. Stretch arm out to side of body. Circle arm from shoulder.
2. Then bend arm down at elbow. Swing it like a pendulum and then in a circle.
3. With elbow bent, flip forearm up, then down.

**Hands**
1. Place hand flat on the table. Cup the palm, put tips of fingers and heel of hand on a table.
2. Make a claw. (Lower the row of large knuckles only.)
3. Straighten fingers out so the hand is flat again.

**Hips**
1. Forward, center, back, center
2. Side, center, side, center
3. Lift one heel up, keeping leg straight so hip rises. Repeat on other side.

**Knees**
1. Flex, straighten; Point out while bending. Point in

**Feet**
1. Lift right heel while bending the knee forward. Keep the ball of the foot and toes in place. Notice the crease in the foot.
2. Alternate feet, lifting heels.

**Illusions**

**HINTS**
Practice moving one body part at a time. Freeze at the end of a movement by using a “clic” (Kipnis, 1974) The Clic is like a punctuation mark; it is a snap into place.
The Release is a relaxation of the clic. For example, you open your hand to show the object is released.
The “Law of Economy” (Kipnis, 1974) encourages you to eliminate extraneous movements in a mime piece, leaving only the essentials.

**IMPROVISATIONS:** Listen to the music. Imagine what might be the scene. Place yourself in the scene. Create your actions. Continue listening for possible sound effects. Claude Kipnis says to be ready for “I know not what.” His book, *The Mime Book* (1974), first published by Harper & Row in NY had flip action photos on the edges and is still one of the best on mime. Meriwether Publishing in CO has a second edition reprint but they cut off the flip action photos. Find the first Harper & Row version!
STORYTELLING MNEMONICS  
By  
Gail N. Herman  
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Hearing a story memorized word for word can often be boring for the listener who does not want to hear a word for word monotone voice. Learning a story in its structural form is a much better way to “memorize.” The following are some ways storytellers learn stories they have written, adapted, or read.

1. VISUAL METHODS: Visual Spatial Intelligence  
Each time you tell your story, you see it anew.  
I. The Movie Screen  
Close your eyes. The insides of your eyelids are a movie screen. See your story scene by scene.

II. The Cartoon  
Create a storyboard with 4-8 boxes. You may use stick figures & balloons for minimal dialogue. This will pare your story down to the essence.

III. The Story Map  
Draw a map of the story scenes from a bird’s eye view. If there is a journey, map out the path and the places the characters inhabit. Or if the story is psychological, draw the feelings.

IV. The Outline  
If you think well in words but need to see them, make an outline or scenario. Be sure to “chunk” the different parts using indentations and spaces.

V. The Photocopy  
Photocopy your story. Underline the most important parts. Take it with you. Read and reread the highlighted parts.

2. AURAL METHODS: Linguistic Intelligence  
I. Read Aloud  
Hear yourself read the story.

II. Record the story as you read it. Use expression and sounds. Play it back in the car or when you do chores.

III. Listen to Storytellers on You-Tube, DVD, or CD.  
Visit the National Storytelling Network,  
www.storynet.org
IV. Record Yourself
Tell the story into the tape recorder. Make up the parts you forget.
Learn to think on your feet. Play it back, noting what changes you wish to make later.

V. Imaginary Tape. Close your eyes and create the sounds effects and hear the words.

3. KINESTHETIC METHODS: Kinesthetic Intelligence

I. Type or Write the Story Skeleton
Type or write the original story. Then type or write it using your own words.

II. Act the Story
Act the story from the view of one or two characters.
Create character stances, gestures & voices.

III. Mime the Story
With a friend, use mime to share all or parts of the story.

IV. Move the Story
Dance the story as you tell it.

V. Find Props or Storytelling Aides (Visual and Kinesthetic). Use visual and tactile objects, flannel, puppets, costume pieces, props, etc.

Finally, retell your story as you see the pictures and structure, hear the voices and sounds, or feel the movements and feelings of the story. You now know the story by “heart.”
You do not have to tell it with the exact words; you can improvise.

Some phrases you will find you want to use each time, but if you forget them, you will have many others to use and you will not spoil the flow of the story. You might pause for a second or two and then see, hear, or feel where you need to go next.

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