

## Telling Tales

Stories are interwoven into life itself, as Andrew Wright puts it stories are a path to walk on; a map to live in.

Anecdotes, stories & metaphors help translate concepts and ideas into concrete tangible, shared meaning. We are 'hard wired' for metaphor, in other words thinking metaphorically is a key way in which we think. Metaphors are short stories and stories are long metaphors.

Broadly speaking, to be able to cope with abstract concepts we compare them to more practical and material experiences.

For example:

Life is ...a journey

Business is a war...a game

Time is ...money

In Bruner's (1986) words, "[Narrative] deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience and to locate the experience in time and place."

What are the ' **magic ingredients** of a good story?

- Quantity & quality – like Goldilocks we need to bear Grice's Maxims in mind when we tell a story. If it's too long our audience will get bored and if it's too short they may not get the point.
- Stories have a beginning, a middle and an end – they need structure and a clear conclusion.
- They usually have characters and a setting
- Practice is key - telling & retelling improves the story. Use intonation and pausing for effect to keep your audience interested.
- Context, cultural knowledge and experience are also key to understanding

**So what has all this got to do with teaching?**

Once upon a time, long ago and far away (or perhaps not so long ago), teachers did not use fancy PowerPoint presentations, overhead projectors, or even chalkboards. They simply shared their knowledge through stories.

- Stories create interest
- Stories provide a structure for remembering course material
- Stories are a familiar and accessible form of sharing information
- Stories provide a clear framework for speaking.

"Retelling stories, as an instance of guided speaking, can be an effective strategy to enhance learners' communicative output and class participation".

**Before you tell a story you need to:**

**Get attention** : How?– useful phrases such as: I'm going to tell you a story/ You'll never guess what happened to me the other day! Signal to the listener that you are about to tell them a short story or anecdote.

**Ideas to use in class**

**1. My first ... story.** Sharing personal experiences

Telling a Story from experience can create a more personal student-teacher connection

- a) Tell students you are going to tell them a story about your first experience with something. Pick 5 or 6 key words from your story and ask them to draw a picture  
E.g. a violin, a phone box, a radio, a concert, tube train
- b) Predict the story – think + share in pairs – elicit a few
- c) Listen to story and..
  - see if you were right
  - put pictures in order
  - think of a question to ask me
- d) Re-tell story in pairs
- e) Students think of a first experience they had.
- f) Draw 4 – 6 pictures to illustrate
- g) Pairs swap pictures – tell your partner the story –listen & order pics

**2. Give a message: Practice makes perfect**

Stories are a way of communicating

- a) Show picture of Tiger Woods – who's this? What's he famous for?
- b) Tell story:

**Give a message**

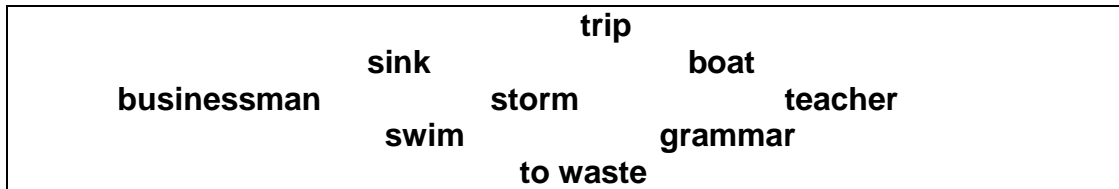
Tiger Woods' golf ball was stuck in a sandtrap. It was a very difficult shot. He took a long time considering how to deal with it. Finally, he addressed the ball, focused all his energy and played the shot. The crowd watched as the ball hung high in the air, dropped and then bounced twice and into the hole. "That was a real lucky shot, Tiger," a voice shouted from the crowd. "Yeah, it was," responded Tiger. "But you know what? The more I practice, the better I get, and the better I get, the luckier I get."

- c) Discuss the implications of the story and reiterate importance of practice

**3. Teach language skills**

- a) Look at word rose (check understanding of vocab)
- b) Individually invent a story using at least 7 of the words (no writing)
- c) When ready tell stories to other students.
- d) Listen to my version and discuss how similar / different it was to theirs.
- e) Discuss implications of story: who do you agree with the businessman or the teacher? How important is getting the grammar right?

This idea can be used with any text, whether it is a story or anecdote you are going to tell the class or a text from the coursebook. This task increases students' motivation to read or listen as they have a clear reason to do so. It also allows them to be more creative and you could follow-up by getting the class to vote on which story they liked most.



### Teach language skills

A businessman invited his friend the teacher to take a trip on his boat. While the businessman steered the boat, the teacher relaxed in a chair. "What will the weather be like?" asked the teacher. The businessman replied, "We's going to have a storm." The teacher corrected his friend immediately. "You can't say that. Don't you know grammar? You must say "We **are** going to have a storm. If you don't know grammar you've wasted half your life."

The businessman simply shrugged his shoulders and continued steering the boat. Later, just as the businessman predicted, a big storm arrived. The wind was strong and the waves were huge. The businessman asked his friend, "Did you ever learn to swim?". "Of course not said the teacher, "Why should a teacher know how to swim?" "In that case replied the businessman, "you've wasted all your life because we's going to sink!"

#### 4. Stories in the news: Who, what, where, when, why?

- a) Tell students this story is about a crocodile. Elicit information about crocodiles: What colour are crocs? Where do they live etc
- b) Show picture – here's our croc – his name's Snappy Does he look like a normal croc?
- c) Imagine he is a talking croc – what would you ask him? Write Qs ( half group)
- d) Half group have article – read it but they are going to be Snappy and answer their partner's questions.
- e) Extension. Find / encourage Ss to find interesting stories in the news.

Creativity: change the ways things are – could extend to ask what would happen if ... white were black, if you were green etc

#### References

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### **Snazzy Snappy: Croc Turns Bright Orange**

A crocodile at a wildlife park in Australia has turned himself orange after attacking a water filter in the pool in his enclosure.

The reptile, named Snappy, obviously bit off more than he could chew - although he is expected to return to normal at some point.

The 2.5m-long animal is now bright orange from head to tail - much to the amusement of onlookers at Roaming Reptiles in the State of Victoria.

Experts believe vegetation and algae which would normally have stayed out of his water thanks to the filter managed to get in, which affected his colour.

"I think it caused the pH levels in his water to soar which has led to the change in colour," zoo manager Tracey Sandstrom told news.com.au .

"Snappy is pretty territorial and he attacked the filter one day and a few weeks after that, I noticed he was orange. "However, the new look has not had any health implications - and Snappy is expected to return to his normal green colour in time.

bbcnews.co.uk

A famous 18th century rabbi and storyteller, the Maggid of Dubno, was once asked how he managed to always have the right story to make his point in any given situation. His reply was to tell a story.

#### **HITTING the BULL'S EYE**

A Tale from Eastern Europe

There was once a famous archer who entered a village and saw several targets drawn on a wall. In the absolute center of each target was an arrow. The archer asked the villagers, "Who has accomplished this amazing feat?"

The villagers laughed and said, "It was the village fool who did it."

The archer said. "Bring me to this "fool" for he is truly a great master.

The archer was brought before the village fool. He reverently bowed low and said, "Great master, tell me, how are you able to shoot a bull's eye every time?"

The village fool replied with a grin, "It is easy! First I shoot the arrow and then I draw the target."

The Maggid of Dubno, it is said, explained, "It is the same with stories. First I introduce the topic for which I have the perfect story, and then the story helps me to make my point every time