

## Teacher's Supplement for *First Books: stories in hands and strings* with David Novak

### Program Description

A solo spoken word performance 45-50 minutes in length, consisting of 4-5 stories.

### About The Artist

David Novak has been telling stories professionally since 1978. His background includes many years training and professional experience in the theatre. He has also worked extensively with pantomime, clowning and creative dramatics. He holds a BFA in Theatre Arts from Southern Methodist University and an MFA in Performance from U.C. San Diego.

Mr Novak has been featured at the prestigious National Storytelling Festival. He has also appeared at major festivals across the country including Hawaii and Alaska. In 1995 and 1996 he was the Master Storyteller for the Disney Institute at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida.

Mr. Novak has written four picture books, *String Figure Jack!* (xLibris) *The Little Ant* and *Johnny Appleseed and The Bears* (Riverbank Books) and *A Letter From Dad* (Simon & Schuster) and seven audio recordings, *More Rhyme Than Reason*, *The Cookie Girl*, *Chaste White & Blush Red*, *Sterling*, *Hounded*, *Smoke From the Everglades*, and *Notes on the Art of Storytelling*.

### Why Does He Tell Stories?

"As a Storyteller, I can integrate my many areas of interest and expertise. My work has grown from explorations in mime and movement, character, voice, and classical text to the spontaneity and intimacy of the shared story. The theatre is my tradition and is evident in my style. Yet I am not interested in merely "acting out" a story, but in telling. Every story I tell has been through the filter of my imagination and carries a piece of my heart.

"I believe that storytelling is the original virtual reality. I hope that people listening to my stories will experience their feelings, explore their thoughts, and consider the world we live in."

*Some of the places David has told stories:*

National Storytelling Festival  
Washington Storytellers Theatre  
New York Storytelling Center  
Woodstock Theatre  
Sierra Storytelling Festival  
Talking Island Festival, HI  
Shorebird Festival, AK  
Northern Appalachian Festival  
Stone Soup Storytelling Festival  
Oklahoma Arts Institute  
Las Vegas Storytelling Festival  
Hamburger University



Los Angeles Music Center  
Storytelling Arts of Indiana  
Hong Kong Int'l School  
Flint Storytelling Festival  
ETSU Storytelling Institute  
Walt Disney Feature Animation  
Walt Disney Imagineering  
The Disney Institute  
Lyceum Theatre  
NOA Marine Educators  
ArtServe Theatre  
Lincoln Center Institute

## First Books: stories in hands and strings

Books hold stories. Before writing was invented, storytellers found many ways to “hold” stories in memory.

In this program, your students will have A Telling Experience in which they

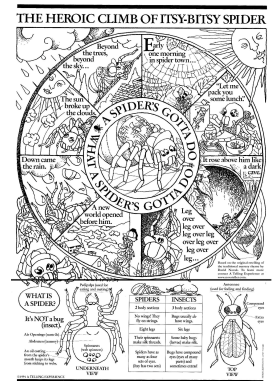
- \* learn to define Reading as a behavior that involves seeing and interpretation.
- \* learn to define Books as devices for holding stories.
- \* see a variety of involvement strategies to make oral presentation engaging and informative.

Storytellers, always had words. What they wanted to preserve was the memory of the story and so made books from hand gestures or string figures.

### The "First Books" storytelling program may include:

*The Heroic Climb of Itsy Bitsy Spider*: an example of how the familiar finger play provides a outline for the storyteller to “color in” with imagination. A coloring page of the story can be downloaded for your use in the classroom at:

<http://novateller.com/Downloads.html>

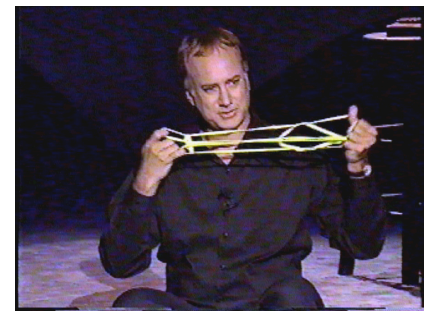


*The Seed*: an original finger play as an example of a “book” written in gestures.



*The Captain's Life Jackets*: an original retelling of a traditional paper-folding story. There are various origami books that will teach these folds, but for a fun way to learn how to make paper boats read the book *Curious George Rides A Bike*. To see a video of this story: <http://youtu.be/n7622QddBSc>

*String Figure Jack*: a rhyming retelling of Jack & The Beanstalk, using cats cradles string figures. These are introduced as “the original hand-held video games.” There are many resources for learning string games. Some are available in the *Selected Bibliography* which you can find at: <http://novateller.com/Downloads.html>



On the next page is a fun activity for “recording” stories in string. This can easily be extended into a full lesson or simply used as “sponge time” before or after the program.

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Telling Experiences for The Classroom: The Story String



There are many traditions of keeping objects that carry stories: from the carvings of a totem pole to the ornaments of a charm bracelet.

With the following activity, you can bring the exploration of objects and the stories they tell into sequencing and story recording.

**MATERIALS:** Yarn or string

**PREPARATION:** Cut a length of yarn or string (approx. 1yd) for each student.

**SKILLS & CONCEPTS:** Sequencing, time-line, personal story, oral traditions.

**ACTION:** Use the yarn as a diary or journal by tying objects into it that serve as “mementos” for each thing you do in a day. (The period of time selected for the activity can vary with the teacher, from a brief nature walk, to a 24 hour period, to several days.)

**INTO:** Discuss the way objects can remind us of stories. Demonstrate by telling the story of some article of clothing, or object in the room, such as a wedding ring or a favorite coffee mug. Introduce the idea of a charm bracelet and the way charms are mementos of experiences.

Incidentally, the word “charm” comes from the Latin “carmen” for song or incantation.

**THROUGH:**

1) Students collect and build their “Story String” looking for an object that will remind them of a given moment. The object does not need to be unusual. Any ordinary thing can be useful (a food wrapper from lunch, a blade of grass from the playground, etc.) *Objects should be tied along the string in the order that they happened, forming a string time-line.*

2) Students share their Story String in story swap groups. Tell the stories from the objects in sequence.

**Note:** if students swap their stories in teams of two, they can repeat the story many times over with new partners. Such a rotation allows for mass practice and gives the student the opportunity to rehearse before a number of classmates before sharing with larger groups.

**BEYOND:**

- 1) Tell the stories to other classes.
- 2) Tell stories from another student's string.
- 3) Invent a story from another string.
- 4) Write one or a series of the stories.
- 5) Create a story string for a story the class is reading as a form of "string book report".
- 6) Hang all the strings about the classroom as a showing of the many things that happen to us!
- 7) Make stories on a shoestring as outlined on the next page.
- 8) Learn more about the use of string for storytelling by reading *Knots on a Counting Rope* (by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault) or learning to play and tell cat's cradle stories. (String game books are referenced in the bibliography.)