



SHARING STORIES: THE POWER OF THE SPOKEN WORD

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Celebrate National Family Stories Month in November with a focus on family literacy! Family stories help children identify their place in the world, in their cultures, and in their families. Children's librarians can maximize the positive effects of storytelling by providing engaging library programming that models best practices for caregivers and promotes the benefits of sharing stories. The upcoming holidays are a great opportunity to encourage families to practice oral storytelling at home.

Along with creating a special connection between teller and listeners, storytelling offers a literacy-rich experience that prepares young children for future reading success. When a child's attention is captured by an oral story rich with details, she can visualize what's happening, follow the rise and fall of the storyline and the sequence of events, and infer emotion from the storyteller's intonation, facial expression, and body language—skills needed for reading comprehension (Mokhtar et al., 2011). Caregivers can learn the best way to present an oral story—whether a family story or a favorite traditional tale—by listening with their children to skillfully delivered oral stories during library storytimes. Librarians can emphasize effective storytelling techniques, such as using repetitive phrases and asking questions to invite active participation. Using repetitive phrases encourages children to listen attentively by leading them to anticipate their next chance to join in on a fun refrain, such as shouting “Boom!” at key points in the story. This attention to sounds and phrases develops phonemic awareness—the ability to identify and differentiate sounds.



Asking simple questions (e.g., “*What sounds do you think the puppy made when he was hungry?*”) can involve even the youngest listener in the story. More complex questions, such as “*What do you think the wolf said to the three little pigs?*”, invite children to use their predicting and critical thinking skills as they become participants in the storytelling.

Stories don’t have to be new to be engaging—children often clamor to hear the same stories again and again. Librarians can encourage caretakers to repeat traditional family stories, as well as beloved fairy tales or folktales. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, these retellings can be powerful tools for modeling narrative development, increasing language, and developing comprehension skills in pre-readers. The first telling allows

children to pick up details of the story, the second telling lets them connect and clarify those details, and the third telling builds a deeper understanding and reinforces memory for their own retelling (Isbell, 2002). Each retelling offers yet another opportunity for children to delve deeper into the story and learn something new.

After telling a story several times, caregivers can encourage children to tell the story in their own words. When making their first attempt at storytelling, children often retell stories that they’ve heard again and again. Retelling familiar tales helps children grasp the basic narrative framework of characters, setting, and plot. As their narrative abilities grow, they learn to manipulate those elements to form their own stories. Having children tell familiar stories also fosters

vocabulary growth, as children reuse words and phrases from the original narrative (Isbell, 2002).

The benefits of sharing stories with children are far-reaching. By encouraging caregivers to find moments in their daily routines for sharing stories with their children, librarians can help nurture the connection between caregiver and child while setting the stage for children to become successful readers.

See *page 3 for a reproducible handout featuring simple tips to help caregivers boost their child’s literacy skills by weaving storytelling into their family’s daily routines.*

References

- Isbell, Rebecca T. (2002, March). “Supporting Language Learning: Telling and Retelling Stories, Learning Language and Literacy.” *Young Children*. www.naeyc.org/yc
- Mokhtar, Nor Hasni et al. (2011). “The Effectiveness of Storytelling in Enhancing Communicative Skills.” *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 18: 163–169.

Learn more about how storytelling enriches early literacy learning with the Very Ready Reading Program at www.demco.com/veryready

10 Tips for Sharing Stories

You already know that reading books to your child from the time he is born gives his brain a powerful boost as he grows. But did you know that both listening to and telling stories also provide your child with important reading skills? Try these 10 ideas for weaving storytelling into your daily routine.

- At the dinner table, on car rides, during family walks, or at bedtime—one of the biggest advantages of oral storytelling is that you can do it anywhere. The car is an ideal time to weave a story for your child. You'll be surprised at how effective an engaging telling of "The Three Little Bears" can be in quieting a restless backseat passenger.
- Children love hearing stories about what their parents were like as children. Did you have a beloved pet or a special tradition you shared with your mother or father? Share stories about your life as a child: the games you played, pets you had, what your school days were like, and experiences you had with friends. Invite grandparents to tell stories about you as a child or about themselves as children.
- Go all out when telling stories: use different voices for each character; be expressive by whispering, shouting, or acting out parts of your story.
- Add drama to your stories by acting them out with your child. Traditional stories such as "Hansel and Gretel" or "Little Red Riding Hood" are perfect for narrating and acting out. Join in to play the part of the witch or the wolf—your child will love getting the best of you at the end of the story!
- Tell stories that include repeated phrases, such as "The Three Little Pigs" or "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." Pause at key parts and encourage your child to join in on repeated phrases, such as "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house down!"
- Tell your child the story of the day he was born, the day you brought him home from the hospital, or where he was and what it was like when he learned to crawl or walk. These stories are rich with emotional ties and will be sure to captivate your child.
- Substitute your child's name for a character's name (e.g., Goldilocks can become Sophie-locks). You'll see her face light up with delight as you tell the story and insert her name into it.
- Holidays are the perfect time to tell family stories that make us laugh and spark memories. Encourage friends and relatives to share their favorite traditions and fondest memories of holidays past.
- Younger children often look up to their older siblings, so let them join in on the storytelling. Both older and younger children will benefit—older siblings from the speaking and storytelling practice and younger siblings from hearing a new version of a familiar story.
- Look at old family photos and tell stories about what was happening when the photo was taken. Include as many details as you can in your stories. Invite your child to join in by asking her to tell her own story about what she thinks is happening in the photo.