

Storytelling

A unit in ten lessons, grades K-12

Stage 1 – Desired Results

<p>ESTABLISHED GOALS</p> <p>Content Standard: - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate and addressing intended audience needs and knowledge level.</p> <p>Cultural Standards: -Acquire and pass on the traditions of their community through oral and written history. -Acquire insights from other cultures without diminishing the integrity of their own.</p>	<i>Transfer</i>	
	<p><i>Students will be able to independently use their learning to...</i></p> <p>Perform a traditional or original story to express humor, a community tradition, or a lesson of cultural significance.</p>	
	<i>Meaning</i>	
	<p>UNDERSTANDINGS <i>Students will understand that...</i></p> <p>Stories explore universal themes of human existence and can reveal truths.</p> <p>Oral traditions exist across regions and cultures.</p> <p>Storytelling is a way to preserve the cultural history of a community.</p>	<p>ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS</p> <p>How can stories from our heritage or other places and times bring meaning to our current lives?</p> <p>What universal traits characterize effective storytelling across cultures?</p>
<i>Acquisition</i>		
<p><i>Students will know...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the different genres of stories; personal, traditional, legends, myths, and fables. - that one way that Elders serve as tradition bearers is by sharing stories. - the skills necessary to dramatically share a story orally. 	<p><i>Students will be skilled at...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Telling an oral story using story elements and storytelling techniques - Expressing how storytelling communicates culture. - Performing without a script while being seen, heard, and understood. - Sustaining a story for at least three minutes. - Listening attentively and respectfully to other storytellers, especially Elders. 	

Stage 2 – Evidence and Assessment

Evaluative Criteria	Assessment Evidence
<p>The storytelling performance will be evaluated on the attributes of voice, audience contact, positive command, and duration (see rubric).</p>	<p>PERFORMANCE TASK(S):</p> <p>Students will orally share their stories with their peers so that they can help pass on the oral tradition. They should present the tale with the skills of a storyteller: using clear speech and varying the use of volume, rate, and inflection to build suspense and portray different characters.</p>
	<p>OTHER EVIDENCE:</p> <p>-Story types chart with text evidence -Journals with reflections on culture bearing through storytelling, the process of becoming a storyteller, and the role of the listener in storytelling.</p>

Stage 3 – Learning Plan

Summary of Key Learning Events and Instruction

Preparation: Two-three weeks prior to the launch of the unit.

- Contact Elders about sharing stories in the classroom (see Cultural Notes).
- Collect story anthologies (see Suggested Resources).
- Recall a scar story to share on Day 1. Plan on how to tell this story well enough that it's a solid model for the class, but also leave enough room for improvement so that the class can practice giving feedback and applying new skills (see bold text in example story Day 1).
- Find a speaker of your community's local language. They do not have to be fluent, but they should feel confident with basic conversation skills, including greetings and introductions. Ask if students know how to introduce themselves in the community language. Whereas a non-native might say, "Hello, my name is ... and I am from (name of the community)." Native forms of introduction often open with familial connections, "Hello, my (maternal) grandmother is... from ... my mother is..." Use the form of introduction most common in your community.

Day 1: Sharing a personal story

- *Introduce:* The goal of the unit - is to be able to prepare and share a story orally.
- *Explain:* Storytelling is an act we all do for various purposes all the time. There are many types of stories. Today we focus on the personal story.
- *Share:* I am thinking about a scar I have right here (point to a part of my body). I am thinking about how to tell this story in a way that respects the other people involved. If there is still a lot of emotional pain with this scar, then maybe I won't share it and tell you about another scar. Some scars leave little or no trace, like a broken arm. But if we could take an x-ray we could still see that it has healed. We start with a scar story because it helps us connect to each other. We respect other people's pain. We learn to feel empathy. What is empathy?
- *Perform:* (if you download this lesson, delete this example and type in your own. Aim for a 1-3 minute story) [When I was five years old I met my mother's brother for the first time. He showed up at our house and he was the tallest man I'd ever met. **He was wearing his navy uniform and he had a long jagged scar running from just under his eye to nearly his chin. I fell in love with him instantly. If he sat down, I crawled in his lap. If he went outside to stretch his legs, I held his hand. If he disappeared for a minute, I asked "Where's uncle?" (this boldface section would be inserted in the second telling of the scar story. It is an example of additional details that could be added to improve the story).** One day my father, uncle, and I went to the store. We did our shopping and my uncle bought me a little toy which he handed me as I crawled into the backseat. I played with it for a moment and then looked up, "Where's uncle?" I asked. My dad said that he had gone back into the store to buy something else. Without thinking I opened the car door and raced for the store. It took all my strength to open the store door. I looked straight and to the right. No uncle. Then I looked to the left. There was my uncle going down along a long counter. **I should not have started running. I should have noticed that the counter I was trying to cut under was not taller than I was. I should have noticed that the corner of the counter came to a right angle, like a little sharp point. I did not notice those things because I was blindly running after my uncle (this second retelling addition is an example of the foreshadowing, or for elementary-aged kids - trouble coming.)** I was running so fast that when my eyebrow caught the corner of the counter, my feet went from under me and I landed with a thud on my back. I lay there for a moment. Then I opened my eyes and blood covered my vision and I started to cry. I remember my uncle picking me up, I remember a white handkerchief, the car, and the entrance to the hospital. Then crying again when they put me on the stretcher. But I stopped because my uncle was holding my hand as they put the four stitches in, right here. Above my eye.]
- *Analyze:* Have students deconstruct the story briefly by retelling it, as a group or with partners. Introduce terms as the story unfolds: story opening, setting, character, rising action, resolution and point out how these provide structure for any story from beginning to end. Record these terms on board or chart pack paper.
- *Pause:* Give students 3-5 silent minutes to think of a scar story to share with a partner. Students can jot down ideas or notes in their journals, if helpful.
- *Discuss:* The behaviors of respectfully listening to a story. How did you listen to my scar story? How does respectful listening feel? How do you know?
- *Share:* Partners swap stories.

- *Regroup*: When all are done, have students share the strongest element of their partner's story with the group and why. Use the chart as a reference so students can practice using new vocabulary in context. "My partner did a really great job of rising action. I really wanted to know what would happen next."
- *Review*: The elements that make a well-told story. Share that you are going to retell your story later with additional details and stronger rising action.
- *Journal*: "My favorite part of my teacher's story was ____ because...I enjoy listening to oral stories because...The scar story I told today was the story of when I...I could improve my scar story by..."

Day 2: Storytelling by Elder (this can be done anytime during the school year, but the earlier the better!)

- *Prepare*: Your space and the students for a visit by an Elder (respectful listening, a comfortable chair, a hot beverage, a student greeter—or any established procedures that you've used in the past to make them feel welcome and valued in a school context).
- *Model*: Respectful listening behavior throughout the stories. The Elder should share at least 2 stories.
- *Ask*: How did the Elder choose these stories to share today? What significance do the stories have for the Elder's life or identity? Which story is their favorite to tell, and why? Does the Elder want to take any questions?
- *Invite*: Elder to participate in the next activity.
- *Divide*: The class into groups of 3-4 students and assign them one of the Elder's stories to retell collaboratively as a group, to each other. Scaffold this task by displaying any anchor charts you have with transition words, or perhaps the story elements chart from yesterday (which will also be used at the end of the lesson).
- *Discuss*: Have groups identify the story elements (opening, setting, character, rising action, resolution) in the story of the Elder that they retold. Focus on identifying story structure and audience engagement more than critiquing their skills—it's okay if the Elder didn't demonstrate something that you are expecting students to do later on.
- *Journal*: "My favorite story was ____ because...When (name of local Elder) told stories today I felt...because...This story tells about my culture by..."
- *Post lesson*: Make a recording of the Elder story for each group.

Day 3: Second Telling of Scar Story

- *Hook*: Open with a theater game that emphasizes speaking with volume, expression, and changing pace (this should feel difficult, but also fun and lighthearted).
 - Teach the line: "The tip of the tongue. The roof of the mouth. The lips and the teeth."
 - Sugt'stun tongue twister: *Ka-turt-ku-tar-tu-kut Katurtkutartukut* (We all are going to meet.)
 - Draw attention to how each line can be felt on that body part.
 - Repeat the line but change the emphasis: Loudly, softly, angrily, happy, fast, slow, shy, brave, laughing, crying. Ask kids for other ways to say it (robot, baby, etc)
- *Explain*: The story elements you've been working on: adding details, and rising action.
- *Tell*: Students that you will also be improving your story in another way: storytelling techniques have to do with not just what you say, but how you say it (pauses and tone of voice)
- *Connect*: To the storytelling techniques the Elder used. "Remember when..."
- *Retell*: Your own story, with improvements to both the story elements and techniques.
- *Ask*: Students to identify what changed, and their ideas about why they demonstrate improvement: "Do the changes improve the story? How?"
- *Ask*: Now it's your turn. "How are you going to improve the story you told on the first day?"
- *Assign*: Students should have different partners than Day 1.
- *Tell*: The listener is going to give two pieces of constructive feedback when the story is over: technique and story elements.
- *Discuss*: "How did you feel telling your story a second time? What made it different or better?" Ask follow-up questions that highlight the value of practice, knowing your story, learning new techniques, and learning to become a storyteller.
- *Journal*: "When I was telling my story, I felt...I used these body parts to tell my story...The second time I told my story I thought...because...I'm proud that I..."

Day 4: More Storytelling Technique and Introduction to Genres

- *Prep:* Have enough storybooks so that every student, or pair of students, can have a book, or make this reading activity into a station-based rotation.
- *Review:* Story types from the first three days: personal story (scar); The Elder may have shared legend, history, myth, and folk. Introduce two new genres: folk tales and fairy tales. *Told around the world. *People are largely the same and tell the same kinds of stories, even though the settings and characters are different. *Understanding other cultures through the use of stories helps us understand and appreciate our own culture too.
- *Mini-lesson:* [Watch](#) the first 1:04 of Ed Stivender telling “A Pottle of Brains.”
- *Ask:* “How does this storyteller use his voice and body to create characters? What techniques is he using to tell the story?”
- *Highlight:* This storyteller also has a voice and posture for the narrator (connection with Celebrations unit)
- *Teach:* The V technique. One character always faces slightly to left, the other character always faces slightly to right, and the narrator faces forward (at least at the beginning of the story). Have you seen this on TikTok?
- *Warm-up:* “The tip of the tongue. The roof of the mouth. The lips and the teeth.” This time each sentence is said in one of the three directions and with a unique voice. Add the emotions and paces from the previous day.
- *Challenge:* Finding the story we want to tell is hard work. Professional storytellers may read 50-100 stories to find one that he or she wants to tell.
- *Announce:* Today and the next day are for reading as many stories as possible and making notes of the types of stories we might like to tell.
- *Process:* Read stories. If you like a story, write down the book, title, and page number in your journal. Go to the next story. No decision about which story until the end of Day 5.
- *Differentiation:* Younger students may need an older student partner, who they will continue to work with throughout the unit. These partnerships can follow several paths when they get to performance: 1) older student reads the story while the younger partner acts it out with [puppets](#) or with cut-outs on a [flannel board](#) and voices one of the roles (i.e. Henny Penny, or the troll in Three Billy Goats Gruff); 2) older and younger students tell the story together (usually older providing the narration, younger the character voices; 3) older student tells the story while the younger student(s) pantomimes it.
- *Modeling/Sponge Activity:* Play a video of a storyteller from Suggested Resources.
- *Discuss:* What genre was this story? What makes this a well-told story? What made this storytelling memorable and enjoyable?

Day 5: Review of Elder Story and Learning about Genres.

- *Skill:* Learning to introduce oneself to a group.
 - There are times that we are in groups of people who may not know us.
 - We learn how to introduce ourselves in the safety of people who do know us.
 - One by one, students should come to the front of the class and say (without giggling or mumbling) the form of personal introduction most common in your community. Other students respond with nods or polite applause.
- *Practice:* Groups from Day 2 will meet to retell the same Elder story.
- *Offer:* The recording of the Elder telling the story if needed for reference. Clarify that the goal is not to change the story too much, but you’re also not telling the story in exactly the same way—the goal is to retell the story in a way that maintains the same structure, details, and theme.
- *Ask:* How can you improve your telling of this story? Why do you think it will make the story better? How can you make sure that everyone in your group is able to participate?
- *Circulate:* Give constructive feedback while groups work on their second retelling together.
- *Transition:* Extra time/second day to read books from different genres, if needed.
- *Restate:* Length by age or grade must enjoy the story to do the work of learning it. What do you feel drawn to? Why? This doesn’t have to be the same type of story you typically enjoy as a reader...for this task, you need to enjoy it as a storyteller! What might this story show about the culture it comes from? What lesson does the story work to teach?
- *Circulate:* As students read provide help as needed, especially if they are overwhelmed and can’t narrow down their choices. Offer books you’ve previously read and discussed as a class, if helpful.

- *Story selection process:* Option 1) Make a note about each student, story title, book, and the page number that they seem drawn to; Option 2) have students rank on a piece of paper their 2-4 favorite stories. Then after school, work on matching students with stories.
- *Follow-up:* Approve a story appropriate for each student, and make two photocopies: one for the student, and one for your master file (this saves time if the student misplaces theirs).
- *Modeling/Sponge Activity:* play a video of a storyteller from Suggested Resources.
- *Discuss:* What genre was this story? What was good about the story? What was good about the storytelling?

Day 6: Planning for Storytelling

- *Skill:* Introduce oneself to a group.
- *Inform:* storytelling is not just memorizing a story. It is narrating the story as it plays out in the storyteller's head. You need to be able to envision what is happening in great detail, then think about how to convey that to your audience. You might need to go beyond what the author wrote. Annotating the photocopy of the story is a great way to visualize the story and choose how to tell it. [Download](#) this storytelling resource and print pages 6-7 to share with the class.
- *Brainstorm:* A list of strong storytelling elements and techniques.
- *Assign:* Students to their Elder story groups. In groups of 2-3, they will read through each person's story, making suggestions on how it could be told. Teller welcomes all suggestions and is free to tell the story how they want. They should make notes, just like in the Three Billy Goats Gruff example.
- *Journal:* "This will be a fun story to tell out loud because...I'm excited to try...My group helped me by...I think people will enjoy the story because...Telling this out loud will be different than reading it because..."
- *Modeling/Sponge Activity:* play a video of a storyteller from Suggested Resources.
- *Discuss:* What genre was this story? What was good about the story? What was good about the storytelling?

Day 7-9: Practice

- *Skill:* Introduce oneself to a group.
- These three days of practice have four components.
 - Group practice of Elder story
 - Individual practice of story
 - Individual sharing with the Elder group. Group has an important role:
 - Attentive, supportive audience—model respectful listening
 - One member holds a photocopy to help provide support or cues as needed
 - Peers offer suggestions for improvement
 - Watching/listening to clips of storytellers from Suggested Resources.
- *Journal:* "I got some new ideas on how to tell my story from...Their idea is for me to...I like this idea because...I decided to ___ because I think it will...I know I'm improving because I..."
- *Modeling/Sponge Activity:* play a video of a storyteller from Suggested Resources.
- *Discuss:* What genre was this story? What was good about the story? What was good about the storytelling?

Day 10: Story Sharing

- *Share:* Elder story groups are paired and shared with each other until all groups have shared with each other.
- *Present:* At the last group sharing, individuals will pair up with someone from a different Elder story group and share their individual stories. Each person will share their individual story with 3-4 peers.
- *Notice:* This is an in-school sharing, not a performance for the community, which is a worthy extension but requires additional practice. After this in-school sharing, the students will be more skilled and realistic about how much more work is required to perform for the community.
- *Journal:* "I think that it is important to share stories because... I'm proud that I...I'm more confident as a storyteller now because...I've improved the most in my ability to...Something I learned from the Elder that I used in my own storytelling was...Something I'd like to work on is..."

Cultural Notes

*General guidelines for school and community success
and space to make notes specific to your community*

Asking for help from Elders

- Ask a trusted colleague about the accepted community norms for requesting help from an Elder. These may include the following considerations: making a personal visit, using a liaison, establishing first contact via phone or email, or having a conversation about a visit while at the store, post office, or other community space.
- The request has two parts: 1) share about the role of stories in the community and to tradition; 2) share some stories they think the students should hear.
- Also, ask for permission to make an audio recording of the storytelling. Explain that the students will use the recording as a resource to help them learn the story.

Suggested Resources

Video resources of storytellers on YouTube:

- Yupik performer Chuna McIntyre blends storytelling, song, and dance in [Brother Sun and Sister Moon](#) Time 4 minutes.
- Johnny Moses is a Salish storyteller. A great example of bilingual storytelling: [Octopus and Crow](#). Time 9:37.
- Another wonderful bilingual story from Johnny Moses: [Stupid, Lazy Girl](#) Time 9:43.
- Joseph Bruchac is an Abenaki storyteller. His telling of [Skeleton Man](#) Time 10:12.
- Thirza Defoe is an Oneida/Ojibwe storyteller who performs in the persona Grandma Quay: Here is a [story](#) from an hour-long performance of song, dance, and story. Time 10 minutes.
- Gregg Howard is a Cherokee storyteller. He tells a trickster tale about [Rabbit](#). Time 4:04.
- Gayle Ross is a Cherokee storyteller. She tells [Rabbit and Possum](#). Time 7:50.
- Diane Ferlatte is an African American storyteller. She tells [Brer Rabbit's Dance](#). Time 14:33.
- Jackie Torrance was an African American storyteller. She tells [The Golden Arm](#). Time 4:35.
- David Novak uses string figures as an aide to tell [Jack and the Beanstalk](#). Time 6:45. Instructions on how to tell this tale can be bought from [Amazon](#).
- Jackson Gillman is a very physical storyteller. In this video, he performs Rudyard Kipling's "[How the Whale Got his Throat](#)." Time 6:11.
- Thomas Burnett tells in the Appalachian storytelling tradition. He tells [Jack Goes Hunting](#). Time 8:20.

Culturally specific story collections

- Chugach Legends: Stories and Photographs of the Chugach Region, compiled by John F.C. Johnson, Chugach Alaska Corp, 1984. Of special interest are the following which vary in length: Pukituq who turned into all kinds of animals (pages 52-53), The blind boy and the loon (page 54), The fire dwarfs (page 56), The man who married a bear (page 61-62), The man and the sea lion (pages 67-69), The brown snipe... (page 80), How the raven brought the daylight (page 85-86), How raven tricked the bears (pages 89-91), The bear that escaped (pages 91-92).
- A Dena'ina Legacy: K'TL'EGH'I SUKDU, The Collected Writings of Peter Kalifornsky, Alaska Native Language Center, 1991. The text of all the stories is provided in Dena'ina and English. Of special interest are the following which vary in length: Belief in Things a Person Can See and in Things a Person Cannot See (pages 40-45), When the Animals Divided into Pairs (pages 78-81), Raven Story (82-87), Raven, Camprobber, and Dipper #1 (pages 98-103), Raven and Camprobber (pages 108-109), Beaver and Porcupine on the Other Side (pages 112-113), Lynx and Wolverine (pages 122-125), The boy and the Killer Whale (pages 126-129), The Man and the Loon (pages 144-149), Golden-Crowned Sparrow (pages 150-151), The Mouse Story (pages 154-157), there are three stories about lazy boys that can be told together (A Lesson pages 182-183, Another Stupid Boy pages 188-189, The Stupid Boy Who Succeeded pages 190-191).

Story anthologies for children

- Stories in My Pocket: Tales Kids Can Tell, by Martha Hamilton, Fulcrum Publishing, 1996.
- Noodlehead Stories by Martha Hamilton, August House, 2006.

- How & Why Stories (World Storytelling from August House) by Martha Hamilton, 2005.
- Through the Grapevine: World Tales Kids Can Read & Tell, August House, 2006.
- Eleven Nature Tales: A Multicultural Journey (World Storytelling) by Pleasant DeSpain, August House, 2005.

Extensions

Suggestions and space to make notes.

Cross-cultural stories

- In the Suggested Resources are two stories about trickster rabbits, one from a Native American tradition, and one from an African-American tradition. Research the connection.

Making a picture book from an Elder story

- Former Yukon-Kuskokwim teacher Judy Madros posted her master's thesis online. Starting on page 38 are [lesson plans](#) on how to have middle school (or high school) students prepare the Elder story as an Easy Reader for younger students in the school.

Storytelling Festival

- Consult with an expert in your school on how to put on performances for the community in the school.
- Practice. Lots.