

Five story-telling techniques

In this posting I want to offer you 5 neat and useful teaching story-telling ideas:

1. Telling to a bowl of water

Choose a quiet, gentle, introverted story and bring a bowl of water to class. Get the students closely round you and put the bowl on the floor between you feet. Tell the story gazing into the bowl as if you could see the scenes in the water. Deny the students eye contact. Most of them will try and look into the water!

2. Tell your story to two volunteer students

Get the students sitting so that they form a sort of egg shape. Yourself sit on the floor at one end of this oval, tell the group what sort of story you intend to tell them and ask if there are two people who tend to really like this type of story. When you get two volunteer listeners ask them to come and sit on the floor facing you at your end of the oval.

Tell your story to them exclusively and deny the rest of the group eye contact. When you have finished the story ask the students in the oval how they felt about being "ignored". Also ask the volunteers how they felt being focused on. Sometimes in such post-telling feedback you are told things that surprise you. In one class I was told by several people that they found it easier to listen when my attention was not directly on them. They felt freer in their listening.

3. The students listen and then read

In preparation, write out and photocopy the end of your story. If you have no copier than write the ending out on a large piece of paper and be ready to stick it up on the classroom wall.

Tell the students you story nearly to the end, building up expectation and tension. Stop and either give out the endings or stick your paper up on the wall for the students to crowd around. Those who liked the listening will plunge into the reading like divers from the top board!

4. A story with two or more endings

Prepare to tell a story with two endings. Tell the students you are going to tell them such a story and they are either to chose between the two endings or invent a new one of their own.

Tell your story up to the point where it divides. Tell the first ending, and then loop back to the dividing point and tell the second one. Allow the students 30 seconds of silent thought to decide which ending they prefer or to invent a new one. First ask the inventors to give their new endings. Then ask the ending 1 likers to explain their preference. The same with the ending 2 preferers. It vital to ask them to gjve the reasons for their preferences.

5. The listeners exaggerate your telling!

Explain to the class that they are going to take an active part in your telling of the story. If you say, for example " It was a big mountain" the students shout out " no, Teacher it was a huge mountain, a ginormous mountain"... in other words they

exaggerate your story. You then continue: " Yes students, it was a huge, vast, ginormous mountain ...

I believe this story telling tradition originates in the ebullient Caribbean and it clearly goes down more naturally with some students than others. Works a wonder in Brazil but is counter-cultural in Finland, where the idea of interrupting the speech of another person, let alone a narrator, is outside normal discourse patterns. Though, may the technique be more useful in cultures where it has to swim against the current?

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