



The Art of Storytelling

1-6

Language Arts/Drama

by Linda Gold

Language Arts

Reading Literature, Standard #2

Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

Reading Literature, Standard #3

Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

Drama

Standard #T.CR.5: Create character.

Standard #T.P.1: Identify (analyze) the character, setting, and essential events (plot) in a story that make up the dramatic structure, and use choices to shape (enhance) believable and sustainable drama/theatre work.

Standard #T.R.4: Give and accept constructive feedback, using selective criteria to evaluate what is seen, heard, and understood in dramatizations.

Objective: Following the teachers modeling of storytelling, engagement techniques are discussed. Students will be tasked with finding a story, creating a story map, learning the events of the story, practicing the story and retelling the story, using the engagement techniques. This lesson plan will take several sessions to complete.

Materials:

Every student will need a story to tell. I recommend folktales. They are based in a tradition of storytelling and are the easiest stories to tell. I do not allow students to tell the Disney version of a story. The original stories are less familiar to audiences and are therefore more engaging. Folktales can be found in picture books, collections of stories or on the Internet.

Resources:

The Storytelling Classroom by Sherry Norfolk, Jane Stenson and Diane Williams

Awakening the Hidden Storyteller by Robin Moore

<http://www.storyarts.org/classroom/index.html#more>

<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html>

1st Step

The best way to teach students how to tell a story is by modeling good storytelling techniques. Prepare a story to tell to your students. Before you tell the story, ask your students to watch for storytelling techniques. What are some of the tools you use to make your story engaging to your audience? After telling the story, make a list of the techniques that the students observed. Add and explain any additional techniques they did not pick up on.

Storytelling Techniques

- 1. Choosing a story.** It is important for the storyteller to like the story that he/she is telling. Make sure that it is a story that does not rely heavily on pictures. The storyteller must be able to recreate the visual aspect of the story in the mind of the listener. Folktales are the easiest stories to tell.
- 2. Stories are told, not memorized.** A storyteller must know their story. A good storyteller spins a yarn, weaves a tale, tells a story. Events of the story are memorized but the words themselves are not. In this way, a storyteller can connect with his or her audience and make adjustments to the story as it is told. In order to get to know your story, create a story map, containing the major events of the story. Do not add too much detail to the map. It should be a summary of the story that can be fleshed out by the storyteller as he/she adds detail back in during the retelling.
- 3. Voice:** the main tool of the storyteller is voice. Here are some aspects of voice that are important for storytelling:
 - **Diction:** It is important to make sure that every word is easy to understand. Diction takes priority over character voices.
 - **Volume:** A storyteller must be heard to be effective. Varying the volume can be a powerful tool. There may be times in your story when you want to speak very quietly and other times when you want to speak very loudly. When building up to a climax, the story usually gets louder and then quiets down as the story winds down.
 - **Rate:** Most of the story should run at a moderate rate. There are times when the teller should slow down and/or speed up. Using a variety of rate is a very effective tool. Make sure not to go so fast that the audience has trouble keeping up with you.
 - **Character voices:** Having a different voice for each character helps your audience follow the flow of the story. It adds interest and is very engaging. It is important to be consistent with the character voices. If a voice is hard to understand, you may want to choose a different voice. (See attached character voice sheet.)
 - **Emotion:** It is very important to reflect the emotion of the story within your voice. Happy, sad, excited, scared, even hungry are just a few of the emotions that can be conveyed through your voice.
 - **Sound effects:** Your voice can be used to create sound effects throughout your story. Consider squeaky doors, footsteps, barking dogs, etc.
 - **Colorizing words:** Make words sound like what they mean. For example, the word big should sound big and the little should sound little.
- 4. Body:** The storyteller's body can also be used to enhance the story.
 - Facial expression helps to convey the emotion of the story and the characters.
 - Making eye contact with your audience while narrating the story helps to keep them engaged.
 - Consider developing a character stance for each character in the story. It is another way to help your audience know who is talking.
 - Using gestures and pantomiming some of the action is also very effective.

- Use a dialogue stance when characters are talking to each other. In a dialogue stance, one character faces one direction while the other character faces the other direction. Moving back and forth during the dialogue, helps the audience know which character is talking. Make sure not to stand sideways to the audience. Always have the characters turned out a little, toward the audience. In theater, we call this cheating out.

2nd Step: Story Map. After you have told a story and identified good story telling techniques, have your students choose a story and create a story map. This is a great opportunity to teach the students to summarize, leaving out unnecessary detail. Explain to the students that when they tell their story, they will add detail back it. After all, it is the detail that makes the story interesting. But for now, they need to get down to the nitty gritty of the story. They need to understand that the story is a series of events. It is these events that they will memorize.

3rd Step: Practice at Home. Encourage the students to practice their stories at home. Be sure to add detail back into the story when telling it. My rule of thumb is to practice a story 10 times before I tell it to anyone else. After I have practiced it on my own, I pull in family members to practice on. Have them tell you if there was anything unclear about the story. Did it make sense to them?

4th Step: Practice with a Partner: Have the students pair up and practice telling their stories to each other. Encourage them to really listen to each other so that they can give valuable feed back. The number one question they need to answer is, did the story make sense? Were they ever confused about what was happening? After telling it to one partner, and listening to their story, instruct them to come to a designated area in the room to find a new partner and tell your story again. The more they tell it, the better it will become. You may want to allow them to use their story maps during this practice session. Following this practice, have them go back and reread their story to see if there is anything they are leaving out.

5th Step: Practice in Small Groups: Have the students tell their stories in small groups, giving and receiving feed back to help make the story better. During this practice session, students must tell their story without using the story map.

Final Performance: When you feel the students are ready, have them tell their stories to the class. Following each performance, choose three students to tell the storyteller something they liked about the performance. Help them to understand the difference between things they liked about the story and things they liked about the performance. What did the storyteller do well? You may wish to ask one student to tell the storyteller something they can improve on or you may choose to do that yourself. If you wish to use a rubric for grading the assignment, I have included one.

Name: _____

Description: Storytelling

	Excellent (3 points)	Good (2 points)	Oops! (1 point)
Emotions/ Facial Expressions	The storyteller's emotions and facial expressions match the emotions of the story for the 1. narrator and 2. characters	The storyteller's emotions and facial expressions are not used consistently, or they match the emotions of the story for either the 1. narrator or 2. characters	The storyteller's emotions and facial expressions do not match the emotions of the story, or the storyteller does not use emotions and facial expressions.
Fluency	Storyteller 1. tells story without unplanned pauses and 2. story makes sense	Storyteller 1. has few unplanned pauses and/or 2. story makes some sense	Storyteller pauses frequently to try to remember the story and/or the audience doesn't understand the story
Loud and Clear	Storyteller does a good job of speaking 1. loudly and 2. clearly	Storyteller needs to work on appropriate 1. volume and/or 2. diction	The audience has a hard time hearing and understanding the storyteller.
Choose at least one: 1. Character Voices 2. Pantomiming 3. Sound Effects	Storyteller does a good job of keeping one of these techniques 1. consistent and 2. believable.	Storyteller uses at least one of these techniques, but needs to make it more 1. consistent and/or 2. believable.	Storyteller does not use any of these techniques.
2-4 Minutes Long	Story is 2-4 minutes long.	Story is less than a minute too short or too long.	Story is at least one minute too short or too long.
Story Map	Story map: 1. is clear and neat 2. does not contain too much detail	Story map: 1. is somewhat clear and neat and/or 2. contains a little too much detail	Story map: 1. is not clear and neat and/or 2. contains too much detail

Finding Your Voices!

I'm often asked by children, "Where did you get all of those voices?" My reply, "You have a lot of voices inside of you too. You just have to find them!" Just like a musical instrument, our bodies contain resonators. Using a variety of resonators can create different voices, depending on where you place the voice. Vary those voices using the variations and a variety of gates (mouth openings).

Voice Placement

1. Top of the head (falsetto)
2. Eyes
3. Ears
4. Front of the Mask (nasal)
5. Back of mouth (adenoidal)
6. Throat (guttural)
7. Diaphragm

Variations

1. Rate
2. Volume
3. Pitch
4. Rhythm
5. Accent/dialect
6. Diction

Gate

1. Loose
2. Tight
3. Vertical
4. Horizontal

Characteristics

winsome	screechy	husky	constricted	needy
strained	breathy	scratchy	cracking	lilting
raspy	edgy	rumbling	grating	desperate
harsh	tinny	hoarse	clear	hesitant
gravelly	growling	piercing	cutting	
grainy	sharp	restrained	metallic	
shrill	brassy	thin	strident	

More Ideas

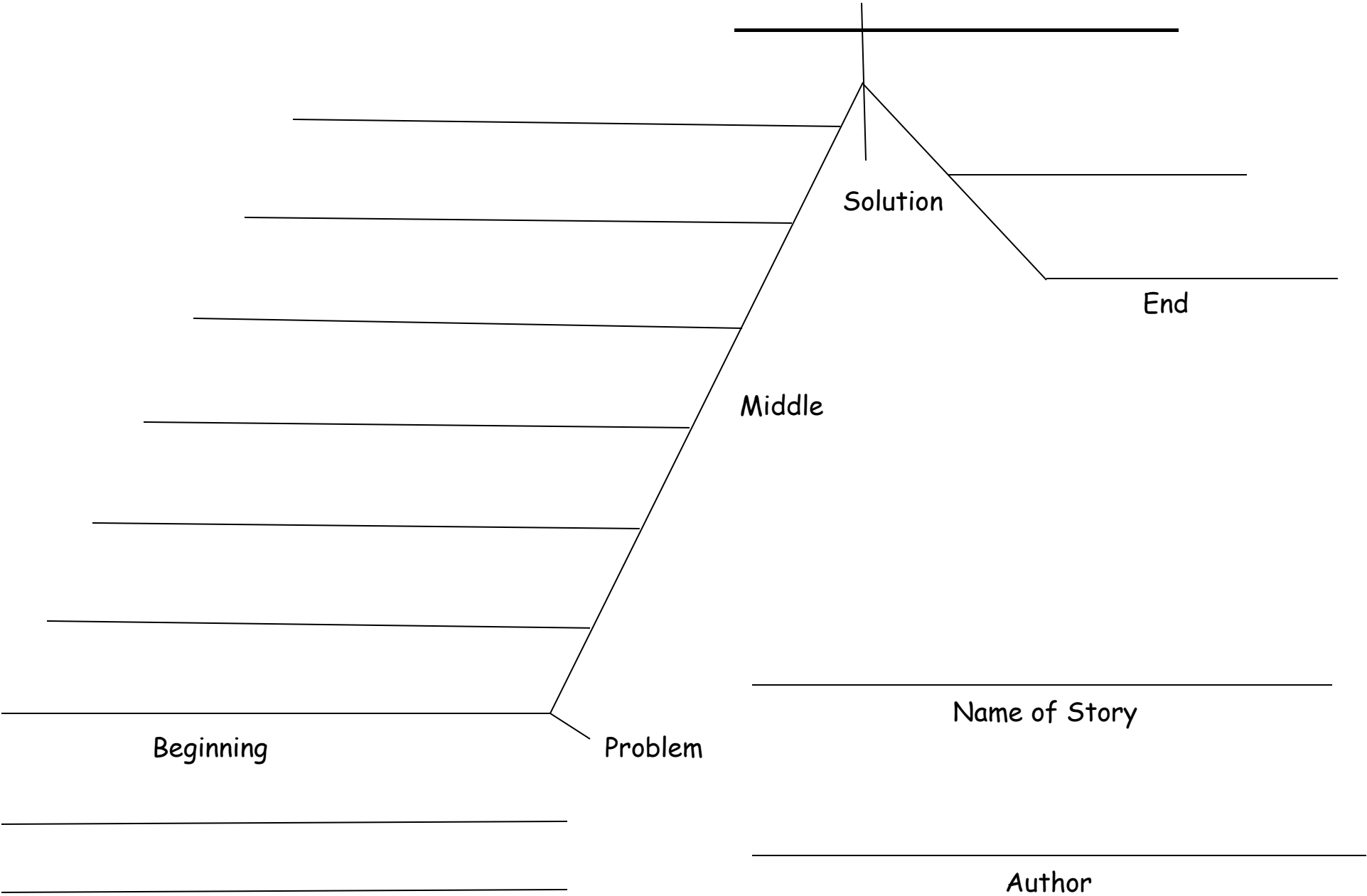
1. Combine a placement with one or more variation(s) and a specific gate and characteristic to achieve a truly unique voice.
2. Listen to voices around you or on TV and imitate them. You may find one you really like. Even if you don't do a very good imitation, you have still created a character voice!
3. When creating a voice for an animal, start with the sound the animal makes.

Free Advice

1. Take care of your voice! It is one of your greatest tools. If you try a voice and it hurts, don't use it!
2. Stretch your range. When you're driving by yourself, pretend you are a fire engine and make the sound of a siren. (However, it would not be wise to drive as though you are a fire engine!)
3. Work in front of a mirror. Seeing the puppet in front of you can make him/her seem more real and can help you create the puppet's own unique voice.
4. Avoid milk products at least 24 hours before a performance. Try lemon or apple juice instead!
5. Don't let yourself be limited by the above ideas. Voices can be as varied as the number of people in the world. Find the ones inside of you!

Story Map

Storyteller: _____



Beginning

Problem

Middle

Solution

End

Name of Story

Author