**Introduction to Storytelling**

By Ashlyn Anderson

**Grade:** 5

**Length:** 45 minutes

**Standards:**

National Theatre Arts

* Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work.
  + TH:Cr3.1.5.a. Revise and improve an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work through repetition and self-review.
  + TH:Cr3.1.5.b. Use physical and vocal exploration for character development in an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work.
* Anchor Standard 4: Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.
  + TH: Pr4.1.5.a. Describe the underlying thoughts and emotions that create dialogue and action in a drama/theatre work.
  + TH: Pr4.1.5.b. Use physical choices to create meaning in a drama/theatre work.
* Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
  + TH: Pr6.1.5.a. Present drama/theatre work informally to an audience.
* Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.
  + TH:Re7.1.5.a. Explain personal reactions to artistic choices made in a drama/theatre work through participation and observation.

Utah State Core: Theater – 5th Grade

* Standard 1: Playmaking
  + The student will plan and improvise plays based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history for informal and formal theatre.
    - Objective 3: Describe and explain plot structure in terms of conflict.

Utah State Core: English Language Arts Grade 5

* RL 2: Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.
* RL 5: Explain how a series of chapters, scenes, or stanzas fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story, drama, or poem.
* RF 4: Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
  + b. Read grade-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression.

**Big Ideas:**

* Storytelling
* Story Structure
* Story Maps
* Tableau/Still Image
* Character
* Emotion
* Expression

**Essential Questions:**

* Why are strong acting choices essential to interpreting a drama or theatre piece?
* What happens when theatre artists share a creative experience?
* What are the components of an effective story?

**Enduring Understandings:**

* Theatre artists make strong acting choices to effectively convey meaning.
* Theatre artists share and present stories, ideas, and envisioned worlds to explore the human experience.

**Prior Experience:**

It is helpful if students have already explored and selected their stories for the storytelling unit. If they bring copies of their stories to class, students will have an easier time creating their story maps and rehearsing.

**Author’s Note:**

**Lesson 1: Story Maps**

**Lesson 2: Character Voices**

These lessons are intended as an introduction to a storytelling unit to prepare students for an event such as Utah’s Timpanogos Storytelling Festival or the Jordan Schools District Story Weaver’s Festival. Teachers should have copies of published folk tales, fairy tales, myths, legends, fables, and tall tales available for students to select their stories. After learning how to map the beginning, middle, and end of a story in these lessons, students should be prepared to map their own selected stories and begin rehearsing for the festival.

Guidelines for the story festival might include

* Stories must be told from memory and not read aloud.
* Stories should be 3-5 minutes long.
* The story must be a published folk tale, fairy tale, myth, legend, fable, or tall tale.
* The story should have a recognizable beginning, middle, and end with supporting details.

**Lesson 1: Story Maps**

**Objective:**

Students will show their understanding of dramatic plot structure by creating a story map and performing an informal retelling of a story through a flipbook of tableau images.

**Materials Needed:**

* Bell (or some other signal)
* Copies of short narrative mime scripts
* Blank story maps/outlines of Aristotelian dramatic structure

**Warm up:**

Play Gibberish: put the students into pairs and have them decide who will play the carnival worker and who will be the visitor to the carnival booth. They will improvise a conversation at the carnival until the bell rings. When the bell rings, they must immediately switch their conversation from English to Gibberish. Their goal is to continue the conversation from where they left off in English. Remind the students to let both partners be equally involved rather than having one student dominate the conversation.

Model this for the students before beginning the activity.

Ring the bell 3-4 times, having the students switch back and forth from English and Gibberish more than once.

Variation: Rather than having a conversation in gibberish, ask students to switch into gestures-only at the sound of the bell. They must be silent but continue the conversation through using body language, gestures, and facial expressions.

**Step 1:**

Ask the students to return to their seats. Lead a discussion about what they just experienced.

* Who felt as though they understood something their partner said even when it was spoken in Gibberish?
* What did your partner do to help you understand what he or she was thinking or feeling while speaking Gibberish?
* Was it more difficult to switch from English to Gibberish or from Gibberish to English? Why do you think that way?

Refer to the students’ comments about their experience to explain that there is much more to communication or storytelling than just the words. There is body posture, gestures, facial expressions, volume, rate, pitch, intonation, and inflection. Explain how this will be important for students to remember as they narrate and speak as characters in their stories; they might take one posture and voice for a witch, for example, and a different posture and voice for a prince (model this).

When students consider all the different parts of storytelling, memorizing the words should not seem as essential. Students should memorize the *events* in their story, but they do not need to memorize *every* *word*. Compare this to a popular story: ask the students if they feel like they could tell the story of *Beauty & the Beast* or *The Ugly Duckling* right now without preparation. They feel like they can because they know the events of the story so well that they do not need to have it memorized word-for-word. They should practice their stories so often that they feel this comfortable and prepared to tell it.

**Step 2:**

Tell the students that they will learn how to create a story map today, which will help them memorize their stories. They should practice telling their stories from their story maps. The story maps will help them remember the order of all the important events and make sure they do not forget any key details.

Draw the outline of Aristotle’s dramatic structure on the whiteboard. Label and define each of the five parts for students.

1. Beginning: background information, setting, time, character relationships
2. Problem (Inciting Incident): changes the course of the story, sets up the conflict
3. Middle (Rising Action): events that drive story forward, characters attempt to solve the problem
4. Climax: highest emotional state, problem must be solved
5. Ending: characters’ and problem come to a conclusion and resolution

For each of these components, ask students to tell you what happens in the story of *Beauty & the Beast* or *The Ugly Duckling*. Clarify any misunderstandings.

Ask students why stories need a problem. Why is conflict important to a good story?

**Step 3:**

Now we will explore what happens to a story when it is missing one of its parts. In groups, students will retell a version of a narrative mime. Pass out copies of these short stories to students in groups of 5-7. Also provide a blank story map for each group.

Give the students time to read their stories and fill in the story maps with the appropriate details for each part of the plot structure.

**Step 4:**

Explain that students should create a “flipbook” of frozen images for their stories, moving from one tableau into the next. Compare this to flipbooks they may have experience with: even though each page of a flipbook is a still image, when the pages are turned quickly, the still images create the illusion of movement. Ask them to create a tableau—or still image—for each important event or part of the story map.

The teacher will read the narrative mime out loud for each group as they perform. Their job is to act out the story with a portion of the plot structure missing (e.g., a story without its problem, or a story without a climax, etc.). It should be obvious and feel very incomplete to the class when the story is presented. The teacher will likewise omit this part of the story from the narration.

Tell the students they have 7-8 minutes to create and rehearse their flipbooks.

Variation: Students act out condensed versions of their stories with movement and speaking instead of tableaux or still images, and without the teacher reading the narration.

Variation: Have students retell condensed (60 seconds) versions of popular fairy tales, omitting one of the components of the story map structure. For example, acting the story of *Snow White* without any rising action.

**Step 5:**

After adequate time to prepare and rehearse their flipbooks, have the students perform for the rest of the class. Lead a short discussion following each performance, asking students what they observed about the performance.

* What choices did the actors make that were meaningful to you as an audience member?
* What part of the story do you think was missing? Why?

**ATAWT:**

With any remaining class time, pass out a story map to each student and have them begin filling in the events and details of their individual stories for the festival.

**Assessment:**

Students can be assessed on their participation in the flipbook activity. They can also be assessed on their completion of their story maps.

Retell the story of *The Three Little Pigs* without the beginning.

Retell the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* without the climax.

Retell the story of *Jack and the Beanstalk* without the climax.

Retell the story of *Hansel and Gretel* without the ending.

Retell the story of *Cinderella* without rising action.

Retell the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* without rising action.

**Lesson 2: Character Voices**

**Materials Needed:**

* Emotion cards (from *The Drama Game File*)

**Preparation:**

Be ready to tell (not read) a story to the students using character voices, gestures, and facial expressions, e.g. “The Emperor’s New Clothes.”

**Continuation from previous lesson:**

Students should come to today’s lesson with their story maps completed. If they need more time, give them a few minutes at the beginning of class to finish their maps.

**Warm Up:**

Write a sentence on the board (e.g. “I can not go to the ballgame”) and have the students practice reading it out loud with you, emphasizing a different word each time. Talk about how emphasis makes a line more interesting and meaningful in a performance.

Using the emotion cards, practice reading the sentence again, now with a particular emotion. For example, “This emotion card says terrified. What word might I emphasize if I were to say this sentence in a terrified voice?”

Practice combining emphasis and emotion a couple of times as a whole class. Then gather the group in a large circle sitting on the floor. Pass out the emotion cards, one to each student. Tell them to keep their emotions secret. When students keep their cards private, they do not need to worry about performing and being judged for accuracy. They only need to try their best.

Each player takes his/her turn in the circle to say the sentence with a) emphasis and b) emotion. Rotate the cards through the circle by passing to the next player. Once everyone has a new card, play the game again.

**Step 1:**

Have the students return to their seats. Explain that you will now tell them a story, and they need to watch for storytelling qualities and techniques you use to enhance the story.

Tell the story to the students.

**Step 2:**

After telling the story, lead a discussion with the students about the techniques they noticed you use while telling the story. Make a list of these on the whiteboard:

* Character voices, accents
* Pauses, pacing
* Volume
* Pitch
* Gestures
* Facial expressions
* Focus
* Character stances

**Step 3:**

Give the students time to practice telling their stories to each other. Put them in small groups of 2-4 students. They should be telling from their story maps, not from the stories themselves. They should recall the events of the story, instead of trying to memorize and repeat it verbatim.

Encourage the students to experiment with character voices as they practice telling. Ask their partners to provide suggestions using the list of storytelling techniques written on the whiteboard.

Teach the students how to provide helpful suggestions to each other, beginning with an “I wonder” phrase (e.g., “I wonder what gestures you might use to make the father’s character different from the daughter”). They may give suggestions to the storytellers if they need help coming up with character voices, stances, and gestures.

**ATAWT:**

If students are ready to move forward, use the remaining time at the end of class to guide them through character voice exercises.

**Assessment:**

Students may be informally assessed on their participation in the warm up game and storytelling practice. They may be more formally assessed on the thorough completion and accuracy of their story maps.