

Stories on a Shoestring

(Quick Stories on a Tight Budget)

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TO LEARN A STORY FOR TELLING, IT IS GENERALLY AGREED that we must learn the outline and sequence of that story. If we understand the basic sequence of the story, then we are ready to "clothe" that story with its unique particulars. For example, the story sequence:

Boy meets girl	Boy loses girl	Boy finds girl
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is the pattern for hundreds of stories. Learning "Cinderella" or "Romeo and Juliet" is easier when you recognize this sequence. You then know the basic sections of the story, and you can use this as a template for making choices in your telling. You can make choices about organizing the events of the story and where you wish to place emphasis. Of course there is much more to these stories than this simple sequence. Concerns such as a child rebelling against a parent could be offshoots that render each story unique. But the movement forward will still follow that same sequence.

In the same way that we can see a sequence in a story, we can also see a story in a sequence. We can take a generic outline with a specific sequence of events, create our own interpretation of each event, justify it with a plot, and find a story. One such sequence that offers many possibilities for a story is in your shoelaces! To tie a shoelace, you must move through a sequence: 1) Open laces, 2) Cross laces, 3) Under and over, 4) Loop, 5) Around and through, and 6) Bow.

Parents and teachers have long known that a good way to teach shoe-tying is to tell it as a story. Try these examples:

Find The Rabbit

To find the rabbit, go out the door (1)
To a crossroads (2)
Until you come to a bridge. Go under the bridge. (3)
Crouch down low. (4)
Crawl along until you find the tree where the rabbit lives. (5)
Go around the tree, through the hole, and see the rabbit! (6)

Looking at the shoelace sequence this way, we can think of it as a rough comic strip that needs finishing. If we look at each "frame" of the above sequence and ask ourselves "What is it?" we can find all kinds of possibilities for a story:

1) Two trees; a valley; snakes; or antennae.

2) Crossroads; "X" marks the spot; or vines.

3) Swing on a branch; or go under the bridge.

4) A cave; or a ghost rises.

5) Boys wrestling; a blanket; or a wrap.

6) A rabbit; a bag of gold; or a butterfly.

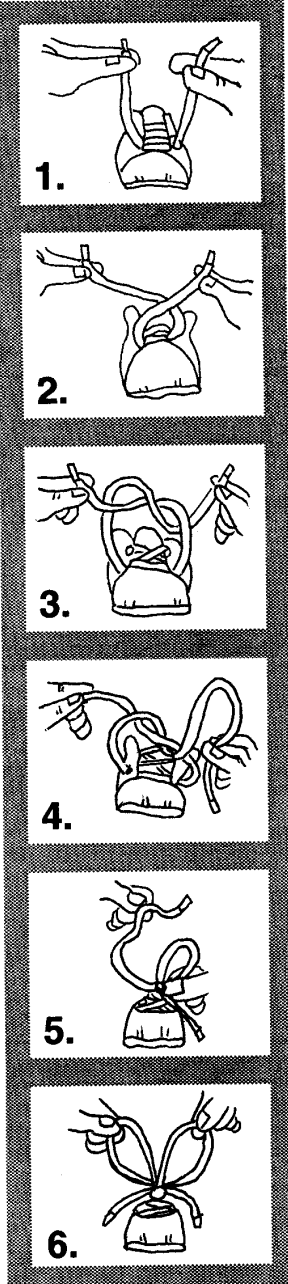
Of course the shapes a string makes are abstract, but in the hands of a teller, two shoestrings can easily be made into two snakes or a deep valley. Playing with your shoestrings in this way, you will discover many possible answers to your creative inquiry of "What is it?" The next step is to tie (pardon the pun) the images together to serve a plot. Here are more examples of stories on a shoestring:

Kite Flyers

Two boys were flying kites. (1) The kites were tangled (2) and fell. (3) The two boys argued, (4—*Hold up two loops instead of one.*) "Your fault!" "Your fault!" They wrestled and fell. (5—*Wrap one loop around the other.*) Then they ran home. (*Drop loops flat to shoe.*) After awhile they came back. One kite was broken, the other string was tangled. So they tied the good string to the good kite (*Continue wrapping movement of Step 5, this time completing move and going into bow on Step 6.*) and flew that kite together as friends. (6)

The Meadow

In the meadow there were many bright flowers. (1) As summer passed, the flowers began to dry and fall. (2) Winter wind blew and snows fell. (3) Some people came along and built a snowman. (4) Spring came and the snow began to melt. (*Lower loop to shoe.*) The fresh water from the winter snow softened the seeds of the meadow flowers. (5) A tiny sprout pushed out of the wet earth. (*Push string through loop only half way, as if half completing Step 6.*) The sprout unfolded leaves and spread out roots. A flower blossomed atop its stem. (6) Again the meadow was filled with bright flowers!



If you take the lace out of the shoe, you can find more possibilities. (See illustrations of Steps A-H.)

The Caterpillar

A caterpillar was looking for something to eat.

At the top of a tree it saw a leaf. (A)

The caterpillar climbed to the leaf. (B)

The leaf was much bigger up close. But the caterpillar was very hungry. (C)

So the caterpillar ate that leaf one bite at a time. (D)

Now the caterpillar was very big and the leaf very small. (E)

The caterpillar was tired.

It wrapped up in a "caterpillar blanket" (a cocoon) and slept. (F)

When at last it awoke, it yawned and stretched. . . it had wings! (G)

That was handy, for it was high up in the tree and needed a way down.

Now it could fly away as a butterfly. (H)

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David Novak's years of training and experience in theatre arts brought him through the silence of pantomime and the panache of clowning and the language of drama to the wonder of storytelling. He has been creating, telling, and re-telling stories professionally since 1978.

