

# Leeny Del Seamonds

## *Master Story Performer™*

### *Grant Support Information* (with NYS Learning Standards)

**Leeny Del Seamonds, Master Story Performer™**, is an award-winning, internationally acclaimed master performer of Hispanic/Latino, original and World stories spiced with exquisite mime, a cornucopia of characters, and love of people. With a twinkle in her eye and fire in her heart, Leeny breathes life into her stories, as she masterfully and effortlessly springs from one story character to another. A dedicated Teaching Artist with a B.A. in Theatre/Performing Arts, Leeny encourages listeners to feel positive about themselves and to rejoice in human and cultural diversity, inviting them to share in her Latin/Cuban-American sense of humor and love of performing.

The **2002 National Storyteller of the Year®**, Leeny has been featured at major festivals, conferences, community events, corporate functions, museums, libraries, school systems and universities nationally and internationally and has been published in *Storytelling Magazine*, *Tale Trader*, *Museletter*, and *Ahhhh! A Tribute to Brother Blue*. Her highly acclaimed recording, “*¡Ay Caramba! ¡Ay Ay Ay! Cuentos y Canciones (Latino Stories & Songs)*,” takes listeners on a journey through Leeny’s rich Latino heritage and won a **2003 Parents’ Choice Silver Award**. Leeny’s musical CD, “*CelloTales: The Melding of Music, Myth & Memories*,” created and performed with cellist Gideon Freudmann, won a **2004 Parents’ Choice Gold Award** and a **2005 Storytelling World Winner Award**. Both CD’s received favorable endorsements from *Booklist* and *School Library Journal*.

**Leeny Del Seamonds** has been headliner at the National Storytelling Festival and Teller-in-Residence at the International Storytelling Center, both in Jonesborough, TN, as well as headliner at “Gimistory,” The Cayman Islands International Storytelling Festival, BWI; Virginia Storytelling Alliance Gathering in Richmond, VA; Tcha Tee Man Wi Storytelling Festival in Corvallis, OR; Three Apples Storytelling Festival in Harvard, MA; Prairie Center for the Arts Storytelling Festival, IL; Smoky Hill River Festival, Salina, KS; City of Jacksonville’s 2004 Celebration of Women; Kansas City Storytelling Celebration; and Nebraska Storytelling Festival. She has been featured at dozens of national festivals, including Clearwater Great Hudson River Revival in New York and Corn Island Storytelling Festival in Louisville, KY. Leeny has been a featured performer at seven First Night Boston celebrations; and in September 2004 was headliner at the Baltimore Book Festival, sponsored by Parents’ Choice Foundation.

*“Leeny’s expressive voice transmits the magic of storytelling”—Booklist Magazine*

*“Leeny, a heartfelt thank you for joining us and sharing your superb stories in Jonesborough—you are truly a wonderful ambassador for storytelling!”—Susan O’Connor, International Storytelling Center*

*“Leeny is funny, irreverent, smart, sassy—and a dynamite storyteller as well!”—Jane Yolen, Award-winning Author*

## **Performance**

Storytelling is a powerful tool to both teach and entertain. Through a repertoire of fifteen story sets, Leeny introduces students to a diverse 50-minute program comprised of folk tales, myths, legends, and storysongs designed to stimulate their imagination and creativity; enhance reading, writing, listening and interpretive skills; and immerse them in a language-rich environment. Students have an opportunity to hear the stories and can internalize the story pattern while developing a greater awareness and comprehension of literature. Through stories, students and teachers are transported to fantastic, foreign places and into multicultural situations that foster their understanding and appreciation of human and cultural diversity. In stories, we find a reflection of ourselves, as we identify with the story characters' emotions, values, challenges and triumphs. Together, we can *“Live the Story! ;Vive el Cuento!”*

Each performance usually begins with a story-poem, short story or anecdote. For example, at the beginning of **“Tales, Trials & Tribulations,”** Leeny may discuss the power of storytelling and what led her to become a storyteller or she may perform **“The North Wind & the Sun”** and discuss the power of winning a bet/competition with grace and dignity. This introduction/short story is followed by a 10-12 minute multicultural tale, such as **“Renaldo”** from Argentina (*a story about a conceited fox who forgets his promise*) or **“The Snow Child”** from Russia (*a beautiful, magical child changes the life of a lonely old couple*).

Although audience participation has been interspersed throughout the beginning of the program, the next story is one in which students and teachers perform with Leeny. Everyone acts out the story together, using gestures, mime, movement and sound effects. For grades K-3, one of Leeny's **“Rescue Tales”** is shared; and for grades 4 and up, Leeny and the audience perform a well-known folk tale using volunteers for speaking parts, while the remainder of the audience performs the sound effects. Everyone plays a part in the performance. Ensemble acting is an effective tool in developing self-esteem, cooperation, respect for others and individual ability.

If time allows, the program's final folk tale, (i.e., **“The Tiger, the Brahman, & the Jackal”** from India or **“Chen Ping”** from Ancient China--*stories with hero themes*) is introduced and performed. If time is running short, Leeny will teach one of her songs with movement (in English and Spanish) to be sung and enjoyed by all.

The material in each program is carefully selected to be age/grade level appropriate; and attention is given to special requests, seasons of the year, and holidays. All programs include audience participation, enabling listeners to share in the joy of performing and build their confidence.

All program material and information, especially from foreign cultures, customs, geography, history and language, is extensively researched, carefully written and thoroughly rehearsed. Whenever possible, Leeny interviews someone from a specific culture or foreign country and records his/her accent and speech pattern to aid in her research and preparation of a particular

multicultural tale. Leeny's goal is to accurately imitate a story character's foreign accent and gestures, while incorporating some of the foreign language into the story, thus maintaining cultural authenticity and avoiding stereo-typical caricatures of members of cultures foreign to our own.

### Story Sets

- 1• *Foibles, Folklore & Fun!* - Folk tales, poems and storysongs from around the World.
- 2• *Tales, Trials & Tribulations* - Humorous and poignant multicultural tales and tunes.
- 3• *The Star Inside* - International folk tales, humorous anecdotes and story-poems encouraging that special "STAR" inside each of us to shine through. The perfect self esteem program for Grades 4-12.
- 4• *¡Ay Caramba!* - A colorful piñata full of Latino/Hispanic folk tales, anecdotes and personal stories decorated with English-Spanish translations and bursting with Leeny's Latin humor.
- 5• *The Nature of Things* - A blooming bouquet of stories, fables, story-poems, myths and storysongs honoring our Earth and Nature, their beauty and preservation.
- 6• *For the Birds!* - Myths, legends, humorous tales and tunes featuring our feathered friends.
- 7• *The Home of the Brave* - Native American folk tales, legends and myths about Creation, Sky Country and respect for our Earth and the environment.
- 8• *Hooray for Heroes!* - Stories and songs of courage and heroic triumphs from around the World. Specially designed for PreK-Gr. 2.
- 9• *Which Way to the Witch?* - A Halloween cauldron brewing with witches, ghosts and goblins from multicultural places.
- 10• *Winter Magic Tales* - Heart-warming, magical folk tales, stories and storysongs certain to take the chill out of "Wind-Chill" and chase away the Winter doldrums.
- 11• *Far Out! A Spacial Odyssey* - "Volaris," the inter-galactic Talespinner, beams aboard with stories and songs from Atlantis, Zargon, Earth and her home planet Xcees. Perfect for Grades K-4 and families.
- 12• *I'magic'nation* - Journey to fantastic, far away places with magical folk and fairy tales—sure to spark everyone's imagination!
- 13• *Millennium Myths & Madness!* - Celebrate our new millennium with World stories and storysongs that span ten glorious centuries.
- 14• *Kudos for Courage & Kindness!\*\*\** - Soar around the World with heroic tales bursting with kindness, inspiration, bravery and courage to overcome adversity and make a difference.
- 15• *CelloTales: The Melding of Music, Myth & Memories\*\** - An unforgettable melding of stories and cello music for all ages performed with virtuoso cellist Gideon Freudmann. (\*\*Bookings for these two programs available through Young Audiences of Massachusetts - [www.yamass.org](http://www.yamass.org).)

### Artistic and Curricular Objectives of Leeny's work:

- Stimulate students' imagination through vivid word pictures and physical expression.
- Students find a reflection of themselves in stories, as they identify with the characters' emotions, values, challenges and triumphs.

- Improve oral presentation and oral interpretation skills by learning healthy phonation and vocal variety (i.e., pitch, range, quality, dynamics, tone and interpretation).
- Augment language arts curricula through integrated study of reading and storytelling, while exposing students to vocal variety, language, gesture, mime, facial expression and movement.
- Improve story-sequencing skills.
- Foster self-esteem, confidence, and provide outlet for creative energy.
- Develop an appreciation and understanding of a new art form.
- Teach mime (pantomime) to students to empower their communication and performing skills, while developing an understanding and appreciation for mimicking life and related experiences.
- For older students, foster self-esteem, self-expression and increased confidence while performing an individual (solo) role in front of an audience, and cooperation and respect for others presenting an ensemble story in front of an audience.
- Teach students to embrace the life lessons and morals found in literature.
- Expose students to perform a story using costume pieces, simple props and improvisational skills, while emphasizing solo and ensemble performance skills.

**(NYS Learning Standard • Number 1, The Arts/Theatre)**

- Introduce students to diverse multicultural program of folk tales from various cultures, while maintaining cultural authenticity and avoiding stereo-typical caricatures of members of cultures different than their own;
- Expose students to story characters with foreign accents and gestures;
- Expose students to foreign language and encourage correct pronunciation of foreign language with student call-and-response during the stories;
- Highlight connections between Spanish language and Latino culture, English language and creative expression;
- Introduce and incorporate authentic Latino instruments in stories and songs;
- Excite students about oral literature and reading;
- Encourage self-esteem and gain student confidence to speak in front of others;
- Active participation with students to enact a multicultural folk tale, while teaching the fundamentals of acting and performing in a group (ensemble) story.
- For older students, teach and execute a Latino/Hispanic story *en español* with individual and ensemble student actors;
- Students find a reflection of themselves in stories/theatre pieces, as they identify with the characters' emotions, values, challenges and triumphs.

**(NYS Learning Standard • Number 4, The Arts/Theatre)**

### **Workshops**

**A performance followed by 45-minute workshop(s) in a smaller group setting accentuates the academic relevancy of language arts and storytelling, creative dramatics, mime, movement and improvisation.**

**(NYS Learning Standards • Number 1, 3, 4. The Arts/Theatre)**

**Creative Dramatics (Gr. K-2).** The perfect participatory workshop for the primary grade level student! The goal of the workshop is to excite the young student about oral literature, as well as reading. It promotes and encourages self-esteem while the student learns the basic fundamentals of acting and performing in a group (ensemble) tale. In the first part of the workshop, students are taught a variety of warm-up and improvisational exercises for face, body and voice. Then the class performs a tale with Leeny, such as “*The Three Billy Goats Gruff*,” using four volunteers at a time for the speaking parts, while the remainder of the class performs the sound effects. This type of ensemble acting fosters self-esteem, cooperation, respect for others and individual ability. Everyone (including the teacher) has fun while learning!

**Creative Dramatics (Gr. 3-12).** This is a creative dramatics/basic acting workshop designed for the older student. The workshop’s goal is to enhance students’ appreciation for oral literature and reading, while encouraging self-esteem. It enables students to more fully embrace the lessons and morals found in literature. In the first part of the workshop, students are taught a series of warm-up and improvisational exercises for face, body and voice. Then the class performs a short folk tale using several volunteers at a time for speaking roles, while the remainder of the class performs the sound effects and scenery. Ensemble acting is an effective tool in developing self-esteem, cooperation, respect for others and individual ability. There are no “stars” in an ensemble performance—everyone has a chance to shine!

**Mime, Movement & Improvisation (Gr. 3-12).** Anyone can learn the art of mime (commonly called “pantomime”). This workshop is designed to teach the older student basic mime skills and explore using his/her hands, face and body to enhance communication and self-expression. The workshop includes warm-up and improvisational exercises, basic mime isolation techniques, facial expressions, mime wall and “tug-o-war.” Students should be prepared to move and have fun!

**Making the Most of Your Voice (Gr. 3-12).** This workshop is designed to teach students how to use their voices properly and achieve vocal variety through healthy phonation. The first part of the workshop will include a series of exercises in relaxation, posture, breathing, projection and articulation. The second half of the workshop will enable students to explore and experiment with different story character voices and learn a variety of sound effects, animal sound effects and birdcalls. A tape recorder may be used for student feedback.

**¡Ay Caramba – Dos! (Gr. K-12).** This workshop, a follow-up to Leeny’s program, “*¡Ay Caramba!*,” is designed to further expose students to the Latino/Hispanic culture, emphasizing correct pronunciation of *español*, especially the vowels, and how to “roll the *rr*’s.” Then the class acts out the tale, “*Tres Cabras Llamados Gruff*,” (Leeny’s Spanish version of “The Three Billy Goats Gruff”) using four volunteer actors at a time for the speaking parts (*español*), while the remainder of the class performs the sound effects and rhythm dance. This type of ensemble acting not only fosters self-esteem, cooperation, respect for others and individual ability, but helps to bridge the cultures. Everyone (including the teacher) enjoys “*la fiesta*.” *¡Muy bien!*

**Telling a Tale (Gr. 4-12).** It’s fun to get up and tell a tale! This basic storytelling residency is designed for the older student. It’s main objective is to teach the fundamentals of telling a story/folk tale—vocal projection, articulation and vocal variety; achieving correct posture, body

movements and gestures; and incorporating character voices to enhance the story and bring it to life! Students learn how to change from “narrator” to “story character(s).” They are encouraged to make the story their own and strive towards feeling comfortable and confident when telling the story to a small audience. This workshop is most effective when taught in a series/residency (three or more workshops per class), enabling students to develop and adapt the story while polishing performance techniques, thereby allowing time for individual coaching

**From Storybook to Storyteller: Making the Story Your Own! (Gr. 4-12)** Every storyteller has his/her own unique style of performing and writing stories. Leeny teaches the basics of “how to make the story your own” when adapting an existing traditional (*public domain*) folk tale, from paper to performance. Key components of this workshop include: adding a time and setting (*where* and *when* the story takes place); introducing the story character(s); creating distinct, well-defined characters; and adapting the language to familiar language usage, reflecting the teller’s actual style of speaking. This workshop can be a part of Leeny’s “*Telling a Tale*” residency or be a self-contained, two meetings per class mini-residency.

### **Evaluation**

An evaluation form is given to teachers who have observed the special performances and workshops. A modified evaluation form is given to students, where they indicate their interest and general understanding of the stories told; their favorite characters, voices, gestures, physical postures and why those particular characters and stories interested them; and how students feel about themselves and what they have learned about cultures.

Teachers receive an evaluation form, which will pose:

1. Was the teacher planning meeting helpful?
2. What were your overall reactions to the course and its conduct?
3. What were the students’ overall reactions to the course?
4. Was the course appropriate for the age/grade level?
5. Did the course description adequately and accurately describe what you experienced?
6. Did this course enhance your educational classroom goals? If so, how?
7. How effective was the re-evaluation in-service meeting scheduled midway through the residency?
8. Is there anything you would change or add to the course to improve it?
9. List the observable gains of the students in the core group?
10. How did the teacher skills workshop help you to incorporate storytelling into the curriculum and assist you in evaluating and accommodating to different students’ learning styles?
11. Did the final workshop give you ample opportunity to ask questions, receive answers and share in dialogue with the residency presenter and colleagues concerning residency process and outcomes?

### **Adult & Teacher In-service Workshop Descriptions**

**Making the Most of Your Voice** - This workshop is designed for teachers and performers at all levels: for anyone interested in achieving healthy phonation as well as vocal variety. In the first part of the workshop, participants will learn how to care for and preserve their speaking voices through proven relaxation, posture, breathing, articulation, and projection techniques. Although the workshop is highly participatory, Leeny will include some vocal demonstration. Leeny plans to tape record participants so they may hear first-hand (and learn to improve upon) their vocal patterns, vocal style, and regional accents, if any. We will also explore vocal variety and versatility.

**A Time for Mime & Movement** - Anyone can learn the art of mime! Come and learn, or brush up on, basic mime techniques. Explore using your bodies, hands and face to enhance communication and add some specific movements and gestures to enhance your storytelling technique. This highly participatory workshop includes warm-up and improvisational exercises, basic mime isolation techniques, facial expressions, mime wall, walk/run, climbing stairs, picking up and pulling a rope, and a group tug-o-war. Finally, we will add mime to the spoken word, weaving movement into the story. Be prepared to move and have fun!

**Spoken Word Alive!** – This highly participatory workshop is designed for teachers and performers at all levels. Bring your words alive with vocal variety, healthy phonation and body movements/mime. Explore different vocal pitches, qualities and vivid character voices. Use your body, hands and face to enhance communication and add specific movements/mime, gestures and vocal variety to the spoken word. Learn to develop distinctive, well-defined story characters and how to make clean, crisp determination and distinction between narrator and characters. Be prepared to move, challenge yourself, and have fun!

**Creative Dramatics** - This creative dramatics workshop is designed to teach basic acting techniques to anyone interested in learning how to interpret and create a character (from a story or play) by using his/her voice, body movements and facial expressions. This highly participatory workshop will begin with a series of warm-up and improvisational exercises for face, body and voice. Then, using several volunteers at a time, the class acts out a short folk tale and/or scene from a play. Everyone has an opportunity to perform and receive coaching.

**Telling a Tale** - This basic storytelling residency is designed to teach the fundamentals of telling a story/folk tale—vocal projection, articulation and vocal variety; achieving correct posture, body movements and gestures; and incorporating character voices to enhance the story and bring it to life. Participants learn how to change from "narrator" to "story character(s)." They are encouraged to make the story their own and strive towards feeling comfortable and confident when telling the story to an audience. This workshop is most effective when taught in three or more sessions.

**From Storybook to Storyteller: Making the Story Your Own!** - Every storyteller has his/her own unique style of performing and writing stories. Leeny teaches the basics of “how to make the story your own” when adapting an existing traditional (*public domain*) folk tale, from paper to performance. Key components of this workshop include: adding a time and setting (*where* and *when* the story takes place); introducing the story character(s); creating distinct, well-defined characters; and adapting the language to familiar language usage, reflecting the teller’s actual style of speaking. This workshop can be a part of Leeny’s “*Telling a Tale*” residency or be a self-contained, two meetings per class mini-residency.

## **References**

Esther Wikander, Teacher/Residency Coordinator, Abbot School, Depot St., Westford, MA 01886; 978.692.5580

Ann Shapiro, Executive Director, Connecticut Storytelling Center, 270 Mohegan Ave., Box 5295, New London, CT 06320; 860.439.2764

Linda Newcombe, Teacher/Residency Coordinator, Priest Street and Bennett Schools, 115 Priest St., Leominster, MA 01453; 978.534.7761

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