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Study Guide For Teachers

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Introduction

Our names are Martha Hamilton and Mitch Weiss, and we are full-time professional storytellers also known as "Beauty and the Beast Storytellers." We are a husband and wife who have been telling stories together since 1980. Our repertoire includes a selection of traditional world folktales, original stories, stories by other authors, and tales based on historical people and events. We tell some stories individually, but mostly we do "tandem" storytelling where we combine our contrasting styles, swapping lines and impersonating characters. Our program is a terrific way to kick off a storytelling unit in your classroom, and our books and recordings provide all that you need to get students (and you!) telling stories. Even a one-day visit to a school can have a profound effect if teachers capitalize on the excitement generated by storytelling and get students telling and writing stories. See page 6 for brief information on our books and the "Books and Recordings" page of our Web site for details.

****Because of our name, many prospective listeners think we will be telling the famous French tale, but *it's just our name*—and we still won't reveal which one is the Beauty and which the Beast. (FYI, we chose the name *many* years before the Disney movie came out.)**

Our Web site at www.beautyandthebeaststorytellers.com has lots of useful information in the "Just for Teachers" section, and also a part that is "Just for Kids." For example, you will find:

Frequently Asked Questions

Why Children Should Be Given the Opportunity to Tell Stories

How Storytelling Activities Help Meet Numerous State Learning Standards for Education

Storytelling Games

Pourquoi Play: Practicing Oral Language Skills by Making up "How and Why" Stories

Extemporaneously (can be used for K-6 and adapted for any age)

Writing How & Why Stories: a Unit for 2nd - 6th Graders

Writing Noodlehead Stories: a Unit for 2nd - 5th Graders

How To Order our Books & Recordings

Storytelling and Education

Storytelling is the oldest form of education. Cultures throughout the world have always told tales as a way of transferring their beliefs, customs, and history. This age old art form is still a useful tool for stimulating imagination and creativity, motivating children to read, fine tuning a child's listening skills, and creating an awareness and appreciation of different cultures. We look forward to sharing our stories with you and your students, and hope that our performance and/or workshop will spark an ongoing process. Our goal is to make children realize that they are already storytellers and can bring stories to life with nothing more than vocal and facial expression and hand gestures to help

listeners visualize. During our visit to your school we will emphasize that most of the stories we tell are folktales that were made up by ordinary "folks," and there's absolutely no reason children can't make up great stories like the ones we tell.

We encourage you to tell stories to your students, and to get them involved telling stories. Learning a story isn't hard if you tell it in your own words and don't worry about being perfect. Think of storytelling *not* as another subject to teach but as a tool that can be used in any subject. You can always make up or ask students to make up stories about information you've presented to them in *any* subject. For example, if you had just taught how the digestive system works, you could say: "Pair up with someone and tell a story that includes the information we just covered. Tell it as if you are a particular food being digested, or the enzymes that break it down, or any part of the digestive tract." This activity helps students retain information because it fixes it in a context, and because stories are the way information is stored in the brain. Their tellings can also be a form of assessment. You will be helping your students to meet numerous state learning standards and encouraging them to use their imaginations and think "out of the box." And, as Albert Einstein once said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Activities

Pre-Performance Discussion

The term "storytelling" has many different connotations. Students who have not been exposed to storytelling in the traditional sense may assume that we will be reading books to them. It is helpful if you clear up any misconceptions by making it clear that we tell stories from memory—the way people used to pass on stories before books were widely available. Make them aware that this is still the way stories are passed on in many cultures to this day. Remind them that storytellers were once vital to the preservation of the history of early civilizations. Their stories were the records that were passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. With the advent of alphabets, writing implements, and eventually the printing press, storytelling lost its special position in the community. And in the twentieth century, the invention and widespread exposure to radio, television, and movies almost caused storytelling to become a lost art. However, there has been a revival of storytelling in the past few decades. People yearn for personal contact, and have realized that television and other media can never have the same effect as a storyteller sharing a story in person.

Post-Performance Follow-Up Ideas

1) Do "The Mind's Eye" Exercise

Discuss with students what happened as they listened to the stories. For example, you might ask: "What did you see as the storytellers told the stories?" Their response will usually be that they saw the storytellers and "pictures in their minds."

Pick an image that was particularly vivid for you in one of the stories. Have the students close their eyes and remember (in silence) how they pictured the image. Asking them questions will facilitate the process. For example: "What did Jack look like?" "How old do you think he was?" "What color was his hair?" "Was it straight or curly, combed or uncombed?" "What kind of clothes was he wearing?" Ask a few volunteers to describe how they pictured Jack to the rest of the class. There will, of course, be many different images of Jack, and you can point out that this is what makes storytelling so interesting and so much fun. All of the listeners create their own images, whereas when we watch television or a movie, we see exactly the same images.

2) Teach Your Students To Tell Stories

Although you might argue that some of your students can already tell whoppers about what happened to their homework, it is hard to deny that being able to tell a coherent, engaging story is an important life skill. Many students who struggle in school are fantastic storytellers. They may have already "checked out" when it comes to working hard at reading and writing because they don't feel

they're good at them. However, they immediately recognize storytelling as a skill they use in their everyday lives. Storytelling is an AMAZING confidence booster and student enthusiasm for storytelling leads to excitement about reading more stories and making up their own, especially if teachers encourage and guide them.

Our book, *Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom*, has all the information a teacher needs to know to get students telling stories, and the companion DVD includes twenty-five world folktales that can be downloaded and printed out for classroom use. Our story collections are chock full of more tellable tales and provide lots of ideas for how to follow-up with storytelling and writing. The collections include: *Stories in My Pocket*, *How and Why Stories*, *Noodlehead Stories*, *Through the Grapevine*, and *Scared Witless*.

A Discussion of Storytelling Skills To Get Things Started

Discuss the fact that all of us tell stories, and that there are certain techniques we can use to become better storytellers. Ask the students what they learned from watching us that might help them improve their storytelling. Brainstorm a list of storytelling techniques such as:

Use of Voice

Storytellers must put expression into their voices. Nothing will cause an audience to lose interest faster than a monotonous delivery. To demonstrate the use of expression, have students practice saying a sentence such as "I lost my homework," first as if they were sad, then as if they were happy, then frustrated, etc. You could also have them say just one word -- "hippopotamus." Have them say it as if it were a silly hippopotamus, a serious hippo, an angry hippo, etc. (Encourage them to use facial expression as well as vocal expression.)

Speak loudly enough. When speaking before a group, storytellers must be sure to look at the back row now and then in order to be sure that all listeners can hear.

Facial Expressions

You might ask, "What did the storytellers say with the expressions on their faces?" You can remind students of a certain part of a story we told where a character was mad, or scared, or embarrassed. Write several feelings (for example: confused, surprised, afraid) on cards and ask volunteers to show the feeling with facial expression only – no body motions or sounds. Ask their classmates to guess what the feeling is.

Eye Contact

It is especially important to have students notice the effect that is created when a storyteller looks directly at listeners. Maintaining eye contact draws the audience into the story and makes the telling more powerful. The listeners feel they are a part of the action.

Timing

Ask the following questions: "How did the storytellers pace the story? Were some parts of it faster when it was more exciting? Did you notice how they went slowly and paused at other times?" Emphasize that a storyteller should not rush when telling a story, and that silences are sometimes just as important as words. During a pause, the teller is using facial expression and body movements to tell the story.

Body Movement and Gestures

Ask, "How did the storytellers hold their bodies for certain characters? What kind of gestures did they use?" Point out that it's very important that the storyteller not use any distracting gestures such as playing with her clothes or shuffling her feet since that would bring attention to *her*. Any gestures a storyteller uses should help listeners create pictures in their imaginations rather than bringing attention to the storyteller.

3) **Have Students Draw Favorite Scenes from a Story**

Have the students draw their favorite scene from one of the stories we told. To build in a lesson on sequencing, line the various drawings from one story up on the chalkboard rail and ask, "Which one of these comes first in the story? Which comes next? Are there any parts of the story missing?" Volunteers can draw the missing scenes and you can then bind them all together to form the class's own storybook.

4) **Have Students Retell Stories**

Some of the stories we tell are simple enough that students can retell them either orally or in writing. Let the class pick a favorite story; then, with the class's help, make a bare bones outline of it on the blackboard. Students can then retell it orally to a partner or in small groups. Some may eventually choose to tell it for the entire class. Afterward, students will enjoy hearing the differing versions of the story told by their classmates.

5) **Have students Make Up "How" and "Why" or "Pourquoi" Stories**

Everything you need to know is in a handout that you can download on our Web site: "Pourquoi Play: Practicing Oral Language Skills by Making up "How and Why" Stories Extemporaneously." Follow up this activity by having students write the stories down and develop them fully; download a complete writing unit ("Writing How and Why Stories") at our Web site under "Handouts."

6) **More Writing Ideas**

- * You can also download a complete writing unit for "Noodlehead" stories on our Web site.
- * Have students take one of the stories we told and tell it from a different point of view.
- * Keep the plot of one of our stories, but change the time or place.
- * Rewrite one of our stories as a newspaper article.
- * Have one of the characters in a story write a letter to "Dear Abby" explaining his/her problem.

7) Problem Solving: Tell or read a familiar story (possibly one we've just told to students), and stop when the problem is introduced. Discuss different ways the main character could solve the problem.

Here are several more ways to keep the excitement about storytelling and reading and making up stories going after Mitch and Martha leave:

Tell/Read the Stories from Our books

The stories are folktales and are meant to be told without the book. However, the lively, colloquial language also makes them effective as read-alouds.

Watch Movie Clips on Our Web site and Play CD Recordings of Children Telling Stories

Click on "View Video Clips" at the top of our Web site and scroll down, and you will find several child tellers -- and more will be added in the future so keep checking back. When children hear other children telling stories, the idea of "I'll bet I could do that, too" is planted in their minds.

Show Morgan telling "Dead or Alive" from *Noodlehead Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell* to second grade and up. She is a fifth grader who says, "I never raise my hand to say anything in class and everyone thinks of me as shy -- so I stunned my teachers and classmates when I told my story. I was glad that I got to show everyone another side of me."

Older students (third grade and up) will also love Jonathan telling "Do They Play Soccer in Heaven" from *Stories in My Pocket* (as long as you think there is no problem at your school with the reference to heaven in the story -- the concept is common to so many religions, after all). It is great to see how he overcomes his initial nervousness while telling the story for his classmates and their families.

For K-4 you could show them Bhavishh telling "The Fearsome Monster in Hare's House" from *Through the Grapevine: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell* and Stef, a second-grader with special needs who does a wonderful job telling "The Spooky House" (written by Mitch and Martha but not published).

From the CDs: Play "Why the Baby Says Goo" (told by nine-year-old Sam Harris) from *How & Why Stories* for K-6.

For grades 3-5-- play "Tilly" from *Stories in My Pocket* (told by 12-year-old Gwen Niven) -- they love the scary ones.

If you (or your school library) own *Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom*, show students (grades two – high school) the twenty-minute feature on the accompanying DVD. They are able to see how scared the third graders who are learning to tell stories are at the beginning, how much fun they have in the process, and how great they feel about themselves after having accomplished something that seemed so difficult.

Show Students Animated Versions of Mitch and Martha's Folktales

We have five books as part of the Story Cove series and all have free animated versions (including our voices) available free online. Go to "Books and Recordings" on our Web site, click on any of the following titles and then look for "To watch a video . . ." Our Story Cove books are: *Rooster's Night Out*, *The Stolen Smell*, *A Tale of Two Frogs*, *The Well of Truth*, and *Why Koala Has a Stumpy Tail*. Although we might tell some of these stories during our visit, playing the animations for students would be a great introduction. However, it's even better to show them after they have heard us tell the story so that they have already used their own imaginations to create the story in their minds.

The Story Cove animations are aimed at primary age students but older children enjoy watching them and can be encouraged to retell them. Along with reading, writing, speaking, and listening, two more literacy skills have been added for teachers to address: "visually representing" and "viewing." After students watch us tell stories, have them view any of the Story Cove movies. For example, the illustrator of "The Well of Truth," Tom Wrenn, has depicted the story the way he saw it in his mind. Have children figure out how they might tell it, or even just a part of it, using vocal and facial expression and hand motions to "visually represent" the story and help listeners visualize it in their minds.

The Hidden Feast, part of the larger and beautifully illustrated LittleFolk picture book series, also has a free animation online and will be enjoyed by K-3 students. Just go to "Books and Recordings" on our site, scroll till you find the title, and click on "To watch a video . . ."

Use the Free Lesson Plans Available for Many of Mitch and Martha's Books

Although the focus is on K-3 for these Lesson Plans from August House Publishers, many have information that is useful for other grade levels. Go to "Books and Recordings" on our Web site, click on any of the following titles and then look for "To download lesson plans . . ." Titles that have lesson plans are: *The Ghost Catcher*, *The Hidden Feast*, *Priceless Gifts*, *Rooster's Night Out*, *The Stolen Smell*, *A Tale of Two Frogs*, *The Well of Truth*, and *Why Koala Has a Stumpy Tail*.

Do Comparisons of World Folktales

Here's one example—we have several world folktales in our books that explain various things about how chickens / roosters look and act. Two of them have free animations online. *Rooster's Night Out* is a Cuban folktale that explains why the rooster crows the sun up each morning. *The Hidden Feast: A Folktale from the American South* explains why roosters often scratch in the dirt. To watch animated versions, go to "Books and Recordings" on our Web site, click on the titles above, and then click on "Watch the video." "Why the Sun Comes Up When Rooster Crows," a tale from China, and "Why Hens Scratch in the Dirt," from the Philippines, can be found in *How and Why Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell*.

Play Storytelling Games

Go to our Web site and click on “Storytelling Games” (on the right hand side). Students love the seven letter sentence game and it shows them that they don't need a television or a computer screen or even a game to have fun with friends -- just a paper and pencil. There are also a lot of other story games described in *Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Curriculum* on pages 34-45.

Books and Recordings by Mitch and Martha

As a result of our extensive experience in teaching children to tell stories, we have numerous award-winning books and recordings that will give all the information and inspiration you need to teach your students to be storytellers and to tell stories yourself. Our recordings include guest child tellers who will get your students excited about telling stories themselves. All are available at our Web site (where you will find a full listing of reviews and awards) or from the publishers listed below.

Professional Books

Children Tell Stories: Teaching and Using Storytelling in the Classroom (Richard Owen Publishers, 2005) (with companion DVD included in back of book)

Collections of Stories for Students to Tell

Forty Fun Fables: Tales That Trick, Tickle, and Teach (August House, 2015)

How & Why Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read & Tell (August House, 1999) (CD available—see below)

Noodlehead Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read & Tell (August House, 2000)

Scared Witless: Thirteen Eerie Tales to Tell. (August House, 2006)

Stories in My Pocket: Tales Kids Can Tell (Fulcrum, 1996) (CD available—see below)

Through the Grapevine: World Tales Kids Can Read and Tell (August House, 2001)

Picture Books

The Hidden Feast: A Folktale from the Southern United States. Illustrated by Don Tate. (August House, 2006)

Priceless Gifts: A Folktale from Italy. Illustrated by John Kanzler. (August House, 2007)

The Ghost Catcher: A Bengali Folktale. Illustrated by Kristin Balouch. (August House, 2008)

Recordings (CD)

Stories in My Pocket: Tales Kids Can Tell (1997)

How & Why Stories: World Tales Kids Can Read & Tell (August House, 2000)

Story Cove: Picture Books with Animated Movies and Lesson Plans/ Classroom Activities

Rooster's Night Out: A Folktale from Cuba. (August House, Story Cove, 2007)

The Stolen Smell: A Folktale from Peru. (August House, Story Cove, 2007)

A Tale of Two Frogs: Inspired by a Russian Folktale. (August House, Story Cove, 2006)

The Well of Truth: A Folktale from Egypt. (August House, Story Cove, 2009)

Why Koala Has a Stumpy Tail: A Folktale from Australia. (August House, Story Cove, 2008)

Books for Young Learners

The “Books for Young Learners” series by Richard Owen Publishers (www.RCOwen.com) includes four picture books by us: *Tricky Rabbit: A Folktale from Cambodia to Read and Tell*, *Two Fables of Aesop to Read and Tell*, *How Fox Became Red: A Folktale of the Athabaskan Indians of Alaska to Read and Tell*, and *Why Animals Never Got Fire: A Folktale of the Coeur d'Alene Indians to Read and Tell*. These inexpensive titles are designed for classroom use and are available as individual titles or in “six-packs.” They are perfect for reading and telling by elementary students.