

WE START WITH THE STORY

1. Identify the kids' interest

- If you know them well, great; if not, think about that age group

- Animals
- Stories where kids their age are heroes
- Stories about things kids like to do: getting dirty, playing with an adult around, trying something new for the first time, etc.

2. Where do you find good stories?

- Stories from your head (remembered, made up)
- Picture books (especially if trying to excite reading)
- Your public or school library has many collections of Folktales often compiled in easy format books, or adaptable to your needs.
- Family stories

3. Key elements to a successful story time

- Know and like your story
- Know and like your audience
- Make sure they match each other
- Be flexible

THEN WE WORK ON THE TELLER

4. How do you learn a story to tell?

- Learn the plot. Tell it to yourself while driving (mind the traffic wardens!)
- Tape it if you want
- Use a mirror if you want
- Remember, you're not trying out for the London Theatre; relax and have fun

REMEMBER: ENVIRONMENT IS IMPORTANT!

5. Even if you know the story, you can't keep the Head Start children attention in hyper situations

- Room temp, noise level, physical environment

TIP: In a hot room, don't do action stories/ but do a warm-up poem in cold room

- Special situations:
 - emotional atmosphere (have there been recent deaths, etc.)
TIP: Let kids talk; let them choose elements of the story and you "improve" them. This improvisation is not nearly as hard as it sounds, particularly if you and the kids already know each other

- *The Easter Bunny is due in ten minutes*
TIP: Don't go on before the Easter Bunny. Period!

- The kids are rowdy, restless, just ate sugar
TIP: If kids arrive early for a program, encourage them to walk about rather than sit. If it is possible to control timing, tell before they eat. Pay attention to what kids want/expect; don't attempt the impossible. Start with a calming poem. Set up expectations. "If you can hear me" games.

If You Can Hear Me is a technique for regaining control of a noisy room. The adult stands at the front and says very quietly "If you can hear me I want you to pat your head." She pats, and as one or two kids catch on and begin patting, the noise dies down. As it does, the adult increases her voice level until everyone can hear the instructions and do the action.)

MAKING STORIES EXCITING AND FUN

6. Add the tools of the teller:

- Voice
- Body
- Face
- Imagination
- Enthusiasm/Spirit (Cooperation with the audience!)

Voice

A good voice exercise is to write some sentences on a blackboard, and have each person say them in different situations. For instance, say "I want a cup of coffee" as though you were tired, happy, angry, disgusted, humiliated, etc. Then change this to an entire situation: you are in your boss's office and he has just fired you. Let them choose the emotion and the voice.

Body language

A good body exercise is one I learned from Heather Forest. Have two people hold up a sheet, and two more stand behind it, the sheet covering their torsos and upper legs. Whisper an emotion into their ears, and then say "go." Have the students point out what made them know which emotions they were imitating. This is called cultural knowledge. We know when people are angry, sad, excited, etc. We don't always know why we know, but we do know. So do kids

- in fact, they are sometimes quicker to pick this up because they need it for living by adult rules. So be careful with your face and body language; the kids are reading it.

Imagination

There are many old theatre games that work well here. One I like is **the Magic Box** - an imaginary box that goes around the circle, each person pulling out and using an object until everyone has guessed what it is. This involves the next tool: cooperation. Someone will choose something complex or esoteric, and no one will be able to guess. Then we have to cooperate with the audience, help them, give them clues. It is our responsibility, not theirs, to provide the communication needed to make the link to our thoughts.

7. Practice

- A tape recorder will let you hear what your voice is doing
- A mirror will let you observe your face and body
- Mulling the story over will bring out imaginative sparks
- Taking it all too seriously will kill your enthusiasm and spirit

8. Remember: you're not just telling stories; you're teaching them to be an audience

- Intersperse with rhymes, fingerplays, prop stories
- Sing
- Keep stories short

Participation stories

9. Ways to participate

Kids love to move, to see things develop in front of them (balloons, origami, etc.) And they love to get to yell, talk, laugh, make themselves a part of the story.

Refrains

- Breathing - take a great big breath just before you want them to join in
- "and then the giant said. . ." done slowly
- hand gestures
- conduct them with a sweeping motion. Kids are quick.
- practice beforehand if very tricky, but incorporating the "now I want you to do this" won't spoil the surprise, particularly if you use one of the above techniques rather than breaking the story to give instructions. Kids will begin repeating when repetition becomes obvious, if you let them know you want it.

Actions

- tricky with rowdy group

Sounds

- building a fire techniques. This is an old story technique, involving creating a rainstorm or building a fire. It is available in many books.

Individual parts (getting the kids to take parts and act out a story)

- tricky but possible with pre-schoolers, easier with older kids. I recommend if you are going to do this that you choose a very repetitive story, like *The Three Bears*. Choosing parts doesn't always work well with strangers entering a classroom. Teachers who are familiar to the kids have better results.

10. Limit the number of participation stories per program, but be ready to be flexible

(If you're going to use it, use it sparingly!) **Ways to participate**

- go over the stories individual class members have been working on and look for places in individual stories where these could be inserted. Not every story has them, not every class participant wants them. But it is a good exercise to identify them.

Finding stories appropriate to age groups and special circumstances

11. Librarians are our friends but YOU are your greatest resource

- Look at books with discernment - some books are for adults to buy kids, some books are for kids to enjoy. Know the difference. Give people time to look through the stack of books on the tables (brought from home).
- **Sudden death exercise** (Wendy's own invention again): each student is given a picture book chosen for her or him, no choice in the matter. They get five minutes to read the book (which is VERY simple - I keep a supply on hand.) Then take the book away - no matter how they plead or cry, take the book. They get five to ten minutes, then they tell the story. This is good for the end of the class, when they have the techniques but are still unconfident about not reading. It really works well.