



"In The Tradition..."

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Guidelines & Resources for Engaging Next Generations in Sustaining Traditions Through Storytelling

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About Storytelling

The stories that we tell ourselves and our children function to order our world, serving to create both a foundation upon which each of us constructs our sense of reality and a filter through which we process each event that confronts us every day. The values that we cherish and wish to preserve, the behavior that we wish to censure, the fears and dread that we can barely confess in ordinary language, the aspirations and goals that we most dearly prize – all of these things are encoded in the stories that each culture invents and preserves for the next generation, stories that, in effect, we live by and through – Louis Gates in *Talk That Talk*, Goss and Barnes.

Storytelling is the root of all media. From the cave paintings in Ancient Africa to using Apps on smart phones.

The sharing of a story can be a liberating experience for the storyteller and especially for the listeners. It can provide that quiet space for self-discovery and encourage emotional release in response to the story.

Storytelling can foster a love of language, an appreciation of literature, and is an effective way to enhance and fine-tune listening skills. The hope is always to inspire others, children in particular, to tell their own stories and deepen their appreciation of stories and literature in general. Those listening are always reachable, even when it appears otherwise.

The story of the story may be just as important as the story.

Storytelling with the next generation addresses those things that are losing our youth in the superficial short-term gratification of digital devices and social media. A relationship with a storyteller offers an alternative in human warmth and remembrance. The sound of the human voice opens the gates of perception, guides the imagination and suggests ways of coping. Imaginative strategies for complex situations require more than sound bites.

The next generation should be shown how storytelling is perpetually valid and an important part of their everyday life. Storytelling is all around them. The use of storytelling gives the next generation the ability to share their experiences through family stories, oral history, struggles, conflicts, challenges, triumphs and achievements.

Folktales demonstrate all the aspects of the dangers of forgetting our past, selling ourselves short and replacing old things with new things, often times just to find out that the old worked better.

The Process of Discovery

Incumbent upon the storyteller working with the next generation to sustain traditions through storytelling is the ability to listen, recognize assets, and release judgment.

Utilize thematic focus groups to explore next generation communities. Allow your target audience to identify topics of interests and issues of concern.

Engage in fieldwork to gather next generation cultural aesthetics of a country or region. Create comparative charts to become familiar with differences and similarities. (i.e ethnicities within region, teen and elders, or gender-based).

Collect oral histories that query the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the next generation from the next generation. Stories that might highlight differences between "then and now."

Listen to the challenges that your listeners face. Some challenges are universal. Others are unique to age, circumstance, place, times. The question is what are the challenges that the next generation face? What are the needs that have not been addressed for their full development?

The assets and needs will emerge from listening to the next generation tell stories and engaging them in storytelling processes that include using their own voice and aesthetic in the re-writing and re-telling.

Identify stories where the motif can be traced from ancient times to contemporary times. (i.e. Trickster tales of Anansi from West Africa to Spiderman in comic books and movies; from Sunguru the Rabbit in East Africa to Bre'r Rabbit in the African American Tradition to Bugs Bunny cartoons.

Identify stories and legends from history that deal with folk, family and contemporary heroes and sheroes. (i.e. Phillis Wheatley, to Paul Lawrence Dunbar to Maya Angelou to Jay Z).

Identify popular folktales of the region.

Educational and Social Benefits of Storytelling

Builds a child's sensibility to forms of rhetoric and diction

Teaches recognition of patterns in language

Stimulates powers of creativity

Strengthens capacity to form objective and practical evaluations

Helps to develop skills in interpersonal behavior

Aids in the development of presentation skills, which is a life skill

Familiarizes students with symbols and traditions which are part of his/her culture

Characterizes the cultural heritage of others with whom he/she shares the world

Provides problem solving and decision-making exercise

Enables participants to have a delightful exchange

Sample Workshop Technique

- ***It's Proverbial.*** Print out universal proverbs as well as those, identified with the country where the workshop is taking place
- Define "proverb": "Pithy and terse saying, stating a general truth or piece of advice."
- Review samples with the participants, by reciting the first lines and asking them to complete. Ask what proverbs or sayings have they heard in their family and communities? Which ones do they use?
- Discuss meaning of several proverbs. Compare historical applications to modern day. Why was it used? Is it still relevant? What groups use it now?
- Ask students to identify current challenges/issues that need to be addressed
- Ask students to identify any proverbs on the list provided that may speak to the issue
- Ask students to create proverbs using their own language and modern aesthetics to address the issues
- Students may also create visual art work to accompany the proverbs
- Create a collective Book of Proverbs

Tips and Techniques Workshops/Lectures/Residencies

Listen first - Listen with body and eyes and ears and especially – heart.

Posture and energy, gesture and facial expressions affect the relationship you are building before a single word is spoken.

Body language is culture specific– open hands, open heart is universal.

Ask - don't assume that your normal is their normal or that your way of being respectful is their way of being respectful.

In residencies, use fieldwork as a tool to teach students how to conduct observations about their communities and share their discoveries through story.

Sample Exercise

Consider having young people conduct oral histories of elders.

“Oral history works for teachers who, frankly, have grown tired of lecturing and want to engage their students more actively in learning. Instead of teachers telling students what is important, oral history projects require students to find out for themselves, by interviewing people and then by processing and analyzing the information gathered.” – *Doing Oral History*, Donald Ritchie.

For younger groups simplify to three questions. For example:

- What was your favorite childhood game?
- What stories did you hear as a child?
- What did you do on the weekends?

For older groups expand the questions:

- What were your favorite, songs, ballads or dances?
- What was a significant historical event that took place during your childhood, and where were you when it happened?
- What was a typical day like when you first started working, or started a family?
- Who stood out in your community?
- What were your favorite foods as a child?

Consider having millennials conduct interviews with millennials.

Have participants re-tell the oral histories in first person, adding techniques such as call and response, movement, and voice tones to optimize the performance.

“Meaningful storytelling processes and activities incorporate opportunities for reflective dialogue, foster collaborative endeavor, nurture the spirit of inquiry and contribute to the construction of new knowledge. In addition, cultural, contextual and emotional realities can be acknowledged, valued and integrated into storytelling processes.” – *Using Storytelling to Enhance Student Learning*, Maxine Alterio

Sample Technique

Introduce interactive tales that engage imagination and compel alternative endings. Folktales may be used from various world collections. Participants interact with the story by questioning relationships, and replacing alternative narrative to change or improve the outcome of the story.

The theft of self-esteem through institutional racism, and bigotry has a longstanding list of responsive coping and survival strategies. Explore any of the following in creating alternative endings:

- Cultivate... Nourish...Plant
- Discern... Envision.... Look again
- Trust... Faith...Believe
- Help...Compassion...Share
- Predict...Think ...Reflect
- Rebuild...Create...Carve
- Gather... Reap ... Harvest
- Store...Protect...Guard

Conduct traditional storytelling sessions. A sustainable way for storytelling to provide a bridge to the next generation is face-to-face experiences. It is a stepping back from technology in order to use the stronger tools right in our own reach, our bodies, our voice, our imagination and our senses -- rendered heart to heart.

Integration of digital storytelling is suggested in long-term residencies, *only after* significant time has been dedicated to developing oral storytelling skills.

Tips and Techniques Performances

Be authentic. Don't utilize next generation language unless you are totally comfortable and fluid.

Know cultural protocols and taboos

Be age appropriate

Optimize your performance:

- Be organic. Don't force the story, or its meaning. Let the story caress and endear to the listener.
- Know your characters intimately
- Embody your characters
- Command the Stage
- Vary tone, cadence and texture
- Choose places to replace words with sound effects
- Enhance with instruments, songs, games when appropriate
- Utilize historical, contemporary and folk references within story
- Make eye-to-eye contact
- Engage audience through call-and-response, questions, acknowledgement, etc.

In telling to audiences of children learning English:

- Keep the stories simple
- Keep your language simple (but not condescending)
- Engage and sustain the attention of the audience by using repetitive, participatory elements; i.e., word (s), phrase (s) or chant (s) that repeat throughout the story
- Use call-and-response: you say or sing a line/the audience sings and says a line back
- Utilize your vocal range to bring characters to life
- Convey varying emotions or actions through your voice, face and body posture
- If comfortable, incorporate simple movements that children can mirror throughout the story
- Explore the possibility of translating a line from English to the local language and repeating the word or phrase in the children's language
- Learn how to say "Once upon a time" or "the end" in the local language
- Consider adapting your story to align with local cultural values – without compromising the essence of the story

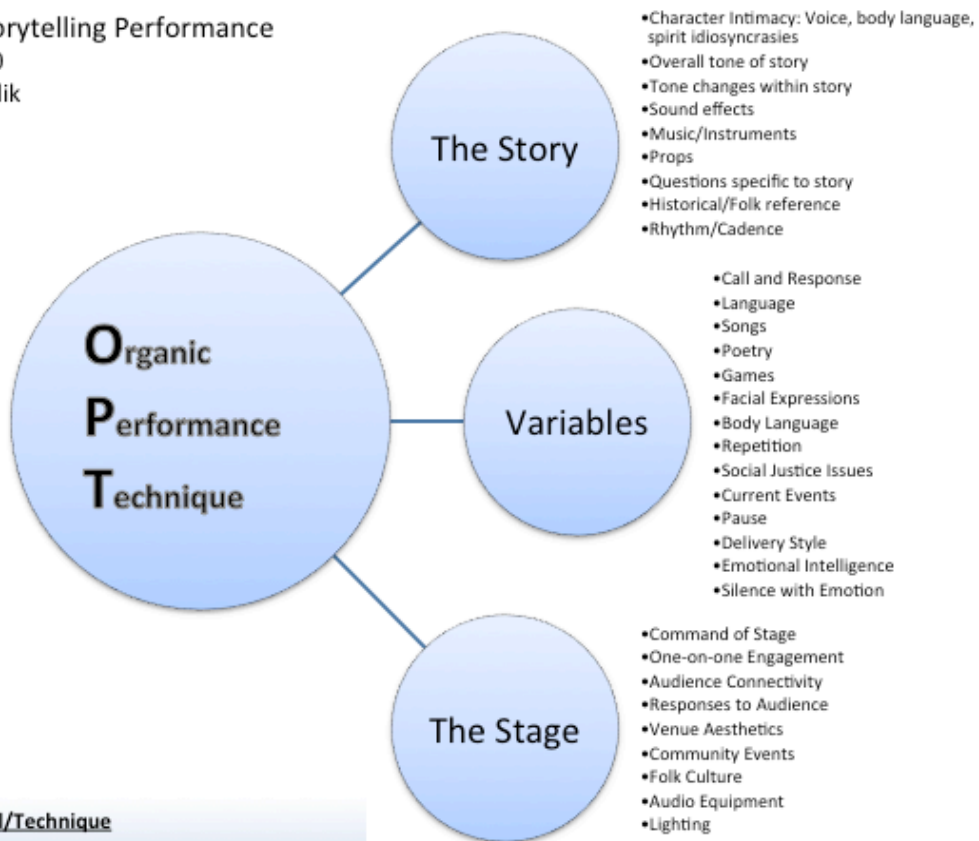
Checklist:

- Review cultural taboos
- Rehearse stories with voice tone, expression and movement
- Rehearse translations, including call and response
- Communicate with host about audience, sound, lighting
- Water
- Vocal Warm-ups
- Sound Check

OPTimizing Storytelling Performance

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	<u>Skill/Technique</u>
The Story	formulate prior to performance
Variables	formulate prior to/and engage at performance
The Stage	engage at performance

Your performance assessment = **Did you OPT?**

Ethics

When traveling, researching, telling, or teaching abroad, respect the existing culture

The best thing you can do is listen to other people's stories. Learning how, why and under what circumstances they share stories is important.

Be knowledgeable about how groups regard their stories. Become a wise wordsmith by acting and telling appropriately.

Honor people's stories. If a culture doesn't encourage outsiders to tell their stories, then don't tell their stories.

When addressing elders always be respectful. They have been through a great deal of life and though it might be different from yours, they have earned the right to be treated well.

Always give appropriate credit when telling a story.

Do not tell another's person's story without permission.

Anecdotal Stories

The kids came in seeming so hard and devoid of emotion and life, but Oba William King took them on a journey. He wooed them and finally got deep into them. I could sense their real attachment to his stories. He ended with a glorious story "The Eagles who thought they were Chickens," whose message struck deep chords within. It was an incredible almost spiritual event. I was wafted away to a clearing in Africa, under a tree, freshened by a breeze across the Serengeti plain, to relish in the ancient engagement of the story. Oba invited the youth to listen and learn utilizing a motivational technique that was magical; one young man took off in the spirit of the moment and gave a delightful and spontaneous gift of drum and song. The engagement of the youth as they listened to the playing of the drums opened something in the heart of the audience; it opened the window of possibility. The magic of the story and the language of the drums did exactly what we had all hoped – it opened a portal into the world of life dreams, ambition, giftedness, goals, a positive way to process the challenges of life, music, art, continuity of the beauty of culture, hope. -Oran and Brenda Harris, Marietta RYDC Chicago, IL

At NABS Festival in Little Rock, a workshop was designed for elder presenters to engage with youth. Somehow it was misinterpreted and a group of additional elders showed up, as did a group of teenage youth from the local community. It began with the teenagers sitting in the back, snickering about being in a room with “old folk.” I invited the youth to the center, the elders encircling them. The energy shifted to the point that the youth had a barrage of questions, and wanted to learn much more about their heritage and storytelling. – Linda Goss

Queen Nur instructed the students on how to observe their neighborhood and conduct oral history interviews with an elder family member on the topics of migration, immigration or folk culture. There were a large percentage of students who had tried so desperately to blend in to “American culture.” Actually, to the point that they denied speaking their native language. By the end of the residency those students proudly re-told the oral histories while using Spanish to engage the audience with call and response and shared stories about foods and festivals from their culture. A year later, the principal told me that the students were still sharing cultural experiences and relationships between students had greatly improved and coalesced – Karen Chigounis, Executive Director, Perkins Center for the Arts, Moorestown, NJ

While in Kuwait, the ambassador gave me a book of folktales from the people there and suggested that I read and learn them to be able to include at least one of their own tales in the program. It was well worth the effort – Ilene Evans

“Tell a Story --- Sustain a Culture”
- Karen “Queen Nur” Abdul-Malik

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