

Techniques for Successful Storytelling

Contextual cues allow students to decipher unfamiliar words and phrases with greater ease and with more accuracy. Teachers may employ a number of techniques in order to enable students to utilize such cues more effectively, thereby making stories more comprehensible to them. These include:

- 1) Become very **familiar with the story** so that you are able to physically leave the script, to emphasize important pieces of the story, and to add clarification with gestures, noises, or visual aids:
 - Read the story repeatedly and **practice** telling it—to a mirror, a pet, a friend, a tape recorder, a camcorder, or an imaginary audience.
 - **Outline** or organize the story in logical chunks so that you can ad lib if you lose your place. *Do not memorize it* word for word as this usually leads to unnatural telling and makes it difficult to continue if you lose your place.
- 2) **Prepare accessories** such as costumes, realia, background music, and visual aids in advance and *practice with them* so that they do not become a distraction instead of a useful addition to the story.
 - 3) Have **students sit close to you** in comfortable “listening positions.”
 - 4) Use a lot of **vocal expression**—whisper, shout, use distinct voices for different characters, stress important words, or include sound effects.
 - 5) Include as much **body language** as possible—gesture, point to pictures, stand up, move, sit down, jump, skip, creep, tip toe, snap your fingers, clap—anything that will help convey meaning.
 - 6) Exaggerate **facial expressions**.
 - 7) Vary the **rate of telling and pace yourself**—try not to increase the rate of the telling due to nervousness. Slow down for particularly tricky or important words, sentences, or paragraphs. Use the rate and tone of your voice to heighten or diminish students’ anticipation of the events in the story.
 - 8) **Repeat, rephrase, and paraphrase** particularly difficult parts of the story (watch students’ faces to know when to do so)—but avoid English at all costs!

9) **Encourage student participation:**

- teach repetitive sections in advance so that students can say them with you
- stop during the story to comment on or ask questions about pictures or the text
- use visual aids, pictures, flannel boards, or puppets during the telling and allow students to manipulate them
- encourage students to make and check predictions about the story throughout the telling (you may wish to use listening worksheets for this)
- allow students to ask questions—even in the middle of the telling!
- stop the story and use the chalkboard—to help students visualize a cognate, to clarify a point by drawing a picture or diagram, or to dissect a word or phrase

10) **Prepare students** in advance

- make stories a regular part of your curriculum
- pre-teach listening and comprehension skills
- pre-teach coping and compensation strategies—what to do when they don't understand or when they "get stuck"—including a pre-arranged "I'm lost" signal
- pre-teach crucial grammar and vocabulary
- preview difficult sections of the story
- activate background knowledge, set schemata and expectations, and encourage prediction through pre-reading activities