

## Tips for Learning Stories

### Look for Simple, Concise Stories

There are many collections of stories out there. For the Storyteller, an elaborate, densely literate re-telling of a tale in book form can pose problems: too much writing to sort through to find the story. You are looking for story skeletons you can clothe with your own words and choices. To this end, look for stories in synopsis form, written for clarity and brevity. It is easier to expand on a simple story than to condense a great epic. For example, Edith Hamilton's collection of Greek and Roman myths may leave something to be desired in the way of great literature, but they are an excellent desk reference for the teller who needs to get the story as quickly as possible.

### Learn instead of Memorize

Learn your story in terms of what happens; to whom; where; etc. Learn the important events and characters, but choose your own words for telling. This way the story will be clear in your mind, and the telling can be short or long depending on the listener. Some parts of a story may require memorization, so:

### Look for Key Phrases

Sometimes a story has a phrase that should be learned (3 Billygoats Gruff: "Trip trap, trip trap, whose that walking on my bridge?!" for example). Learn these phrases. They give the story structure, like sign posts along the road, they help break the story into a series of episodes. Also, memorize important character and place names (ie "Tikki Tikki Tembo...") which are unique to the story.

### Stick to the Essentials

As you work on the story, sift out any extra details or events that don't play a part in the central action. Keep it lean, learn only what must be known for the story to happen. As you re-tell the story, you will discover your own additions, and finishing touches which will make the story yours.

### Talk the Story Out

It is difficult to tell a story without a listener. An alternative to practicing alone is to talk about the story to a friend or acquaintance in casual conversation. Start out

with, "I'm thinking of telling this story about..." This way you are airing your story without the pressure of a polished telling. A subtle distinction but important. The story is never fully ready until it is told.

Here's a story to work on:

### 3 Dolls

#### (adapted from an Indian tale)

A King was given 3 dolls, exactly alike, and challenged to tell the difference. He called the wise man, but the wise man wisely said nothing. He called the fool, but the fool did not listen. He called the storyteller. "Majesty," said the teller, "you cannot see a difference between these dolls in their outward features, therefore the differences must be within." The storyteller plucked a hair from the King's beard and began to thread the hair into the ear of the first doll. The hair went in and stayed inside. "Majesty, this doll is wise: what it hears it keeps in its head!" The storyteller took another hair and began to thread it into the ear of the second doll. The hair did not stay in. Rather, as it went in one ear, it came out the other. "Majesty, this doll is a fool: what goes in one ear comes out the other." Once more the storyteller plucked a hair and began to thread it into the ear of the third doll. The hair did not come out the other ear and it did stay in, for as he was threading the hair into the doll's ear, it came slowly out the doll's mouth. "Majesty, this doll is a storyteller: what it hears, eventually it tells."

The King was satisfied. "But," said the King, "explain this: why when you put the hair

in the doll's ear it is a straight hair. Yet, when it comes out it is all curly?"

"Majesty," said the teller, "no storyteller worth his salt will ever tell a tale exactly as he heard it. For he must always add a special curl of his own devising in the retelling of the tale!"