

RESOURCE
BOOKS FOR
TEACHERS
series editor
ALAN MALEY

STORYTELLING WITH CHILDREN

Andrew Wright

Second edition

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

1 How to choose, tell, and read stories aloud

Choosing and preparing stories

Types of story

There are many types of story for you to choose from. Each offers a different kind of richness.

Stories from the imagination

Myths, traditional stories, fairy stories, legends, 'tall' (unbelievable) stories, teaching stories.

Stories from life experience

Historical stories, news stories, your personal stories, the children's personal stories.

Sources of stories

Myths, traditional stories, and historical stories can all be found on the Internet just by typing in 'myths, stories, and legends'.

You can also find an extensive range of stories published by Oxford University Press, intended both for children learning English as a foreign language and for native-speaker children. See 'Further Reading' for suggestions.

There are a number of story books of great artistic value in both text and pictures published for native-speaker children (in recent years these have been called 'real books'). If you can help the children to understand enough of such books, then they are clearly a very attractive source of stories. However, all stories and books must pass the checklist below, 'Choosing a story'.

You are a source of stories! You know traditional stories from your own culture and you have had many experiences which the children will be interested in. You don't need to be an explorer to have stories—just lose your car keys or worry about your cat not eating and you have a story (see 4.15).

The children are a source of stories! Although young, they have had many experiences. Every day they experience the struggle between their desires and their difficulties in achieving their desires. Every

problem can become a story, like the piece of grit which the oyster turns into a pearl. It is important for children to be encouraged to tell stories from their own life experiences in order for them to be able to make a sense of it. (For ways of storytelling with limited language, see pages 11–13.)

Choosing a story

The story:

- is a story you like (to tell it well, you must like it or value it in some way)
- is one you feel you can tell effectively
- will engage the children (children often accept and like a story in the foreign language which they might feel was childish in their own language)
- is one the children can understand well enough to enjoy (perhaps with your help)
- offers the children a rich experience of values, perceptions, and behaviours
- offers the children a rich experience of language in a form relevant to them and acceptable to a native speaker
- helps you to fulfil your language-teaching purpose: developing listening skills for gist or detail; recycling known language; introducing language items (grammar, vocabulary, syntax, functions)
- provides a rich starting point for cross-curricular or topic work
- is a starting point for creative work and productive use of language in speaking and/or writing
- offers a deepening of the bond between you and the children
- is the right length or can be divided up into the lengths you want.

Language proficiency

The activities described here have been used with children aged five to fifteen, with between six months and three years of English. This is a very wide range of experience and potential learning development. Furthermore, in my experience the difference between one class and another, even of the same age and in the same school, can be enormous. So much depends on the extent to which English is part of the children's lives, how enthusiastic and informed their parents are about English, how naturally English is used by the teacher in the normal life of the class, and, last but not least, how free the children feel to 'have a go' in English.

Children can be helped to understand quite complex stories in language well above their own active command. It is what we expect the children to do which determines the proficiency level required, not the story itself.

Most of the activities in this book are related to the interests of children rather than conforming to the limited traditional focus on testing comprehension. Inevitably that raises the obvious question of how the children can do these activities with their limited language proficiency level. Here are a few ideas.

Guidelines for working with lower-proficiency levels

Responding non-verbally

The children can often respond through movement, drawing, or mime (see 2.36, 2.37).

Responding through repetition

A traditional technique in storytelling is 'call and response': the storyteller says a line and the listeners repeat (see page 26 for suggestions).

Responding with single words

Encourage the children to say short phrases, even single words, perhaps combined with mime, rather than insisting on full sentences with correct grammar.

Example of a retelling of 3.16, 'Elidor', by a near-beginner-level child:

Elidor. Boy. School. No school. River. Two little men. Hole. King. Prince. Play. Gold. Ball. Take. Come back! Home. Mother!

Give written support

If you are happy for the children to see the written form, then write words, phrases, or sentences on the board. The children can look at them and use them during the activity.

For example, if you want the children to give their opinion on right and wrong behaviour, you can write three to five short sentences on the board so that the children can choose one to express their feelings.

Cup half full

Can we understand what the child is trying to tell us? Let us rejoice in what the child does achieve rather than constantly feeling it necessary to reduce the activities to a humdrum level in order to avoid mistakes.

Story-based activities are not usually the time for focused language practice. Make a mental note of language problems and introduce focused language practice another time. It is like the relationship between a real football match and ball practice.

Mother tongue

It is sensible to use English as much as possible. However, there are times when it is also sensible to use the mother tongue. For example, a child is struggling to say something which matters to him or her and has clearly done his or her best. Then you might say, in the mother tongue, *What do you want to tell us?* You can then give a simple version in English for them to repeat.

You may also be willing to combine listening to and understanding the story in English with mother-tongue activities in response.

Simplify the language?

Children do not need to know all the words in a story in order to understand enough to enjoy it. Their understanding will be partly based on the words in the story but, of course, their understanding will also be supported by what you do: the pictures you show, the mime you use, the preparation you make.

Nevertheless, some key words in the story may not be known to the children. You must help them to learn these words before the story or during the story (see 2.8).

Language which is not central to the story meaning can be left in, even if children do not already know it. Experiencing some unknown language is an essential part of developing effective listening fluency. Stories are an excellent way to learn new language in context.

It may be that you will still want to simplify some of the language. Here are some examples of things you might want to simplify:

Less common vocabulary

through the gate instead of *over the stile*

Idioms

quickly instead of *in a flash*

Tenses

ate instead of *had been eating*

Word order

The little cat jumped into the bag instead of *Into the sack jumped the little cat.*

Long sentences

The kind woodcutter said, 'Yes' instead of *The woodcutter, who had a kind heart, agreed.*

What you simplify should only be language which is important for understanding the story and which cannot be made understandable through the context, the use of pictures, mime, or translation. Try not to lose the authenticity of the English words and phrases used in the original.

Content and values

Stories are engaging and memorable and can enter into long-term memory, indeed into the fabric of who we are, more easily than objective information. For children, stories have great potential for good—and for bad. As well as likely interest, you will also consider stories according to the values the story manifests and whether you agree with them or not.

For example, traditional stories tend to divide the world into ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’. This is acceptable if we see the story as symbolic of the ‘goody’ element and ‘baddy’ element in us all. However, it is not only children who are likely to feel that people in real life can be divided in such a way. (Major world leaders often seem to think along the same lines.)

An apparent emptiness of values in a story with a strong sprinkling of cuteness is a value in itself. Is this a positive value? A child brought up on such stories is not enabled to deal with life experiences, only to dodge them with fluttering eyelashes, freckled nose, dimpled cheeks, large eyes, and so on.

If we don’t wish to modify the representation of values in the story then perhaps we should consider follow-up work which will help children to reflect on the values and behaviours in the story, as an ‘after the story’ activity (see 2.54, 2.55, 2.56, 2.57).

For more on the importance of values and the use of stories in personal development see pages 144–50.

Content and lifestyle

I have chosen a variety of stories ranging from real-life stories from contemporary times to traditional stories from around the world. Although the contexts within the stories are very different I believe that the dilemmas, feelings, and struggles in the stories are potentially relevant to all children. A princess may be rich beyond the experience of any normal child but a princess can still long for companionship like anybody else.

You must judge whether the context of the story is so different from the context of your children as to make the story meaningless to them, or even unacceptable in relation to the cultural and spiritual norms in your society.

Changing the content of the story

The traditional way of telling stories is to adapt them to your values, your listeners, and the situation. If you do make changes to the story, you are fitting in with an ancient tradition. At the same time, traditional stories have been honed and refined over generations in both content and form. I am reluctant to change anything unless I have good reason. In fact I have made the protagonists of both 3.8, 'Ma Liang' and 3.11, 'The little white cat', female, because I think it is important to offer girls and boys the idea that girls can be brave and can set off into the world just as much as boys.

Traditional stories are often changed so that nothing nasty happens; for example, the little pigs don't get eaten. This is like refusing to give a child an injection because it might hurt. A key point about stories is that they are not real life. The child experiences the stories as metaphor and has the opportunity to experience problems, and the relationship between cause and effect, at one remove from any personal danger.

If a child is faced with challenging experiences, he or she is much more likely to relate to a 'proper' version of a story than one which has been cleaned up of any real issues.

Telling or reading aloud?

We need both salt and pepper in our cooking. Why should we want to say that one is better than the other? Telling and reading aloud both have their strong points.

Reading aloud

Good points

- 1 You don't have to learn the story.
- 2 You don't have to worry about making mistakes in English.
- 3 The children will always hear exactly the same text and this will help them to predict what is to come.
- 4 It demonstrates that books are a source of interesting ideas and so encourages reading.
- 5 The children can, perhaps, borrow the book afterwards.
- 6 Pictures in the book can help the children's understanding.
- 7 If the book is by a great writer and illustrator then the children are in contact with work which is rich at many levels.

Not so good points

- 1 You must be careful not to read too quickly, because written texts are usually very precise, economical, and unrepentive, and that makes listening to them rather difficult.
- 2 It is easy to 'bury yourself' in a book and forget the listeners!

See the tips on reading from a book below.

Telling

Good points

- 1 The children feel that you are giving them something very personal. The story is yours; it is not coming out of a book.
- 2 Children these days rarely experience someone telling a story and it can have a powerful effect on them.
- 3 It is often easier to understand a story being told than one which is read aloud: it is natural to repeat oneself when speaking.
- 4 You can see the children's faces and bodies and respond to their lack of comprehension, their joy, and their immediate concerns more readily.
- 5 You can make use of your body more effectively to heighten meaning.
- 6 You can use language you know the children know.
- 7 Telling allows for spontaneous shortening, lengthening, digressing, adapting.
- 8 The children feel more inclined to respond, comment, ask questions, and add personal opinions. The children can become contributors and have fun bending the story in a new direction.
- 9 Your role is richer, as provider, teller, sharer, adapter, listener, incorporator.

Not so good points

- 1 You have to learn the story well enough to tell it without the book (see the tips below).
- 2 You might make some mistakes in your English.

Your English and the telling of stories

One of the best ways of improving your English is to learn stories in order to internalize a ten-minute flow of English. Traditional teaching did not develop fluency. Oral fluency needs time, opportunity, and encouragement to develop, and that applies to you as well as to the children. If you learn a story, you have a real purpose—to communicate it to the children. And how lucky you are, because children are an appreciative and kindly audience.

So, if your English is not very fluent and accurate, that is an excellent reason for telling stories to children!

Extra tips on reading from a book

- Read the story beforehand and get to know it and how to read it with some sense of drama. Also, make sure you can pronounce all the words and know what they mean.
- Don't speak into the book. Raise your head and project your voice so that children at the back will hear you.
- Read slowly and with a more dramatic quality than in normal speech.
- Stop quite often to comment, or to invite comments.
- Look up and try to make eye contact. Check that the whole group is with you.
- Stop to show the pictures, and make sure all the children can see them.
- Have your finger ready to open the next page.
- Don't read for longer than about ten minutes (less time for younger children).

Remembering a story

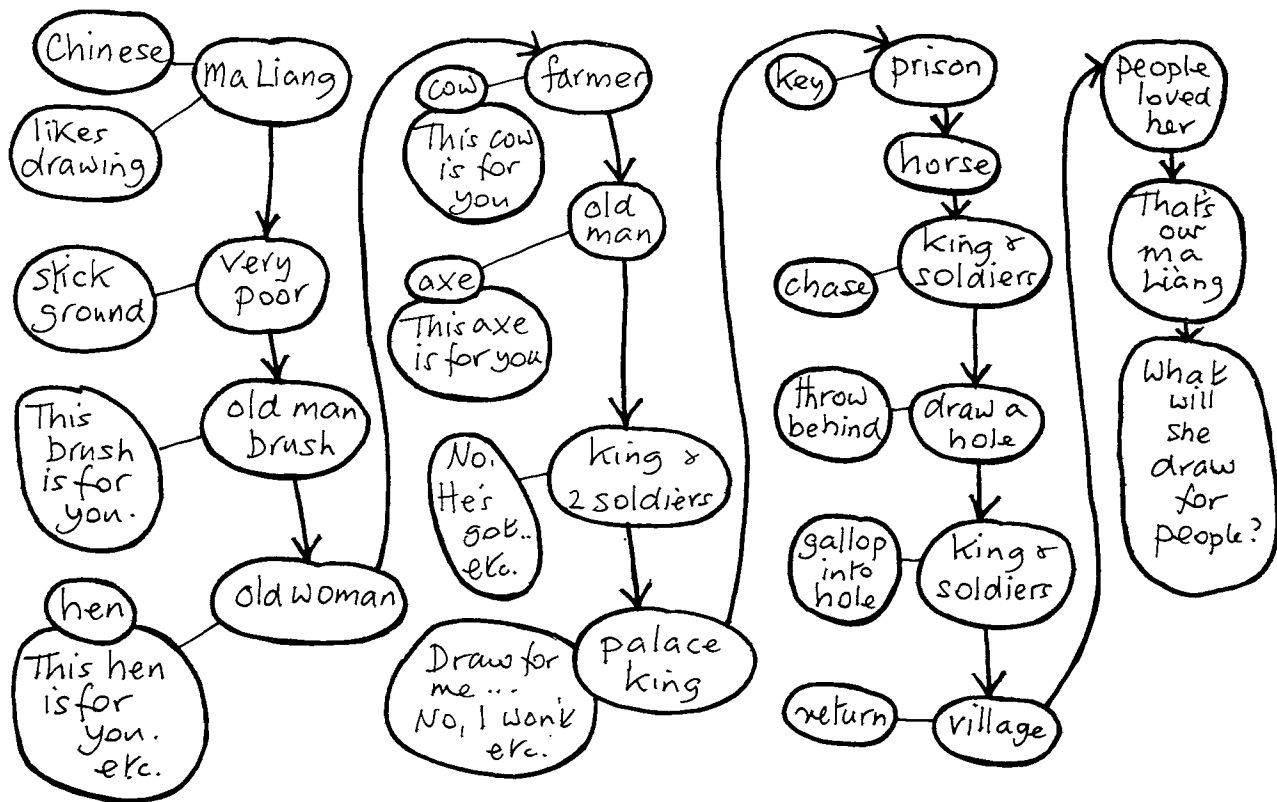
There are various ways of remembering stories in order to be able to tell them without a book, and you must find the way most appropriate to you.

It is difficult to remember a written story word for word, like an actor—and, in any case, it seems rather artificial when it is done like this. Why try to do it? Concentrate on learning the gist of the story rather than every detail of it.

Techniques for different remembering styles

Here are some ideas:

- Read the story or listen to it a few times and then try to retell it on tape or to a friend.
- Remember a dramatic or verbal rhythm in the story. (I think I am right in saying that the great West Indian storyteller Grace Hallworth learns her stories in this way.)
- Write out the key points.
- See the story as a film in your imagination and let your telling of the story be guided by that inner vision.
- Remember the personalities of the characters and this will remind you of the story. (Duncan Williamson, one of whose many stories is 3.11, 'The little white cat', told me this is what he does.)
- Select the key points and write them down, perhaps in bubbles, as in the example here for 3.8, 'Ma Liang'.



This is the technique that I use. Note how I have added extra details to the bubbles but if I forget them I know that I can still tell the story. It is important to make each bubbled story look different because it will then be easier to remember visually. It is the actual making of the bubbled story which helps to get it into my memory. Later the bubbled story acts as a useful and rapid mnemonic.

Whatever technique you use, it is probably best to find friends who will listen to you first. Warn them that you will just concentrate on getting the gist of the story right. Once you are confident that you can remember the basic story, you can express what you feel about the story in future tellings. The more often you tell the story, the more you will feel 'at home' with it. Do not expect to tell it brilliantly the first time. The more stories you learn, the easier it is to learn new ones.

Just before you tell or read the story

Creating story readiness

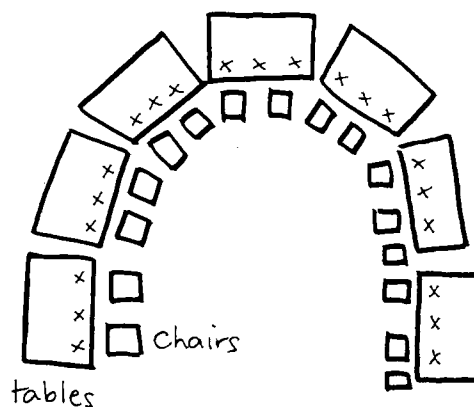
I am referring here to the craft of storytelling and story-reading rather than to the pedagogical preparation, which is discussed in a later chapter (see pages 31–7). Half the success of a story depends on what you do before you begin! The children must be in the right

'frame of mind' for a story. If they think it is all part of the normal lesson they will be in their 'normal' frame of mind and not in their 'story' frame of mind, and you will probably not have much success. So they must be in a story frame of mind!

Getting them nearer to you

Try to get the children much nearer to you than normal. This is partly because it is important for them to see you (and your book if you are using one), but also because it changes the relationship between you, and between them and each other. They know they are going to share something. Younger children can sit on the floor around your feet.

If possible change the seating from the normal class arrangement before the story is told. I always try to do this before the children come into the classroom. My preferred arrangement is a U-shape of chairs with a U-shape of tables immediately behind. Some children sit on the chairs and some children sit on the edges of the tables. For a group of up to 30, a semicircle of chairs is enough, but for 50 or 60 children, you need the row of tables behind to add an extra row. Arrangements where the children sit on parallel benches are not easy for the storyteller.



Story bags, story coats, story boxes

If you cannot change the arrangement of tables and chairs, then try to find some other way of helping the children to feel that something special is going to happen (rather than merely saying so). Children are used to hearing you talk; they just assume it is going to be what they have had before. Some teachers always sit on their table or stand in a particular part of the room when they are going to tell a story and never do this at any other time.

Some teachers have a 'story bag' (which might be just an ordinary shopping bag), which they only have to hold up for the children to get into their 'story frame of mind'. Other teachers make use of a friendly puppet. Others might always wear a particular hat or coat. Some tellers spread a cloth on the floor or table and place objects on the cloth. I place the bag or box down, reverently, touch it with

my fingers, and open it slowly and with anticipation for the magic carpet inside which is going to take us all away from the reality of the classroom into the reality of the story. This beginning, repeated every time, creates that magical story readiness which means the children already like the story before you have even begun.



Prepare their minds with music

You can put some music on—always use the same music—then the children will know and get themselves ready.

Write on the board

Once, in a noisy class, I wrote on the board *I'd like to tell you a story*. Then I sat down on a chair in an open space in front of the children and waited. I didn't have to ask them to be quiet. You might write *A story for you* or just *Story time*. Or you might write a sentence which intrigues the children; for example, before telling the 'Ma Liang' story (3.8) you might write *She said 'No' to the king* or *Draw me a tree, full of golden money*.

Story time

Perhaps have a regular time for your storytelling or story-reading, and the time will put them into the right frame of mind.

An object from the story

For particular stories you might display a picture before you begin, or an object like an old umbrella. An antique doll can tell the story of her times. A suitable puppet can tell the Cinderella story. Ask the children what it might be for. Encourage every suggestion so that the children's minds open and they give their whole selves.

Focusing and warming with imagination

A celebrated storyteller in England, Mary Medlicott, suggests several ways of engaging children's attention and kindling their creative responses: imagination games, action rhymes, and chants.

One suggestion is tapping and chanting for the launching of a story:

Start by tapping your knees gently in a rhythmical way. Tap until you're sure you have the attention of all the children. Then say these words in time with the tapping:

'It's storytime. It's storytime!'

Ssh! Listen!

What's going on?'

After a pause, repeat the chant, looking around at the children. When they say, 'Ssh!', put your finger to your lips. When you say, 'Listen!', cup your hand around your ear.

Extra interest can be added by introducing one or two sound-making instruments: a tambourine, a drum, a bell, a rainstick. Set the instruments out in front of you before you start, or have them ready in a bag beside you. After getting everyone going with the chant, pick up one of the instruments ('Listen!') and demonstrate its sound.

For Mary Medlicott's excellent books, which are a delight to look at and to use, see 'Further Reading'.

Insist on silence before you begin

Don't begin until you have everyone's attention and total silence—unless you are confident that the sheer power of your telling is going to quieten them down. Achieve silence by quiet insistence, not by a sharp-voiced command which shuts minds like clams.

Different ways of beginning

You might find some of these ideas useful—but be careful! Some of them are incompatible with one another!

Chat about the topic of the story

Talk with the children about their experience of what you know will be a central topic of the story. For example, 'Hairy Tree Man', a story in my 'Spellbinders' series from Oxford University Press, is about brother and sister relationships. One way of beginning the story would be to ask the children about their relationships with brothers and sisters.

Give an introduction

Begin with an explicit introduction to the story: for example, 'I'm going to tell you a story about a little white cat.' Then you can tell them story 3.11, 'The little white cat'.

For more on how to start a story, see 'Activities before the story' in Chapter 2.

Begin without warning

Begin without any preparation at all, directly with the first line of the story, or with *Once upon a time* ... While this robs listeners of the possibility of getting possible meanings ready, it is very dramatic. If you come through the door into the classroom saying, *Once upon a time* ..., they will never forget it!

Have a good beginning and ending

Make sure you are confident of how to begin and finish the story. Many storytellers say that you should learn the first and the last lines by heart. Personally, I do this with some stories, but with others I like to slide the listeners into the story before they know they are in it.

Helping understanding

Central to telling stories is that the listener can understand what you are saying! Telling stories to children in a new foreign language is not as easy as telling stories to children in their mother tongue, of course.

Ways of helping understanding are given throughout this book. Apart from trying to tell the story largely with the language the children know, you have other options to guide the children towards understanding, which include your voice and body language, objects, and pictures. Examples for 3.8, 'Ma Liang':

- Show a map of China.
- Show pictures of Chinese country life.
- When you say *Ma Liang was a girl*, indicate girls in the classroom.
- When you say she loves drawing, put your hand on your heart and then pretend to sketch.
- When you say she draws with a stick on the ground, act this out.
- Later in the story, walk over to a child and pretend to give that child the hen Ma Liang has drawn.

Using objects, body communication, voice, etc. are all discussed separately below but must all be brought together when you tell the story.

Your manner

You must tell stories in your own way, and that way must be a normal part of you. Grace Hallworth, the West Indian storyteller, is quiet and dignified as a person and as a storyteller she is just the same. Duncan Williamson, the Scottish storyteller, was full of fun in normal conversation and was just the same in his storytelling. Brian Tomlinson, who has made storytelling a key component in

his work as a teacher, believes it is useful to give a very dramatic telling or reading of the story in order to really make an impression. Exaggerate slightly what you are and see everything about yourself positively. If you are a quiet sort of person, then choose the stories you like and tell them quietly!

Whatever kind of personality you have, you must give yourself totally to your story and to your listeners if you want to get back a strong quality of listening and appreciation from them. Many people who are not confident as storytellers don't want to risk failure, so they don't really give themselves and then they get a feeble response because of it.

Your voice

The potential variety of the human voice includes: pitch, volume, rhythm, softness/harshness, pace, and pause. Making use of this variety depends on the story, the personality of the teller, and the listeners. Of course, you do not need to use all of these qualities all the time. On the other hand, many people do not make sufficient use of this potential richness, and produce a monotone.

Here are some basic things that we can all do:

Breathe

- Sit or stand so that you can breathe easily—don't be 'all hunched up'.
- Keep breathing while talking so you don't become breathless.

Speak loudly but don't speak harshly

Speak loudly enough for the children at the back to hear easily, but not by using a harsh 'teacher's voice' designed to cut through school corridors and across school playgrounds.

Use different voices

Adopt a different voice for the narrator and for each of the characters. Make these voices very different: high/low, soft/harsh. The narrative voice will usually be more neutral than the voices of the protagonists.

Pace and pause

The pause is one of the most powerful of all qualities in storytelling. The listeners have to become active in order to fill it—they try to predict what you will say next. It is one of the most vital elements in dramatic storytelling. Use it at key moments.

Note: in the silence of not speaking you can mime, make a non-verbal sound effect, or move objects. This switching of realities is deeply engaging.

Personalize the story

Pause and question: make the story yours and theirs. You might say to a child, if it is true, *You've been to China, haven't you, Hans?*

Speak slowly and savour the words

Speak slowly and enjoy the sound of the words you say; even simple words can be spoken as if they are important.

Help understanding with stress

Remember that in English we tend to stress the important words in a sentence. This helps to convey meaning.

Rhythm and rhyme almost certainly help people to learn and remember. Stories in verse are loved and are effective.

Infuse a dramatic feeling

Infuse a dramatic feeling in your voice. Try this simple experiment—try saying a very ordinary sentence so that it sounds like the start of an amazing story. For example, *I got up this morning and opened the curtain.*

A second experiment—try saying the sentence in several moods: happily, unhappily, wickedly, innocently, in a thoughtful way, in a casual way, in a frightened way. For example, you can show:

- happiness by higher pitch, faster pace, and rising intonation
- sadness by lower and less variety of pitch, and falling intonation pattern
- anger by harshness of voice, louder and less variety of pitch.

Your body and face

It is probably true that we communicate through our bodily and facial movements as much as, or even more than, we do by the words we use. We can move quickly or slowly, jerkily or smoothly, with grand gestures, or with minor movements of our eyebrows. We can remain seated or we can move and act out not only the players within our story but even inanimate objects! The way we make use of this potential depends on our nature and on the nature of the story and the listeners.

Just as, in general, less experienced storytellers employ a monotonous voice, so they also fail to use the full potential of their body for communication. Indeed, they may use their body and face to communicate their primary concern, their own anxiety, rather than the quality of the story! Here are some tips.

Act as you tell

If you are telling a story rather than reading aloud from a book, you can easily move like the little boy in 3.6, 'The lion', creeping into the

dark cave. You can hold out your hands and pretend to be putting them down on the ground very, very slowly, and you can roll your eyes from side to side as if searching the darkness.

Body action before words

Very often I begin to make the action with my body a split second before I refer to the action with words. So, for example, I might hold up my hand to my ear and move my eyes to and fro just a moment before I say, *He listened*.

Emphasize your movements

Make your movements simple, slow, and never apologetic! Body movements in storytelling should be just a little slower and bigger than in normal conversation. Your storytelling must be clear and simple, not fleeting and confusing like normal life. But we must all find our own way of telling.

Your eyes

Look at the children as you tell the story. Don't just scan their faces, but really look. It doesn't do any harm to look at one particular child for several moments as you tell the story. Other children will feel that you are concentrating on them and not just on the story.

Although eye contact is important, the opposite is also powerful! Making no eye contact at all, but staring as if you are seeing the events unfolding before your eyes, can be extraordinarily gripping.

Objects

Essentially there are two ways of using objects: you can show the children objects which are literally in the story, for example, a Chinese paintbrush for Ma Liang. Or you can use objects symbolically; for example, you represent Ma Liang with a coloured wooden block and use another coloured block for the old man who gives her the brush.

Realistic use of objects

Real objects link the story directly with real life: they are tangible and make the story tangible. There is an exciting double reality: the reality of the object and the reality of the story.

Symbolic use of objects

Symbolic objects invite the children to use their imagination, and in doing so they feel that they are contributing to the story's existence

in their own mind—which indeed they are doing. The symbolic objects also support the children if they retell the story afterwards.

In Japan, a storyteller gave me a pair of chopsticks and a simple piece of white cloth and told me that he had been apprenticed as a storyteller for many years in a school of storytelling which used the chopsticks and the cloth to illustrate every part of every story he told. In this age of virtual reality such a symbolic reality has enormous impact. The children are astonished and delighted to be introduced to a part of themselves they may never have met before: their imagination!

- The cloth can be the sea, a house, or a mountain (on top of a hand).
- The chopsticks can walk, can fly, or be a monster's mouth.

Costumes and masks

You can bring masks and costumes from home or borrow them from the school drama department. Or you may like the children to make masks and costumes. This can be done as an activity after the story, in order to act it out. Or you may like to do it as a pre-telling activity in order to create interest in what the story is going to be about, and then use the masks and costumes during the first telling. Masks can be made out of paper bags and paper plates.

Making masks is a rich activity in itself and is described in some detail in the sister book to this one, *Art and Crafts with Children* (see 'Further Reading').

Pictures

If you have taken the story from a book, there may be illustrations which will help to communicate the meaning of the story and make it come alive in the children's minds.

You may also need pictures to show what the setting might be like: the jungle, the desert, the rice paddy, the great city. Sources of pictures include the Internet and magazines. You can build up a picture library.

Several of the stories in Chapter 3 are 'drawing stories' in which you draw as you tell the story. The great thing for language teachers is that the drawing does not have to be 'professional'. It is quick to do, it helps to give meaning, and it grips the children's attention. But you must practise doing the drawings and telling at the same time. You can prepare the drawings on card beforehand, but this will not be nearly as effective as drawing as you tell the story.

Puppets

Puppets can introduce a story and also tell a story. This is particularly useful for younger children. Instead of puppets I sometimes use soft toys, even soft toys belonging to the children.

Opportunities for participation

Making meanings

The first kind of participation is when the children make meanings out of what you say and do.

Call and response

A traditional way of telling stories is for the teller to call out a sentence and for the listeners to repeat it back, copying the words and the pitch and rhythm used by the teller. For the foreign language teacher this is very useful indeed!

The sentences should be short and rhythmical; otherwise there are no restrictions. One way of emphasizing the rhythm is by clapping or drumming.

Alternatively, you call a word, phrase, or sentence and the listeners respond with an answer or an elaboration. For example, for 3.12, 'Strange animal':

Teller: *Auntie!*

Listeners: *Moan, moan, moan. Groan, groan, groan.*

Teller: *Sipo!*

Listeners: *OK, Auntie! OK!*

Involve the children as protagonists

Involve the children. For example, as you lift the axe off the paper in 3.8, 'Ma Liang', walk across to a child and pretend to give it to him or her.

Adding information to the story

You might invite the children to call out what Ma Liang should draw next and then incorporate the idea into your telling of the story. It is possible to tell a story in 'skeleton' form and invite the children to add all the details. In this way it becomes a joint story.

Children telling and reading aloud

Children telling

You might like to develop the children's own storytelling skills along the lines given above, although it would be very time-consuming and difficult to do with a large class. However, being able to tell a story, even if it is not done dramatically, is very worthwhile in terms of confidence and the development of fluency.

If you want the children to retell or to write a story, give them the support of pictures, a mind map, and a flowchart containing key words and phrases.

Children reading aloud

I don't know how fruitful it is for children to read aloud. I suggest that you ask each child to read only one or two sentences, not only accurately in terms of pronunciation but expressively in terms of the craft of telling and reading described in the notes above.

Choral reading

Choral reading is unfashionable but offers many benefits. For example, all the children speak and shy children do not feel exposed. Here are some suggestions for organizing choral reading:

- Discuss the meaning of each line of the text and the feeling which the children need to express.
- Record and play back their texts to the children. Above all, contrast their improved renderings with earlier ones.
- Look for a variety of voice combinations: all the children; half the children followed by the other half; a narrator or group of narrators, with other groups of children taking the part of one of the protagonists; your voice.
- Use background music or even pre-recorded natural noises.
- Clap or tap to keep a rhythm going.
- Help the children to speak with the full range of their voices. Ask the children to read: slowly, quickly, quietly, sadly, happily, angrily, wearily.

Chanting, miming, and sound effects

For the use of drama see 4.8 and for the use of chants and poems see 4.18.

For more on children telling stories, see the accompanying book to this one, *Creating Stories with Children*.

Interruptions

One child might chatter to a neighbour. The school caretaker might knock at the door. Someone might drop a book. What do you do?

Children not paying attention

- If it is several children, it may be that you are not being dramatic enough. Liven things up. Move around as you tell the story.
- Involve the children, for example by asking them what they would do in the situation in the story.

- If one child is chattering, then go and stand very near to him or her as you tell the story or even tell the story directly to him or her.

School caretaker knocking at the door

Don't try to compete! Quietly ask someone to see who it is and deal with it in the normal way.

Dropping a book

- Pause, show no expression of annoyance, perhaps pick up the book yourself, and then carry on.
- Make a joke out of it, perhaps related to the story.

Don't come out of role!

The important thing is not to break the magic spell. You have lifted the children out of the classroom and into the story. Avoid returning, however momentarily, to your normal teaching voice and manner. That would jolt them off the magic carpet and out of their 'story frame of mind'.

Don't use the cancellation of a storytelling as a punishment.

A checklist for the craft of your storytelling

Question	Yes	No
1 Were the children engaged?	☐	☐
2 Did they all hear me?	☐	☐
3 Did they understand enough to enjoy it?	☐	☐
4 Did I forget any key bits?	☐	☐
5 Did I put all my energy into it?	☐	☐
6 Did I use enough variety of voice?	☐	☐
7 Did I use my body enough?	☐	☐
8 Did I look up and involve them enough?	☐	☐
Comments		

A story corner

A story corner is a great asset. If you can get all the class into the corner, so much the better. Young ones are happy to sit on the floor, but once children are over about 11 they prefer to sit on chairs. You must be on a low chair, not significantly higher than the children.

Mark off the corner with low bookshelves and have a carpet and cushions on the floor. Pictures, flowers, coloured cloths, and puppets will all help to make the corner a magical story world.

The advantage of taking your stories from books is that the children can read them later in the story corner.

Each class should have at least two child librarians who check that the books are all properly signed in and out and that the story corner is tidy and attractive.

There can be a large chart on the wall in the corner on which the children identify the book and the date they borrow and return it. Alternatively, you can use a card index system.

The information needed is:

- Name of child
- Class
- Title of book
- Author of book
- Date borrowed
- Date returned
- Librarian's signature

Evaluation cards

Children give their name and date of reading the book, and classify it according to how interesting it is and how easy it is to read.

- Very interesting/interesting/not very interesting
- Very easy/easy/not very easy
- Comments

Children can vote for their favourite books and put up a 'Top ten' list on a wall poster to encourage reading. (This was suggested by María Pilar Estaún, who teaches in Molins de Rei, Spain.)

Making a story pack

If you are going to prepare activities and materials to accompany a story then it seems sensible to keep everything you have done as a 'story pack'. If it is clearly arranged you can lend it to other teachers and in return they can lend you their story packs.

Here is a checklist for what you might include, based on the sections in this book:

- 1 The text of the story as you want to read or tell it.
- 2 Key words which the children may not know, highlighted in two colours: first colour for words you intend teaching before you tell the story; second colour for words you intend teaching as you tell the story.
- 3 A summary of how you will teach the unknown key words and any materials you have prepared, for example pictures.
- 4 Ideas and materials for what you might do before reading or telling the story, for example helping children to predict what the story might be about.
- 5 Ideas and materials for what the children might need or do while you read or tell the story.
- 6 Ideas and materials for what the children might do after you have read or told the story. This will include ideas for cross-curricular work.