

THE ART OF STORYTELLING

Part I

By Mary Lou Williams, M. Ed.



The art of storytelling involves two aspects - the story and the telling. This article will be about the first of these aspects, the story.

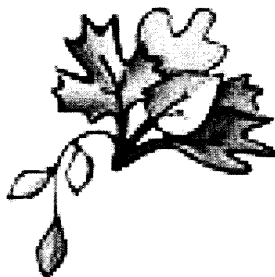
There are three sources of stories: the literary story - stories written in books and meant to be read rather than told; the traditional story - myths, legends, folk tales, fairy tales, tall tales - stories that have been handed down orally for hundreds, maybe thousands of years; and finally, personal stories - stories about the teller's own personal experiences.

Whatever the stories the storyteller chooses to tell, they must have three elements to be a satisfactory oral tale. First, the state of affairs at the end of the story must be exactly the opposite from the state of affairs at the beginning. The satisfaction is in everything turning upside down. Things don't turn out according to plan. The scene is the fundamental unit in a story. Stories have beginnings, middles, and ends. Scenes have beginnings, middles, and ends. Change is taking place in every scene in a good story. And a reversal takes place in each scene. The situation at the end of the scene is the exact opposite from the situation at the beginning. The reversal of fortune that occurs in the overall story takes place in miniature in each of the scenes.

Second, there must be a unity of effect. Everything in the story must contribute to a singular effect. Every scene must serve the purpose of this singularity of effect, and not only every scene but every word. This is what holds the audience spellbound.

Third, there must be a twist, an irony, an unexpected turn of events at the end of the story. But the surprise must not be contrived or manipulated. It must be inevitable. It is this inevitability that keeps the surprise from being mere trickery. It allows the reversal of fortune that takes place in a story to be perceived as natural. The best surprises combine astonishment with inevitability. The listener gasps and then says, "Oh, but of course."

Every story must have conflict, climax, protagonist, antagonist, and resolution. But to be a good story for telling, it must also have the three elements of reversal of fortune, unity of effect, and the surprise that is inevitable.



MYSTERY SOLVED

Miss Suellen had to play the part of detective during her *Down at the Pond* story time last month, when a child urgently told her that there were "toes on the leg!" "What a mystery!" thought Suellen and she returned to reading the storybook. But the child continued, "Toes on the leg! Toes on the leg!" "That's nice," replied Suellen, when suddenly it struck her that the little boy was referencing the beautiful illustration of turtles on a lake. Mystery solved, Suellen returned to the Youth Services office where we all shared a laugh.

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- Deliver monthly newsletter to Bulk Mail Facility on Jetport Road.
- Type 200+ mail labels each month using either a Word/Excel or WordPerfect program. You would be responsible for maintaining an accurate mail label database with monthly updates for new members, and address changes.

If you are able to help with any of the above activities, write to

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