

Oral Storytelling

How to tell stories without books

Telling a memorized story can be a great way to mix things up in your storytime. There are also many benefits of using just your words and maybe a few props. You can easily build participation with the crowd, especially when using repetition of words or by using props. These techniques can build an emotional engagement in the story that kids might not experience with a book. They use their imagination, and sometimes this helps them learn better. Give this technique a try with some of your storytime groups, and you might see some great participation and enjoyment in participating with and creating the story. Oral storytelling also honors cultures with a strong oral tradition and can help make storytimes more inclusive.

Things to try

- Try stories from Native American or other cultures with a strong oral tradition.
- Try incorporating music or movement into your story. Including a song, shaker eggs or even sign language can make it easier for kids to focus for the duration of the story.
- Try using different voices for different characters -- it can keep kids engaged and make the story easier to follow.
- Try giving kids active roles in the story, especially older ones. They can feel important as they show younger kids how storytime works.

Book Suggestions:

Favorite fairy tales and fables are a great place to start looking for stories to perform orally, without the assistance of a book. Here are a few books or stories that translate easily for children of all ages:

- *Shake It Up Tales* by Margaret Read MacDonald
- *Fables* by Arnold Lobel
- *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen
- Chicken Little
- Three Billy Goats Gruff
- Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Getting Started:

- Select a story that is repetitive enough that it's easy to remember, especially if you're nervous about memorizing a story to present.
- Feel free to paraphrase -- no one is going to know if you miss a word here or there. Focus on communicating the overall message and feeling of the story.
- Practice, practice, practice. The more you practice your story out loud, the more comfortable you'll be when the time comes to tell it in front of an audience.
- Take a look at the fables, folktale and fairytale section of your library. You might find some great stories in either the fiction or non-fiction section to use in your storytime.
- Check online for videos of stories being performed. Often you will get ideas on how to present a story by seeing it done by another person.