

#WorldBookDay – 5 steps to becoming an effective storyteller

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Gareth Davies is a writer, teacher, teacher trainer, and storyteller. He has been in the ELT industry for 21 years teaching in Portugal, the UK, Spain and the Czech Republic. Since 2005 he has worked closely with Oxford University Press, delivering teacher training and developing materials. Today, to celebrate World Book Day, he joins us to discuss why being an effective storyteller matters in the EFL classroom, and how you can employ tactics to become a better storyteller yourself.

Extensive reading, the idea of reading for pleasure and not just as a school subject is believed to have wide ranging benefits. Professor Richard Day claims that Extensive Reading not only improves students reading skills but it also improves their vocabulary skills, their grammar skills, their listening and speaking skills. But how do we get our students interested in reading for pleasure. It's the teacher's job to motivate and facilitate reading. What we do in class can influence the students. That's where storytelling comes in. Storytelling can be students first exposure to literature, and effective storytelling can capture the students' imagination

and help them fall in love with stories. This blog looks at how you can become an effective storyteller in the English language classroom.

1. The better you know a story the more you can improvise and the more you can involve the students. Read it to yourself two or three times and then practise telling it in front of a mirror. It is much better if you can tell the story rather than reading it, but don't feel you have to completely memorise it; I often have the book in my hand as a crutch and look at it when I need to.
2. The work you do before you tell the story can be as important as the story itself. For example, I was telling Rumpelstiltskin from Classic Tales recently. In this story there is a spinning wheel. This might not be a concept your students have come across. So using the pictures from the book, actions, and explanations is crucial to your students understanding. You can also use the pictures in the book to elicit different emotions. In the same book the girl is worried, then upset, then happy. Ask the students why she feels that way.
3. Your voice is your most valuable tool. Change the tone or pitch to reflect happy and sad moments, whisper and shout if you need to. Also, try to have different voices for different characters. If you can't do this then, change your position when you change characters. For example, when the main hero is speaking, I will stand in the middle of the room but when it's the villain's turn, I will move to the left or right.
4. If your students are involved in the story, they will feel like they own it. We can involve the students in many ways. For example;
 - ask students to do actions throughout the story. For example, if it is raining in the story, they can pat their legs to show the rain. If someone is crying in the story, the students can rub their eyes. If someone is brushing their hair, etc. This total physical response story telling will help students to understand and remember the words in the story.
 - are there lines in the story that are often repeated? If so, get your students to say the lines each time they come up.
 - are there animals in the story? If so, ask your students to do the

animal noises.

- ask questions. Ask how the students would feel in the character's shoes, ask what the weather is like, ask them to describe the animals, ask them what happens next.
5. Enjoy yourself! If you don't look like you are having a good time, then your students won't enjoy it. Put energy and wonder into your voice. Look surprised how the story progresses, look happy when the main character is happy and worried when the main character is in trouble. Remember it might be the twelfth time you've read the story, but it is the first time for your students.

The last piece of advice I'll offer is to be patient with yourself. No one is a faultless storyteller the first time they try. Practise makes perfect, so don't worry, have a go. Each time you do it you will see new ways to include the students or change your voice or bring humour to the story. And remember, you don't have to tell the story exactly how it is in the book. In fact, this can be useful, the students can then read the text later and try to spot the differences. Happy storytelling.