Storytelling in the 21st-Century Classroom

By Elizabeth Edwards

Values of using storytelling

- Generates/captures interest, imagination, and emotions
- Makes learning more relevant
- Promotes long-term learning
- Introduces vocabulary (that is more advanced than their abilities, thus increasing tolerance for unknown vocab)
- Practices prediction skills, critical thinking, logic, creativitiy, communication, collaboration
- Accessible and authentic
- Skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in a personalized context
- "Break" from coursework
- Cross-curricular, cross-cultural, multi-generational

Kinds of stories

Fables, myths (universal themes), cautionary tales, anecdotes, news articles, bios/memoirs, TED talks, jokes, picture books

General tips

Teachers are recommended to:

- Build a picture bank. Can be used as picture prompts or for other creative activities.
- Build a story bank. Keep track of stories that are good to use in the classroom.
- Build an activity bank. Activities that your classes respond well to.
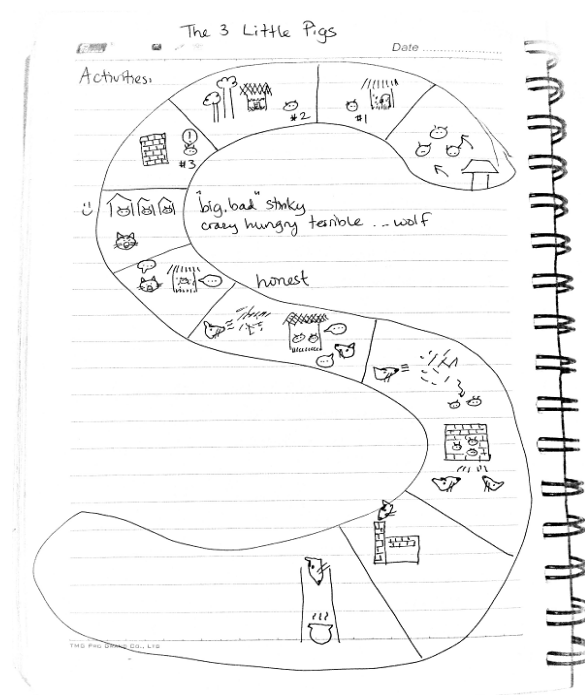
Further resources

Oxford Basics for Children: Storytelling by Eleanor Watts (OUP, 2006) – geared towards young learners

Storybuilding by Jane Spiro (OUP, 2007) – aimed towards teachers of secondary students

Activities

S-strips

Gist:	▪ Teacher tells the story in chunks ▪ Students draw that part of the story quickly for a visual record ▪ Follow-up activity – students retell the story using their drawing
Benefits:	▪ Learners tell the story their own way ▪ Storytelling, not story-reading
Target language:	▪ Topics ▪ Vocabulary ▪ Storytelling/speaking practice
Adaptability:	▪ Can be used for any kind of story and with any age-group ▪ Lower levels – pre-teach vocabulary, multiple tellings ▪ Higher levels – comic strips o Follow-up activity of going back and adding dialogue/thought bubbles

Drawing and pictures

Gist:	▪ Teacher tells the story through drawing on the board
Benefits:	▪ Students join in with predictable speech (e.g. sound effects) ▪ Promotes anticipation (listening), fun language practice (speaking) ▪ Holds interest more effectively than simply reading from a book/page
Target language:	▪ Vocabulary ▪ Functional language
Adaptability:	

Collaborative storybuilding and action

Gist:	▪ Leave blanks in printed version of the story (like Mad Libs)
	▪ Students put in the appropriate words/structures
Benefits:	▪ Adds variety, personal details to story
	▪ Creative practice of types of language
Target language:	▪ Parts of speech
	▪ "Categories" of words, e.g. emotions, prepositional adverbs of place, etc.
Adaptability:	▪ Lower levels – students put in single words
	▪ Higher levels – students put in more complex structures

Sequencing

Gist:	▪ Teacher "cuts up" story into multiple parts
	▪ Students work to put story in the correct order
Benefits:	▪ Practices cohesion, recognizing sequencing markers, logic, looking for clues
	▪ Students check understanding with peers
Target language:	▪ Story structure
	▪ Explanation of cause-and-effect, etc.
Adaptability:	▪ Lower levels – pictures instead of sentences
	▪ Follow-up activity
	o Encourage students to add details to "flesh out" the bare-bones story they've just arranged in order, before reading the full version
	o Actions – freeze frames or tableaux for each part of the story