

## **Storytelling: The Benefits for Children**

October 2023 by Maryann Whitfield

Storytelling might seem old-fashioned and even irrelevant in a time dominated by screens and many kinds of devices. But don't be deceived. Storytelling is an incredibly powerful way for children to learn.

There are many ways to tell a story, and there are many kinds of stories to tell:

- A cardboard box full of photographs sits on the living room floor. Four children gather around it gleefully examining the pictures. One is a black-and-white photo of a man with two children sleeping in his arms. Their mother quietly begins telling the story of her father. "There was a kind, gentle young man who lived during the Great Depression. Times were hard and there were few jobs. When traveling to look for jobs he had to jump into a train's freight car. One day he slipped just as he jumped onto the car. His leg was severed..."

True stories of family members' lives entice children to imagine what life was like in a past time. These stories become a way of passing down a family's history and culture.

- A busy mother with two little girls gathers them near her on the bed for a bedtime story. The oldest says, "I don't want a book tonight. Please tell us a story about you when you were a little girl."

Her mother smiles. "When I was a little girl I begged my parents for a pony. I begged and begged. They didn't seem to be listening to me, and it made me so sad when I didn't get a pony right away. One day while I was playing, my mother called to me from the driveway, "Come get in the car. We're going to the stable..."

Children love to hear stories about their parents' and grandparents' lives, especially stories about their childhood. These stories let them imagine their parents as a child, like them. The loving relationship and bonds between parent and child are reinforced.

- A father puts on the soundtrack to *Star Wars*. As the music fills the room, Luke sits close to his father in the recliner. He knows he's about to hear a story filled with the adventures of space travelers who live in the future.

Storytelling helps children learn to listen as they follow the events and characters in the story. These stories provide rich opportunities for children to use their imagination and create pictures in their mind. The pictures a child creates become a personal movie unique to them. The skill of visualizing will help them become better listeners, readers, and writers.

- Papa Ron sits with his grandchildren Avery and Andrew. "Papa, please tell us the story about those three billy goats again," Avery implores. Avery and Andrew know their papa tells a lively version of the old folktale *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. They love the deep, gravely voice he uses for the Troll. Papa clears his throat and begins, "Once upon a time..."

Fairy tales like *Cinderella*, folktales like *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, and fables like *The Tortoise and the Hare* invite children into the world of make-believe while also helping them learn life lessons. The words and language structures used in these stories, such as, "*Once upon a time...*" expose children to language that is somewhat different than everyday spoken language. These experiences help them as they learn to read and write.

Children love to listen to stories told orally and there are many benefits to hearing stories told in this way. These moments help build relationships between the storyteller and the listener. Storytelling is a simple and beautiful way to help a child learn.

## **Read these episodes from the Literacy Gallery**

Maryann Whitfield – Papa Ron Tells a Story



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