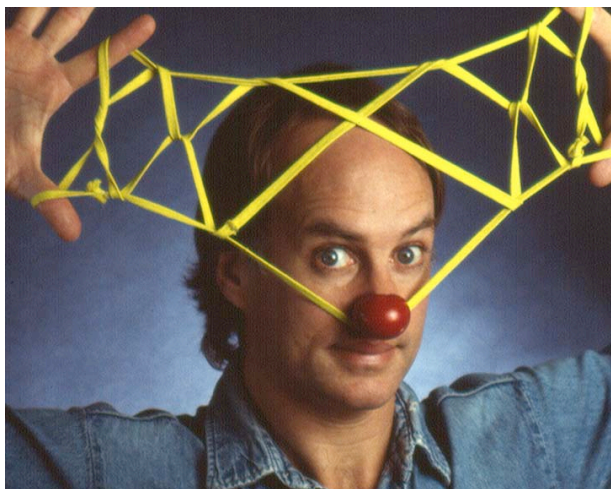


Tips For Telling



Exercise The Listener

When we use different performance skills to animate our stories, we are exercising the listener. We must draw our listeners in, keep them alert, create and fulfill the expectancies of their imaginations. Stories are full of surprises. They engage the listener from the start, for at the beginning of any telling there is a fresh readiness for the unfolding of the story. A listener leans in to the story with a sense of anticipation, as the story is going to reveal itself in a series of twists and turns, new events, new characters...revelations! Stories are constantly revealing ideas and events. The promise of revelation lures the listener through the story. In telling stories we can use this dynamic of revelation in many ways: in the story itself, and in the performance of the story. As we speak, our voice changes and shifts in surprising ways. As we gesture, our movement also changes and shifts in surprising ways. We can reveal something visually, by opening a book, or pulling a scarf from a pocket, or folding a piece of paper. We can reveal ideas as well, by using an object in an unusual way, or by revealing information and relationships in the story.

Listen to the Listener

Storytelling is a conversational art form. Even though you're the one doing all the talking, remain aware of your listeners. Watch them: are they with you? Distracted? Fidgeting? Wait for their attention if they're distracted. Comment on what they're doing if they distract you.

Use your Eyes: See the Story, See the Listener

As your eyes weave back and forth between "seeing" the imaginary world of the story and seeing the listener, you will help the listener to "see" and imagine the story. Make eye contact. That is, find opportunities to look eye to eye with your audience. (see above) But don't always look at your audience, its too discomfoting! Remember, the eyes are the window to the soul. What they see in your eyes as you pretend to see the Big Bad Wolf is worth a thousand words.

Showing and Being

with Gestures

Gestures that show are the kind we use when giving directions. We point out the way, "show" with our hands where the turn is and how high the fence is, etc. These are gestures that illustrate. We use these in telling as we are describing something: "There was the tooth fairy's castle, high atop the cliff."

We also use gestures to be in the story. We act out characters shivering with cold, or feeling their way through the tall grass. When we do "going on a bear hunt" we use the gestures of being in the story.

with Objects

You can show some part of a story with the *real* thing: such as a sea shell or a photograph; or with a *suggestive* thing: a piece of string representing the spider's web, a marble for a tear. The advantage of the suggestive object is that it keeps the listener working harder to imagine the story and can give a freshness to familiar things.

You can also effectively become someone or something in a story using a simple object. By putting on a hat, shifting a tie or holding up a mask, we transform ourselves into the moment of the story. For example: the popular, "you must pay the rent" story using a bow tie variously as the hair ribbon of the heroine, the mustache of the villain and the bow tie of the hero.

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Repeat Repeat Repeat Replace

Repetition is a good way to get your listener involved. A repeated phrase that comes in often enough will have your listener chiming along with you. Many good stories have a chance for this kind of repetition. But as the story develops to its climax, the repetition will change. Often we find a pattern of 3 repetitions with a variation on 4. The change from an established pattern is surprising and entertaining. So look for a way to replace the last repetition with some variation. An excellent example is Remy Charlip's "What Good Luck! What Bad Luck!"

Sound On and Off

Your voice makes many sounds. Use voice sounds in words for coloring. Use sound effects for animation. Turn the sound off for sudden surprise silences. A silence can do more to get attention from a wiggly listener than a loud sound. The silence says: "Who turned off the story? Where were we? What are we waiting for? What happens next?"

The quality of a silence is determined by the quality of the sounds which precede it. A sudden loud noise followed by silence has a very different feel from a slow fading away of sound resulting in quiet. In the same way, movement and stillness play off each other.

Be On the Level

A young child can be easily intimidated by a big storyteller in a wild costume towering overhead. This can be useful when you're building a story (i.e., the giant's: Fee Fie Foe Fum!) However, you don't want to scare away or lose the child you're telling to. Work from the child's level. Start sitting down and being more or less eye to eye. Stand when you need the added effect, but come back to eye level from time to time to "check-in" with your listener.

Storytelling is an intimate art form. Even with a large crowd, if you sit for a moment, you can shrink the story to a more comfortable, intimate size and this can be quite refreshing. Save the large sounds and leaping gestures for the most important moments so they can have their greatest impact. As a general rule: the smaller and closer the audience, the more you work from a seated position.

Slow Down and Speed Up

Vary the rate at which you tell. Speaking quickly (if you articulate and are intelligible) can cause your listener to "lean in" to your story to stay with you. It can be fun for a listener as a kind of a wild ride. That's part of what makes tongue twisters entertaining. Verbal pyrotechnics can have the same entertainment value as juggling torches. Likewise, a sudden change of pace will keep the ride interesting. Just as there is a thrill in flying down the slope of a roller coaster, so too there is a thrill in creeping up the next hill. Here too is a way to get your listener's attention without shouting. Speaking fast requires close attention.

Peter Piper asked his Papa, the Pickled Pepper Packer, "Papa, could I have a peck of Pickled Peppers Please?" Papa Piper reprimanded Peter:

"Peter! My Pickled Peppers are packed professionally for the purpose of procuring a pretty penny."

Peter Piper pined,

"Papa! I'll pick them personally."

Papa Piper pondered Peter's predicament.

"Peter, I perceive you have a penchant for these Pickled Peppers.

Perhaps you could pick a pick a peck of Pickled Peppers if you pick them privately."

"Perfect!" said Peter Piper.

So, Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers privately as his Papa had prescribed.

