

Feature – Storytelling



Storytelling Mini-Lesson

Nile Stanley

Focus: Writing and telling the jump tale

The jump tale is a scary story in which the teller uses the dramatic pause followed by a sudden loud outburst to scare the audience and get them to jump out of their seats. Jump tales usually involve a ghost seeking revenge. In the classroom teachers can capitalize on children's love of scary stories. Jump tales provide opportunities for storytelling with dramatic expression, analyzing story pattern, and writing with voice.

Mark Twain's *Golden Arm* is the classic jump tale with a story pattern that children love to copy and retell using their own ghost stories. Children may enjoy these stories around the campfire, on the playground or at slumber parties. In the classroom, children should learn to tell the jump tale using multiple techniques, such as solo telling, interactive group telling, or scripted and performed as a reader's theatre. Children may also engage in digital storytelling and/or a multimedia approach, with added art, music, and sound effects. Some children may enjoy making an audio CD or video on the web or DVD.

In these multifaceted ways, storytelling supports the growth of important academic literacy skills (Gordh, 2006):

- Listening and speaking
- Reading and writing
- Observing, sequencing, and predicting
- Retelling and narrating
- Building comprehension
- Understanding vocabulary
- Exploring theme, character, narrative structure and culture
- Building motivation and engagement
- Building creativity

Storytelling's additional benefits are that it is culturally responsive and promotes language and literacy within families. Research has shown that successful family literacy programs use

storytelling (Palmer, Leiste, James, & Ellis, 2005). When children and their families work together telling, reading and writing stories not only do they learn about their culture and heritage, but they perform school type literacy activities at home. Research by Sanacore (2004) indicated that storytelling provides opportunities for more interaction and physical movement than traditional instructional techniques of reading aloud or skill drills, thus accommodating the social and learning styles of many African American children (especially boys). Storytelling literacy instruction is more natural and engaging because it builds upon the prominent oral tradition often found in families of native American, Hispanic, African and Caribbean cultures (Honeyghan, 2000; Patterson, 2002; Grace, Smith, & Hinchman 2004). In these ways, storytelling provides a bridge between community and home.

Use the Experience, Reflect, and Apply (ERA) Model using Storytelling to Teach Literacy

The lesson is designed for the fifth-eighth grade; however, teachers may adapt it for any grade using age appropriate stories.

Experience the Story

Pudge Smoot's Golden Arm

by Nile Stanley

The family had great hopes for their son, Clarence Douglas Farnsworth Smoot, the third. Unfortunately no one could remember a name that long so everybody called the boy, Pudge Smoot. The name fit just fine because he was chubby. Now Pudge was very popular among his classmates because he could throw and hit a baseball better than anybody.

“That Pudge Smoot’s got a golden arm,” all the kids would say.

“I don’ know.” (Say in an exaggerated tone of stupidity and apology.)

Despite being slow witted he was always picked first to play baseball in gym class and his team always won.

In class Pudge was a class clown even though he didn’t try to be.

“What’s the capital of Florida?” the teacher asked.

“I don’t know.” said Pudge. The kids would chuckle

“What’s 2 + 2?” in disbelief the teacher would ask.

“I don’t know!” said Pudge. The kids would howl.

Years later when Pudge Smoot led his high school baseball team to the state championship people always summed him up by saying, “He ain’t too bright but who cares? Pudge Smoot’s got a golden arm.”

Pudge lived on a farm and because he had grown so big he could do a lot of chores to help out his widowed Mom. One day Pudge was helping his Mom bale hay. He would rake and pickup fresh cut alfalfa and put it in the baling machine. (Repeat picking up and placing the hay into the machine).

“Be careful Pudge not to get pinched by the baling machine,” Mom warned.

“I don’t know.” said Pudge.

Suddenly Pudge’s whole arm got caught and mangled in the machine.

At the hospital Old Doc Smithers said that his arm could not be saved and had to be amputated.

Without an arm Pudge couldn’t play baseball very well. (Pull your arm up your sleeve in hide it in your shirt. Make flailing motions with your armless sleeve.) The kids stopped playing with him. Pudge grew even heavier as years went by (Clasp hands and extend your arms beyond your belly.) He could not get into college so he worked on the farm. Pudge grew very sad as he missed the cheering crowds. His mother felt sorry for him.

One day Pudge heard his Mom screaming. “We have won the Florida lottery!” she screamed.

“I don’t know?” said Pudge.

“You idiot, WE HAVE WON THE LOTTERY We are rich!”

“I don’t know.” said Pudge.

“Never mind you ...” She caught herself and felt ashamed for calling Pudge a bad name.

She came back from town with a long wooden box. Inside was a beautiful golden arm – all solid gold from the shoulder down. A real golden arm that Pudge could wear. (Bring your arm back into your shirt sleeve and show it off.) Now he would be happy and popular again.

People noticed right away and said, “Pudge Smoot’s got a golden arm.”

“I don’t know,” was all he could say.

“I’m gonna get me that golden arm,” said a bad boy Eddy Johnson who recently had flunked out of college and worked at the Whataburger. Also he had a lifetime of bitter memories from always striking out when Pudge was on the plate.

One night as Pudge slept and snored. Eddy snuck to his window. He climbed in and knocked the sleeping Pudge over the head with a baseball bat lying next to his bed. Eddy took the

prize golden arm and hid it under his bed. Like Pudge he slept with an open window. Then he was roused out of a deep sleep by the wind.

“Who... Who... (Whisper with a whistle). W-h-o’s -- g-o-t -- m-y --g-o-l-d-e-n arm?”

Eddy waked in a start and looked around and listened but heard nothing. “Just some gas from that corn dog I had” he thought and rolled over and went back to sleep.

“Who... Who.. (Louder with a whistle) W-h-o’s -- g-o-t -- m-y --g-o-l-d-e-n arm?” It came again, a singsong of wailing and wheezing.

Eddy sat up in bed in a cold sweat.

Closer it came. (Pause). It was right out his window. “W-h-o’s -- g-o-t -- m-y --g-o-l-d-e-n arm?”

He heard the window sill CRUNCH. (pause) He felt a bony hand upon his shoulder. W-h-o’s -- g-o-t -- m-y --g-o-l-d-e-n arm?” (Say it sadly and accusingly. Stare intently off at someone in the audience. Give a long pause and let it build into a hush. Then jump suddenly at the person and yell.)

“DO YOU HAVE IT?”

Reflect on the Story

1. Have your class do a teacher guided group retelling of a jump tale. One student begins, “Once upon a time. . .” The next student adds, “an then...”
2. Outline a chart of the story with the 5 W’s: Who, what, when, where, and why.
3. Compare and contrast using a Venn Diagram an original jump tale (e.g. Mark Twain’s *Golden Arm* with Nile Stanley’s *Pudge Smoot’s Golden Arm*).

Apply using a Literacy Connection

1. Turn the story into script and perform as story theatre. Assign the various speaking parts (e.g. narrator, Pudge Smoot, kids, teacher and the ghost). Make a DVD of the performance.
2. Write and tell your own version of a jump tale. Keep the basic plot pattern the same but use your own experience to cast the story in a new place and time. Draw upon the people you know to create new characters.

3. Interview and record family member's recollections of ghost stories. Transcribe the text of a story into a one page skeleton outline to facilitate retelling. Learn the "bare bones" of a story that gives the basic sequence of characters and events.
4. After building excitement for telling and writing jump tales, offer books that further explore the ghost story genre, Here are a few examples.

McKissack, Patricia C., & Brian Pinkney (Illustrator). *The Dark-Thirty: Southern Tales of the Supernatural*. Alfred A. Knoff, 1992.

San Souci, Robert D., Katerine Coville, & Jacqueline Rogers (Illustrators). *More Short & Shivery: Thirty Terrifying Tales*. Dell Yearling, 1994.

Schwartz, Alvin, & Stephen Gammell (Illustrator). *Scary Stories: More Tales to Chill Your Bones*. Harper Collins, 1991.

Teachers may find jump tales to tell or read aloud, such as the tales below, which are readily available on the web and in books.

- *Golden Arm* by Mark Twain
- *Teeny Tiny Woman*
- *Who's got my liver?*

References

- Gordh, B. (2006). *Stories in action: Interactive tales and learning activities to promote early literacy*. Westport, CN: Libraries Unlimited.
- Grace, C.M., Smith, K., & Hinchman, K. (2004, July). Exploring the African American oral tradition: Instructional implications for literacy learning. *Language Arts*, 81, 481-491.
- Honeyghan, G. (2000, May). Rhythm of the Caribbean: Connecting oral history and literacy. *Language Arts*, 77, 406-414.
- Patterson, A. (2002). Telling tales: Storytelling in the family. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 27 (1), 145-148.
- Palmer, B. C., Leiste, S. M., James, K.D., & Ellis, S.M. (2000, Nov/Dec). The role of storytelling in effective family literacy programs. *Reading Horizons*, 41, 93-105.
- Sanacore, J. (2004, May). Genuine caring and literacy learning for African American children. *The Reading Teacher*, 57, 744-844.

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