

Tips for Storytelling

When you tell stories you don't need to learn your story off by heart, the way you do with poems, prose, monologues, dialogues or scenes. You only learn important and relevant phrases. The rest of the words should be your own, but it is important that the story should be suitable for the situation and the audience you are telling your story to.



You can make use of two different approaches when telling your story. In the **performance approach** you assume the role of the characters, including that of the narrator, while the **literary approach** is more objective and you simply tell the story as the narrator without becoming any of the characters. Fables or parables often lend themselves better to the literary approach, while folk and fairy tales are often better told through the performance approach. Choose which approach best suits you and the story you have chosen.



Try to get hold of the following audio CD to listen to master storyteller Gcina Mhlope for inspiration:



Songs and Stories of Africa (University of KwaZulu-Natal Press; ISBN: 9781869141141)

Follow the steps below to prepare for your storytelling performance:

1. **Read through your story** a number of times to make sure you remember the order of the events, as well as important information relating to the different characters.
2. **Learn important words and phrases** which are crucial for the desired effect of your story, off by heart.
3. **Concentrate on the images and symbols** in your story. How will you make use of your voice, movement, gestures and facial expressions in order to paint a vivid picture in the imaginations of your audience? Rehearse this until you are satisfied with the end result.
4. **Make sure that the climax** of your story stands out and is easily recognisable.
5. **Take care to build suspense into your storytelling.** Work on this until you are satisfied with the results.
6. As you tell your story, you should **visualise everything happening clearly**, as the audience will be able to see this through your eyes and facial expressions, which in turn will affect the overall mood and impact of your story.
7. **Decide if you are going to make use of any props**, and if so, rehearse with these, so that you will become used to them. Props can be a wonderful way of 'becoming' different characters while telling your story, but their use should be natural and appropriate.

The way you use your body and your voice to tell a story will play a big role in how successful your performance will be. Pay attention to the following guidelines:

- **Make eye contact with the audience.** This is important to send a message of confidence and genuine interest in sharing your story with them. It will also help you to pick up if they become restless and bored. If you notice this, you have to think on

your feet and change your approach. This is why you do not memorise the words of your story. It gives you creative freedom to interact in a spontaneous and suitable manner with your audience. When people feel that you are talking directly to them, they will tend to stay interested and pay attention to your story.

- **Pay attention to your posture.** You do not want to come across as either stiff and formal, or as sloppy. Be aware that your posture communicates an important message to your audience, and make sure that you adjust it to the message you want to send them.
- **Remember that your facial expression** should mirror the message of the words you are speaking.
- **Consider your gestures carefully.** The gestures you use should not only communicate the emotional content of your story, but should also appear natural. Take care that your gestures do not detract from the story, but rather that they enhance it. Rehearse these carefully so that they will appear totally natural.
- **Plan your movements carefully.** Appropriate movements that accompany your story will keep your audience alert and interested. Just be careful not to pace restlessly up and down; rather find a motivation for every movement. When portraying different characters in conversation, it is useful to turn slightly to the right when playing one character before turning slightly to the left to indicate the other character. Also remember that the way you move can tell the audience a lot about the mood and feelings of the characters or the story in general.
- **Use the space well.** The way you use the space is very important, and you will have to adjust the way you use it to the size and the placement of your audience. If your audience is small, and sits in a semi-circle around you which does not allow for movement, you may want to sit and tell your story. Be flexible and creative. Remember you have to adapt the way you tell your story to your audience and special circumstances. This way you will ensure close interaction and communication with your audience which will produce a feeling of intimacy.
- **Use appropriate singing, dancing and sounds effects,** if needed, in your story. Ask yourself if your story calls for some singing and dancing or sound effects. If so, how will you integrate these into your story?
- **Make effective use of your voice,** by remembering everything you have learned about the good and effective use of your voice.
- Last, but not least, allow yourself to **enjoy the whole experience.**

These two pages are taken from the **Grade 8 Drama Workbook** published by Macrat Publishing. Permission is granted for the photocopying of these two pages only. All rights reserved.

