Storytelling:

The Art of Teaching

Written By:

Masoomeh Estaji, Ph.D.

Farhad Ghiasvand

Table of Contents

Preface

Storytelling is considered as one of the most important skills one may make use of as a good speaker or a person with professional performance and dramatic skills. In other words, what credits the storytelling as a valuable skill is its communicative dimension and the way it is able to rely on communication to express a series of ideas, values and beliefs or better to say to establish a process through which it expresses and conveys all those things. Based on this communicative dimension, one is then able to answer how storytelling can be said to have strong cultural overtone and how this can be applied to a context in which padagogical aims in Foreign Language Acquisition are of prime significance. For years, Storytelling has been a part of the syllabus for English Language students in Iranian universitis during B.A programs and a significant attention has been paid to it as a necessary skill for students to accquire. But, unfortunately, not much has been done to highlight its cultural dimensions or the ways through which Iranian students are able to absorb and strike a balance between what their own native language stortelling potentials can give them and what the new language context requires them to adopt. In fact, this culturally significant issue demands the students to use the knowledge of their own mother tongue and also the techniques of storytelling and mix them with what the English language heritage of storytelling provides for them. This aim is attainable only when the students know well how to tell a story in English fluently by taking advantage of techniques or strategies that bridge the gap between the two languages and cultures. Concerning the storytelling course for Iranian university students of English language there is an agreement among practitioners that it is a bit complex and that there is no sinlge affective procedure or method that can work best in all situations. What has been done in this book out of the necessity is to replace the old boring context created by the tendency in these students to come to class and tell in English the sheer memorized story by much trouble and efforts with a more dynamic stress-free context created by much group works and communicative strategies in which students and the instructor are to negotiate about the storytelling and how professional and effective an Iranian storyteller in English can be.

Procedure

This book includes three units. Unit one is devided into five sections including Introduction, the definition and history of storytelling, its purposes, its different types, and the essential elements of a story. Unit two provides some usefull information about the theories underlying storytelling, practical tips regarding dos and don'ts of storytelling, and finally some empirical research findings concerning storytelling are presented in the final pages of the unit. Furthermore, each unit begins with a set of objectives and questions that are expected of the students to reach and find answers to by the end of that unit. Moreover, there are some comprehension and descussion-raising questions in each part which are aimed to establish the understanding of the information presented in each unit

Unit three consists of a collection of stories as sample stories for the students. They are chosen in a way that they match what students have dealt with in the previous units. For each story some tasks and activities have been developed to improve students' vocabulary knowledge as well as their comprehension of the story. During the course of instruction, each student is to select one story as a part of his storytelling project of the semester from the book and presents it to the class. The class as well as the teacher is then to judge him by making a kind of Judgment Chart like this:

Total Fluency	Grammar/ Language	Handling Ability/ Using the Proper Device	Proper Strategy to perform in English	Theme Conveyance/ Suspense creation/ Plot Direction	Facial Expression/ Body Language	Students' Involvement	Innovation/ Natural Acting/ Self-confidence
□ Excellent	□ Excellent	□ Excellent	□ Excellent	□ Excellent	□ Excellent	□ Excellent	□ Excellent
□ Very Good	□ Very Good	□ Very Good	□ Very Good	□ Very Good	□Very Good	□Very Good	□ Very good
□ Good	□ Good	□ Good	□ Good	□ Good	□ Good	□ Good	□ Good
□ Fair	□ Fair	□ Fair	□ Fair	□ Fair	□ Fair	□ Fair	□ Fair
□ Weak	□ Weak	□ Weak	□ Weak	□ Weak	□ Weak	□ Weak	□ Weak
□ Bad	□ Bad	□ Bad	□ Bad	□ Bad	□ Bad	□ Bad	□ Bad

As a further part of their Semester Project, the students are also to choose a second story from outside of the book based on what they have learned and after consulting with the instructor seperately and giving its text to him. They get prepared to tell the unseen story to the class when the turn comes to them. The class is consequently to judge the performance and to tell whether or not he/she has acted well by filling the very Judgment chart mentioned above. Aditionally, the instructor will judge the storyteller by designing a detailed comprehension test for the students from the unseen written text of the story so as to check the degree to which the fluency, comprehensivness and

professioncy of that student has made hime or her able to convey the story to the other students.

Finally, there has been provided a gloss of important words alongside the texts which can facilitate the understanding of the stories and improve learners' vocabulary repertoir. In addition, a glossary of terms and the audio files of the stories are provided.

Unit One

Unit Objectives

By the end of this unit language learners are expected to be able to:

- Provide a brief history of storytelling.
- Define the concept of storytelling.
- Describe the purposes of storytelling.
- Explain the types of stories.
- Explain the essential elements of a story.

1.1 Introduction

Throughout the history of mankind, all people have had a basic need to share their stories with others and even in today's world, we rarely see someone who does not know a story to tell and retell. Now, most of the people can easily memorize stories and tell them to others in very fascinating ways.

As one of the most pleasing and least frightening ways of public speaking, Storytelling has placed itself in the heart of everyone regardless of the age and culture and apparently, all people from all cultures love to hear a story. Historically, storytelling has had a significant role to play in the early church traditions and customs at the times during which most people were illiterate to read the Bible stories for their own sake, therefore the clergy resorted to storytellers to tell and act out the stories taken from the Bible. Later on, the storytellers had to move out of the church buildings as a result of the overwhelming interest that had been shaped in people. This movement, gave the storytellers more freedom to tell other stories in addition to religious stories. Many other storytellers traveled across villages and stood in city squares and narrated stories of wonder and adventure.

In essence, stories organize one's life experiences and keep a record of significant happenings. They are typical forms of discourse, which are of great importance in language learning and literacy development, particularly when considering the high linguistic and cultural differences among students in L2 classrooms. Stories can be valuable assets within classrooms as they can help teachers to identify their students' cultures, experiences, and meaningful relationships. By means of sharing stories, both teachers and learners "create the potential for new connections that link them together inside a new tale" (Dyson & Genishi, 1994).

Motivated by the powerful impacts that storytelling can have on language learners, the present book aimed to provide an opportunity for Iranian EFL

learners to get to know the basic concepts and literary elements of any kind of literary work especially the short stories. Additionally, it has some practical contributions for both teaching and learning as the knowledge of the elemental concepts are put into practice through sample stories from great authors in the third unit.

1.2 The Definition and History of Storytelling

Hundreds of years ago, people of all cultures have taken advantage of stories to help them in explaining a practice, a belief, or a natural phenomenon. Storytelling is a universal way of communicating cultural traditions and values. It is also a vehicle for spreading information about history, science, government, and politics. Some stories are new; others have been written and taken from the ancients. Irrespective of the origin of stories, storytelling is believed to be a unique and dynamic interaction between the teller and the listener.

As Zabel (1991) put it, storytelling is as old as mankind, predating any other form of oral history. It was the only tool available to people to preserve and share cultural customs, beliefs and heritage for many years. Story is believed to be the oldest and the most proven mechanism for humans to remember and store information (Abrahamsen, 1998). Thus, storytelling substantiated to be a very influential way of coding knowledge in oral cultures as it made them more memorable and easily transferred to others. Actually, Abrahamsen argues that civilizations survival is indebted to storytelling as they guaranteed the endurance of life experiences to later generations. The earliest record of storytelling is 4000 B.C. as stated by Ruth Sawyer in her book entitled "Tales of the Magicians" (as cited in Abrahamsen, 1998). Storytellers were highly respected in early Egyptian and medieval times and were also used by nomadic tribes such as the Gypsies. Stories are evident in the Roman culture as well. Even more, storytellers in ancient times were often highly esteemed members of the community as they helped people make sense of complex cultural or religious issues, offered comfort in the face of difficulties, or provided simple entertainment (Parkin, 2004). They often held such titles and Shamans, chief, elder, priest, or troubadours. As stated by Abrahamsen (1998, para.3), it appears through a review of literature that the story is one of the most important inventions of humankind (as cited in Eck, 2006).

1.3 The purposes of storytelling

Without doubt one of the most delightful arts that are created for the purpose of being shared with others is storytelling. As the most crucial element of this skill, stories should be word perfect as they can enter and impact people's brain easily and thoroughly. Storytelling is not as demanding as other forms of public speech yet it serves many significant purposes as follows (as mentioned in Collins, 2005):

- **Storytelling develops the imagination.**

A story allows the listener to go to places, to do things, and to meet people that he never would experience in reality. A story permits you to create mentally the most intricate and wonderful settings, the most exciting characters, and the most spine tingling adventures. The storyteller simply paints the scene and the listener gets it with his mind's eye.

A good storyteller can paint a clear picture in a learner's mind that is more impressive and creative than any other ways of teaching.

- **Storytelling widens the listener's horizons.**

A story can inform the listener about life in places far away. It helps him/her understand what other people are like, how they feel, how they live, and how they think. It can give the listener new ideas that have never passed his/her mind before.

- **Storytelling gives enjoyment.**

Listeners relish in hearing stories. A good story can take the listener to another world. It can lighten his mood. It can lift his spirits. Books tell stories, but some people do not like to read. Television tells stories, but TV excludes the most significant part of the Storytelling process: imagination. Being told a story allows the listener to sit, absorb the words, and use his mind to create.

- **Storytelling helps solve problems.**

Listening to the conflicts that the characters in a story are involved in and hearing how they deal with the conflict can help the listener learn treasured lessons. He/she may learn not only what to do, he may also learn what not to do. Without even realizing it, the storyteller may be giving valuable advice. Aesop's fables were full of advice on how to live and how not to live. These lessons ended the story with the expression, ". . . and the moral of the story is . . ."

Students today face various problems at home, at school, and at play that are difficult to imagine. They are in need real solutions. They require values to live by and heroes to praise and imitate. Church is a wonderful place to present Biblical truths and principles. Whether you are telling a Bible story or a supporting story, you can use the means of storytelling to inculcate truth

and stimulate desired actions. You can give the learners principles by which to live and heroes to appreciate.

1.4 The Types of stories

Generally, stories can be subdivided into two broad branches; **fiction and non-fiction**. Fiction is a story that might be on the basis of real life but is not a true story. It does not need to be necessarily based on real life. Stories that fall under this class are Fairy tales, Folk Tales, Tall Tales, Animal stories, Fables, Myths, and non-true stories. Some of the supporting stories in our textbook are fiction. They are not true stories, but they can teach important lessons.

On the other hand, Non-fiction stories are true and actually happened. Biblical, Historical, Biographical, Autobiographical, and Missionary stories are under this class of stories. As a further categorization of story types, stories can be *Personal Experience stories, Traditional stories*, and *Created stories*. It should be noted that Created stories often involve a mixture of elements taken from both Personal Experience stories and Traditional stories. Moreover, Traditional stories can be classified as:

- ❖ **Folktale**
- ❖ **Legend**
- ❖ **Epic**
- ❖ **Myth**

1.5 The essential elements of a story

A story has five basic but essential elements. These five components are: *Plot, Setting, Character, Point of View, Theme*. These essential elements keep the story running smoothly and allow the action to develop in a logical and meaningful way that the reader can follow.

I. Plot: How the author arranges events to develop the basic idea; it is the sequence of events in a story or play. The plot is a planned, logical series of events having a beginning, middle, and end. The short story usually has one plot so it can be read in one sitting. There are five essential parts of plot:

1) *Exposition (introduction):* Beginning of the story; characters, background, and setting revealed.

2) *Rising Action:* Events in the story become complicated; the conflict is revealed. These are events between the introduction and climax.

3) *Climax:* Turning point of the story. Readers wonder what will happen next; will the conflict be resolved or not?

4) *Falling action:* Resolution begins; events and complications start to fall into place. These are the events between climax and denouement.

5) *Resolution (Conclusion):* Final outcome of events in the story.

II. Setting: Time and location that a story takes place. For some stories, the setting is very important; while for others, it is not. When examining how setting contributes to a story, there are multiple aspects to consider:

1) *Place:* Geographical location; where is the action of the story taking place?

2) *Time:* Historical period, time of day, year, etc; when is the story taking place?

3) *Weather conditions:* Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc?

4) *Social conditions:* What is the daily life of the character's like? Does the story contain local color?

5) *Mood or atmosphere:* What feeling is created at the beginning of the story? Cheerful or eerie?

III. Character: There are two meanings for "character": 1) a person in a fictional story; or 2) qualities of a person. People in a work of fiction can be a (n):

• *Protagonist:* Clear center of story; all major events are important to this character.

• *Antagonist:* Opposition or "enemy" of main character.

Characters in a story can be of various types such as:

- *Round:* Fully developed personalities that are affected by the story's events; they can learn, grow, or deteriorate by the end of the story. Characters are most convincing when they resemble real people by being consistent, motivated, and life-like.
- *Flat:* One-dimensional character
- *Dynamic:* Character who does go through change and "grows" during a story • Static – Character does not go through a change.

IV. Point of View: The angle from which the story is told. There are several variations of POV: *1) First Person*: Story told by the protagonist or a character who interacts closely with the protagonist or other characters;

speaker uses the pronouns "I", "me", "we". Readers experiences the story through this person's eyes and only knows what he/she knows and feels.

 2) *Second Person:* Story told by a narrator who addresses the reader or some other assumed "you"; speaker uses pronouns "you", "your", and "yours". Ex: You wake up to discover that you have been robbed of all of your worldly possessions.

 3) *Third Person:* Story told by a narrator who sees all of the action; speaker uses the pronouns "he", "she", "it", "they", "his", "hers", "its", and "theirs". This person may be a character in the story. There are several types of third person POV:

• *Limited:* Probably the Easiest: POV for a beginning writer to use, "limited" POV funnels all action through the eyes of a single character; readers only see what the narrator sees.

• *Omniscient:* God-like, the narrator knows and sees everything, and can move from one character's mind to another. Authors can be omniscient narrators by moving from character to character, event to event, and introducing information at their discretion. There are two main types of omniscient POV:

4) *Innocent Eye/Naive Narrator:* Story told through child's eyes; narrator's judgment is different from that of an adult.

5) *Stream of Consciousness:* Story told in a way that readers just experience a character's thoughts and reactions. It is a narrative technique that gives the impression of a mind at work, jumping from one observation, sensation, or reflection to the next seamlessly and often without conventional transitions. It was first coined by American philosopher and psychologist William James.

V. Theme: Central message, "moral of the story," and underlying meaning of a fictional piece; may be the author's thoughts on the topic or view of human nature (see http://www.acpsd.net/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=35296&dataid=18116&FileName=Five%20Elements%20of%20Fiction.pdf).

Comprehension Check

1. what are the types of stories?

2. What are the essentil elements of a story?

3. Define the three types of characterization in a story?

4. What are the types of POV?

5. What is Stream of Consciousness?

6. Differentiate between protagonist and antagonist in a story.

References

Abrahamson, C. (1998). Storytelling as a pedagological tool in higher education. *Education.* 11 8(3).
Dyson, A. H., & Genishi, C. (1994). The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Eck, J. E. (2006). *An analysis of the effectiveness of storytelling with adult learners in supervisory management* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Stout).

Parkin, M. (2004). *Tales for change.* London, UK; Sterling, VA: Kogan Page Limited.

Zabel, M. K. (1991). Storytelling, myths, and folk tales: Strategies for multicultural inclusion. Preventing School Failure, 36, 32-34.

Unit Two