



STORYTELLING *Toolkit*

What is Storytelling?

Storytelling refers to the performance of a story through spoken or signed language. These stories can be fictional or nonfictional. Storytelling is an ancient practice that developed as a way for people to share information and make sense of the world. We continue to use storytelling to preserve history and teach morals, as well as for pure entertainment.

Who are storytellers

- **Family elders:** grandmothers, great aunts, and other senior members of a family are often curators holding the key to family artifacts and stories that are not physically documented.
- **Rappers:** from Kurtis Blow to Kendrick Lamar, these creative poets break down complex and relatable life experiences through metaphors, riddles, quips, and rhymes, all over the rhythm of a bumping beat.
- **Preachers:** the trusted spiritual leaders in a community speak to and on behalf of the people, regularly incorporating parables, allegories, and other instructive stories into their sermons. Preachers deliver stories of hope, inspiration, and morality.
- **Historians:** these keepers of the trials, tragedies, and triumphs of our past make deliberate choices in how they structure the narratives found in textbooks, museums, legal documents, and other records.
- **Comedians:** stand-up comics, television writers, and other comedians craft narrative arcs that can draw out intense emotions, making us laugh, cry, and sometimes both at once.
- **Librarians:** champions of literacy, librarians make words come to life through story times, puppet shows, role-playing games, and many other programs
- **YOU:** yes, you! There are countless stories in your everyday life experiences that children would love to hear you share.

Why We Tell Stories

If you want your children to be smart, tell them stories. If you want them to be brilliant, tell them more stories - Albert Einstein

From griots in numerous cultures on the African continent, to elders in the community with excellent memories of what happened, when it happened, and who was there, keeping history alive for others through storytelling has been an integral part of the



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Black experience. Oftentimes, doing so has been the *only* way of preserving knowledge of events that would have been lost or overlooked.

Storytelling is the oldest form of teaching. It bonded the early human communities, giving children the answers to the biggest questions of creation, life, and the afterlife. Stories define us, shape us, control us, and make us. **Not every human culture in the world uses written language, but every single culture tells stories!** Stories create magic and a sense of wonder at the world. **Stories teach us about life, about ourselves and about others.** Storytelling is a unique way for kids to develop an understanding, respect and appreciation for other cultures, and can promote a positive attitude to people from different lands and religions.

How Storytelling Benefits Children

Language form and structure

We, as parents, caregivers, and early educators, are our children's first teachers. As a result, we teach our children language form and structure through storytelling. For example, there is a difference in cadence (*rhythmic flow of a sequence of sounds or words—Dictionary.com*) when speaking person to person as opposed to reading a book out loud. Reading a book to a class, speech may be more structured as described by the punctuation and text on page. There is more allowance for space in non-structured language (slang) in speaking person to person. There is also a difference in reading a book out loud and telling a story orally.

Fostering connections between family and community

Whether it's by attending storytimes at the local library or reading with caregivers right before bedtime, engaging in storytelling is a communal act that builds lasting connections. The bonds and memories created by sharing stories provides children with a sense of care and belonging.

Learning and preserving history

Oral Storytelling and literature are ways to preserve history and explain culture to our children. They often make large ideas easily understood and attainable. This knowledge of the past also helps children understand change and new or frightening events, and the strong emotions that can go along with them.



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Builds auditory, comprehension, and memory skills

During storytelling/storytelling, the storyteller can stop and ask open-ended questions. Asking questions helps to assess how much the child has retained of the story. It also shows child knows they have to listen to story in order to respond, aiding in comprehension

Builds & Fosters Imagination

Listening to a story allows children to visualize the setting, characters, and events in their own way. This supports their imagination which can help support creativity and out of the box thinking, as well as their ability to tell the difference between 'real' and 'make-believe'. Imagination also helps with problem solving as it requires children to use their brain and put thought into their daily tasks, playtime, and storytime.

Encourages development of reading/writing skills

Storytelling is the precursor to all the different types of writing and reading styles, from poetry and picture books to chapter books and nonfiction. They give storytellers the ability to explain differences and likenesses, and the ability to teach those close reading skills. In any culture, it is important to show how language is used.

Suggested Activities

Find stories in songs/music

- Present the title of a song and have your child create a story based on its title
- Present a song and allow your child to create a story based on the theme of the song

Story treasure hunt

- Have a scavenger hunt of different pictures and objects that reveal a story about your family history

Use a map to tell a story

- Let the map and the picture tell the story
 - Example: Present a Google Map of your neighborhood library and allow your child to tell a story about his or her experience visiting the library



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Family photos

- Look at a picture, then start describing the picture in the greatest detail that you can.
 - Example: Present a photo from a birthday celebration and allow your child to describe what is happening and what feelings were evoked in them

Get the elders involved

- Invite parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles to share stories from when they were younger. Where they lived, what life was like, things they did for fun, etc.

Movement stories / call and response

- Choose active stories that encourage children to explore, experiment, and create through movement
- Share your child's birth story with them—paint a picture of the day, including all those who were there and the feelings involved

Suggested PreK-8 Retelling Resources (In Print)

Singing Black: Alternative Nursery Rhymes for Children by Mari Evans

A collection of original short poems by Mari Evans that draw inspiration from black culture.

Songs in the Shade of the Cashew and Coconut Trees by Jean-Christophe Hoarau

Nursery rhymes and lullabies from West Africa and the Caribbean. Lyrics appear in their native language and in English.

Bigmama's by Donald Crews

Crews writes of his own childhood experiences visiting his grandparents in Florida.

Jaha and Jamil Went Down the Hill by Virginia Kroll

Charming rhymes similar in style to Mother Goose transferred to characters and settings of 28 African countries.

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters by John Steptoe

African tale fusing tribal culture and history, as well as the traditional theme of good triumphing over evil.



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No Mirrors in My Nana's House by Ysaye Barnell

A little girl discovers the beauty in herself—and the beauty of the world around her. She doesn't discover these beauties through reflection or her own awareness, but by looking in her Nana's eyes.

One-Hundred-and-One African-American Read-Aloud Stories by Susan Kantor

Engaging collection of African-American short stories and excerpts.

Why the Sky Is Far Away by Mary Joan Gerson

This Nigerian folktale is at least 500 years old. It is a tale about respecting nature and the effects of greed.

Anansi the Spider by Gerald McDermott

One of the great folk heroes of the world, Anansi is a wise trickster. This tale teaches us lessons about being fair and the importance of possessing good character.

Bronzeville Boys and Girls by Gwendolyn Brooks

Explores the lives and dreams of the children who live together in an urban neighborhood in Chicago.

Follow the Drinking Gourd by Jeanette Winter

Two escaped slaves who share their brave story along the path to freedom called the Underground Railroad.

Let's Clap, Jump, Sing & Shout; Dance, Spin & Turn It Out! By Patricia McKissack

A collection of games, songs, proverbs, stories including those from the author's childhood.

Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt by Deborah Hopkinson

A young slave stitches a quilt with a map pattern which guides her to freedom in the North.

Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold

Tar Beach is the roof of Cassie's Harlem apartment building. Cassie's dream is to be free to go wherever she wants, and one day it becomes a reality. She tells the story of how she flies around New York City.



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Adventures of High John the Conqueror by Steve Sanfield

John the Conqueror, sometimes called simply High John or John, was a slave trickster who always outwit his oppressors.

African Tales: A Barefoot Collection by Gcina Mhlophe

This anthology includes eight traditional tales from all over Africa. Tales describes unforgettable stories of wisdom, courage, and heroic deeds

Nelson Mandela's Favorite African Folktales by Nelson Mandela

A collection of some of Africa's most beloved folktales, selected by Nelson Mandela which presents such themes as sly and wise animals, supernatural powers, and bravery.

Porch Lies: Tales of Slicksters, Tricksters and Other Wily Characters by Patricia McKissack

A collection of tales based on oral stories that the author heard from her elders when she was a child.

The People Could Fly by Virginia Hamilton.

A 1985 collection of twenty-four folktales retold by Virginia Hamilton. They include tales about animals, ancient magic, and tales of enslaved Africans who could fly—fly to freedom.

Suggested Non-print Resources

Legends of the World Database: <https://www.librarything.com/series/Legends+of+the+World>

Sugar Hill Storytelling Museum: <https://www.sugarhillmuseum.org/storytelling>

National Black Storyteller's Association: <https://www.nabsinc.org/>

NPR Moth radio hour: <https://themoth.org/radio-hour>

PBS Stories from the Stage: <https://www.pbs.org/show/stories-stage/>

Role-playing games as storytelling: <https://www.kidadl.com/articles/beginners-guide-to-role-playing-games-for-kids-and-teens>



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