

## ***Contando cuentos/Storytelling***

### ***What Is Storytelling?***

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of folk art. From the beginning of time, stories have been a part of everyday communication. Through stories, people have passed down the morals and customs of their culture; mothers have shared with their children tales of delight, love, and unusual circumstances as a way of offering affection and lessons of life. Through stories, our history and our culture, as well as our beliefs and our fears, have been transmitted to the young and old alike.

### ***Benefits of Storytelling***

The oral traditions are the basis of the written ones, of the reading and writing behaviors adults so want to foster in children. Before the written word, comes the oral one. Storytelling asks listeners to draw from experiences and create images in their minds as they visualize and understand characters, scenes, parts in a story, and descriptions. It's the same request made of readers but without the task of decoding words on a page. Chants that beg the audience to join in with the teller make the experience more interactive and meaningful to children.

In the library and classroom, storytelling can bring children to treasures from oral tales and written works. But it can also stimulate other kinds of benefits, such as:

- Developing literature appreciation
- Enhancing the love of reading
- Teaching, reinforcing, or improving reading, writing, and listening skills
- Influencing attitudes, feelings, and behaviors
- Stimulating critical and creative thinking
- Enhancing the classroom curriculum
- Entertaining different age groups and populations
- Introducing a science, social studies, or math unit
- Inspiring an art project, a dramatic presentation, or other creative activities

Through a story, the teller can bring characters and incidences alive or present a culture or an environment in ways that encourage children to continue that learning. Story listening and storytelling have no age limitations. Individuals of any age enjoy a story, from the toddler to the teenager to the elderly. If a story is well told, listeners will enter the world created through words and images.

### ***Professional and Novice Storytellers***

Professional storytellers have dedicated their lives to finding and learning the stories that speak to them and that they believe should not be lost. A good teller, who performs stories that are appropriate and engage the audience, is knowledgeable about the objectives of the library program or school curriculum as well as children's developmental stages. Storytellers who represent a specific culture do so with a knowledge and love of the language as well as with knowledge of the history of the people of that culture. Fine professional storytellers will research the stories and the related

cultural/social elements to present them in respectful ways, thus honoring the culture from which they spring.

But, teachers and librarians can become storytellers in their own classrooms and libraries. The main characteristic a novice teller must have is a love for the story and a desire to share that story with others. The novice may not feel comfortable getting up and telling a story from memory/recollection in front of a large audience, but may feel at ease with a smaller group, using props such as a felt board. The resources and books listed below will help develop those storytelling skills. Periodically check the Tejas Storytelling Association (<http://www.tejasstorytelling.com>) for workshops, meetings, and festivals in your area.

### ***Preparing the Program***

If you decide to contract a professional teller, make your choice wisely. The Tejas Storytelling Association Web site provides information about regional guilds and storytelling events around the state (<http://www.tejasstorytelling.com/menu.html>). Ask others for suggestions of storytellers who can both entertain and educate an audience of children. When contracting with a professional storyteller, clarify the age group, size of audience, object of the program, location of the program, number of performances, and travel and lodging accommodations. (The suggestions given for contracting with an author often apply to storytellers. See the “author visit” section in this tool kit.)

Bilingual tellers offer the advantage of knowing the language and being versed in the culture. However, you may need to contact them early as they are often booked months in advance.

Some storytellers have tapes and CDs for sale. If you want to make these available to your audience check on the process before the day of the program.

When preparing your own on-site program, do not allow your lack of Spanish language skills to deter you. You may want to tell stories from books that combine Spanish and English and employ code switching. The best of these employ short, easy, and familiar words in the target language. Even if you do not pronounce all the words with the “right” Spanish accent, children will appreciate your effort to learn from their culture and will love to help you with the “right” way to say a particular word or phrase. Dual language books may also provide the basis for storytelling, with one person telling the story in Spanish and one in English.

Most important, however, is to select books that are entertaining, appropriate for the audience, and show a respect for the culture. Study the food, traditions, songs, and other ways in which the culture expresses itself. That way, you will appreciate the culture and the children will appreciate you.

### ***Suggested resources***

Bauer, Caroline Feller. *New Handbook for Storytellers: With Stories, Poems, Magic, and Much More*.

Davis, Donald. *Telling Your Own Stories*.

Dubrovin, Vivian. *Storytelling for the Fun of It: A Handbook for Children*.

MacDonald, Margaret Read. *The Storytellers' Sourcebook: A Subject, Title, and Motif Index to Folklore Collections for Children, 1983-1999*.

McDonald, Margaret Read. *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book: Finding, Learning, Performing and Using Folktales Including Twelve Tellable Tales*.

Mooney, Bill and David Holt. *The Storytellers' Guide: Storytellers Share Advice for the Classroom, Podium, Pulpit, and Center Stage.*

Sierra, Judy. *Storyteller's Research Guide.*

### ***Suggested Web sites***

Brown, David K. *Folklore, Myth and Legend.* <http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/storfolk.html>

*Library of Congress American Folklife Center.* <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>

Shepard, Aaron. *Tell a Story! A Guide to Storytelling.*

<http://www.aaronsherp.com/storytelling/Tips.html>

*Story Arts* developed by Heather Forest and funded by Bell Atlantic Foundation. Contains lesson plans and activities, articles, and tips. <http://www.storyarts.org>

*Storyteller.net.* Listen to interviews and stories. <http://storyteller.net/>

Tejas Storytelling Association. <http://www.tejasstorytelling.com>

Texas State Historical Association. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online>

University of Pittsburg. *Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts.*

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html>