

Tip of the Tongue/Top of the Head—Learning to Tell Stories

Gluck Workshop Leave-Behind

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Introduction

This workshop is intended for students between fourth grade and twelfth grade. The purpose is to help students gain confidence in their own ideas, their speaking voices, and to give them basic guidance in the writing of expository or fantastic stories. We will focus on three elements of storytelling: cooperation, imagination, and structure. Through a physical exercise (see “getting comfortable and confident with ideas”) the class will learn to listen to one another and cooperate in a physical way. This will set the stage for cooperative storytelling. Then, we will exercise our imaginations, creating something out of nothing. On the shoulders of these two concepts, we will learn basic story structure. Encourage students to think of the first thing that comes to mind, but also remind them that this story structure is a common tool that all storytellers employ.

Students sit in a circle and tell a story cooperatively (see “telling stories together”). Then students will develop their own stories and write them.

At the end of the workshop, students should feel more confident contributing ideas to the group, have the tools to tell their own stories in a verbal and written format, and they should have one story, which they may share with the class.

Getting Comfortable and Confident with Ideas

Clap Ball

With the students standing in a circle, the teacher/instructor begins this exercise by explaining that they’ll be playing a game of catch, but everyone in the circle has to imagine the ball. The only way we can pass the ball is if I look in my circle neighbor’s eyes and clap my hands at the same time as they do. The clap should continue around the circle this way until someone drops it. Whoever drops it must pick it up and bring it back into play.

This game teaches students to connect with each other, trust one another, and to communicate in a non-verbal way.

Create the Ball

This game allows students and the instructor to create a ball, give it certain qualities, and then allow it to change: grow, shrink, etc. The students must interact with the ball, whatever the changes are. And, the ball cannot touch the ground.

This game teaches students to use their imagination in a targeted way, collectively, which will come in handy when, later, we tell a story as a group.

Pass the Noise (pass the kiss/follow the leader)

Students rejoin the circle and play a game of catch, but instead of clapping, like the previous exercise, they must direct a movement and a sound to one of their neighbors. The neighbor that receives the sound and motion must repeat it and create their own sound and movement, which they pass on to their neighbor.

This game, and its variations, allows students to accept the ideas of others, agree, and make their own additions to a collective creation.

Beginning Story Structure

Remind students to accept what others give, to say “yes,” and to make additions of their own.

What is Story Structure?

Once Upon a Time [A character lived in a place]

Every Day [The character did a thing]

Until One Day [An event/person stops the character doing the thing]

Because of that... [A complication]

Because of that... [A complication]

Because of that... [A complication]

Until Finally... [The character finds a way to win/lose]

Ever Since that Day... [The character’s new Every Day]

Telling Stories together

Sit students in a circle and begin with one student at Once Upon a Time. Allow that student to fill in this piece of story structure. Then, move on to the next student and the next piece of story structure. Continue until you’ve told a story.

This exercise gets students comfortable telling stories collectively in a supportive community.

Refresh Story Structure

The Students Turn

Ask students if anyone would like to tell their own story independently.

Writing the Story

Refresh Story Structure

Write Stories

On a piece of paper, ask students to write down the elements of story structure on their paper with two blank lines between every element. Then, start at the beginning: have them fill in the two blank lines below each element, like you did together. When they have finished, ask anyone if they would like to read.

This exercise is the culmination of the workshop, teaching students the basic structure of storytelling.

Conclude

Ask students about the value of storytelling: 1) Expressing ourselves, 2) Remembering our experiences, 3) Relating to one another, 4) Demonstrating our personalities to colleges on applications, 5) Making sense out of life.

Encourage students, when watching movies or reading books, to look out for this structure. They may find it more often than they think.

Encourage students to plug their own experiences, their own stories into this structure. They all have stories worth being told, and now they have one way to tell them. After a while, they could even remove the elements and tell the story without the guides.