

“Teaching ‘TELLING A TALE’ to Kids” by Leeny Del Seamonds

For the past three weeks, I've been walking around here with a smile on my face because I've been doing one of my favorite things! Now before you get the **wrong** idea--let me explain. During the month of January, I've been teaching my course ***"Telling A Tale"*** to six fourth grade classes; and the students have not only been fantastic to work with, but are wonderful storytellers in their own right.

Last December, as I have done for the past four years, I met with the fourth grade teachers at the Abbot School in Westford, MA, and gave them copies of my ***"Telling A Tale"*** course outline along with the Assignment Sheet and Record Sheet for their use. We discussed the teachers' involvement, my role, and set up a timetable. Before December vacation, the teachers sent home a note to parents explaining the upcoming folklore unit and informing them that their child would be learning how to tell a story/folk tale. The teachers wrote, "As well as the obvious benefits of enriching literature and Language Arts in the classroom, students will experience the preparation, rehearsal and performance of a story in front of an audience. This provides a wonderful opportunity to help students increase poise and confidence addressing a group."

When they returned from vacation, the students received the ***"Telling A Tale"*** Assignment Sheet, which includes a breakdown of types of folklore; student homework assignments for preparing their story; and due dates for story approval, class presentation of the first two story sentences, and scheduled performance of the entire tale to the class.

During the first week of January, an assembly was held for the fourth grade class and teachers, wherein I performed two folk tales and discussed the fundamentals of telling a story: vocal projection, articulation and vocal variety; achieving correct posture, body movements and gestures; and incorporating character voices and sound effects to enhance the story. We also discussed how to adapt a folk tale and make the story "your own." There was a question-answer period, and then the students had an opportunity to try out different character voices and demonstrate various gestures and body movements.

Students spent the second week of January reading approximately five stories from folklore and selecting the one which they enjoyed reading the most and wanted to tell others. It was suggested that students pick a story that had more than one speaking character (besides "Narrator")--but no more than five or six, including Narrator. The students brought their stories to class for teacher approval, to ensure their appropriate length and subject matter, and especially ensure that the chosen story wouldn't be too difficult (or not challenging enough) for a specific student's ability. Once the teacher approved the story selections, students were asked to begin filling out their Record Sheet, which includes information about story character voices, posture, and gestures planned for telling the tale; storytelling preparation and rehearsal; and a summary of the tale's beginning, middle and end.

During the third and fourth weeks of January, I was back at school every day working with each student: coaching their first two-three story sentences, helping them with story characters (voice and body movements), encouraging them to "paint the word pictures with

gestures" (to help with the "what-do-I-do-with-my-hands?" blues), and empowering them to make the story their own. Students are reminded to "speak to Chicago," a term I coined so students learn how to better project their voices. My goal is for each student to feel comfortable and confident when telling his/her tale in front of the class.

The students presented their stories in class during the first two weeks in February. It was an exciting time for all of us. The students not only felt confident and comfortable performing their stories in front of each other, but they were proud of the job they did editing their stories by using their own words and individual styles. And I am so proud of them! Working with kids and teaching them to tell stories is truly rewarding work. This is our next generation of storytellers in the making. These tellers are animated, uninhibited, imaginative and creative. They are bound to put smiles on **all** of our faces!

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