

# The Forgotten Tool in ESL/ELA: Storytelling

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## Overview

Since the earliest times, storytelling has been utilized as a very appealing and vital tool in transferring knowledge of all kinds. According to several experts, stories have often been characterized by their very effective quality of providing students with an opportunity to get engaged in a unique and effective way in comparison to other methods.

Storytelling could be defined as one of the most meaningful and brilliant tools to describe ideas, people's experiences, values, ideas, and everyday life-lessons. That might be done through sharing and telling stories as well as narratives, which might arouse strong emotions and wisdom. Storytelling is a very ancient tool in history which has been used universally to communicate people's values, beliefs, ideas, and cultural traditions regardless of their educational level, or cultural and linguistic background. Moreover, storytelling has been utilized as a very successful tool or means for sharing and delivering information about history, science, government, and life. It is seen by many teachers as a very effective tool in teaching a foreign language, specifically to young learners.

The value of using storytelling in an ESL / ELA class to promote language development and stimulate learners' imaginations is well acknowledged. It is not limited to enhancing learners' listening, speaking and writing, but it can be a good catalyst for establishing a good rapport between the teacher and learners. This paper will explore the literature on storytelling, highlight its educational value and share some tips on how they to use stories in in both EFL / ELA settings among different learners.

## The Educational Value of Storytelling

Storytelling, if used effectively, might create a very powerful and appealing learning environment in the classroom. It



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develops language learning by enhancing and increasing learners' vocabulary and mastering new language structure. This tool of storytelling lets learners to share their own cultural background, experience their own potential and accordingly increase their self-esteem and self-confidence as learners of a second language.

Storytelling gives teachers the opportunity to create a comfort zone for their learners, while fostering a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom and facilitating language acquisition. Scott (1985) explains that storytelling offers several benefits:

- provides learners with models of story patterns themes, characters, and events that would help them in their own writing, speaking, and thinking;
- increases knowledge and understanding of other places, people, and beliefs;
- leads to discussions
- When using stories in an ESL/ELA class, teachers develop not only the social and interpersonal relationships amongst all partners, but also establish a relaxed zone with more mutual confidence.

### Choosing a Story

There are two options to find or create a story: The teacher can either choose tried and true stories or create a story that serves the objective of the lesson. To achieve the desired effect and get the maximum from a story, some elements ought to be taken into account:

- The teacher must believe in the story to create an enjoyable atmosphere; therefore, the teacher should select a story that students enjoy.
- The teacher should well-informed learners' likes/ dislikes, their attention span, their interests, background, etc...
- The story must make sense, highlighting a clearly defined theme with a well-developed plot connected to the world they live in. If the teacher decides to create a personal story, then it has to highlight positive events.

### Tips on Using Stories

The goal of teaching is no longer limited to passing knowledge, but now extends to improving learners' communicative skills

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in a globalized world, whereby learners are required to express themselves in each communicative circumstance. The following activities can contribute to helping learners develop basic interactive skills necessary for life and make them more active in the learning process in a stress-free environment.

### 1. *Finishing a Story*

Divide the students into groups. Each group is given a story opening and asked to finish the story in about 20 minutes. Then select one student from each group to tell their story in the class (orally). To avoid the liability that each group asks the best student to do the job, the storytellers are selected by drawing lots instead of being chosen by their peers. In so doing, each group will try to make the story as interesting as possible.

Example:

It was a dark and stormy night. I was alone at home and about to go to bed, when I saw a scary shadow figure at my window. "Who's there" I shouted..... (See complete story at the end of the article).

### 2. *Reporting*

Before coming to class, learners are asked to read newspaper articles (handed out by the teacher or chosen by the learners themselves), then report to their classmates what they read or found interesting.

### 3. *Picture Narrating*

This activity is based on several sequential pictures. Learners are asked to tell the story taking place in the sequential pictures.

Example: **The farmer and the Snake**



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### 4. *Clouded Story*

The teacher hands out a clouded story to learners, then elicits talk through questions, making sure to involve as many learners as possible. By the end of the talk, students try to reconstruct the story. One way to involve a great number of students is to hand a clouded story whereby the clouds are pasted differently.

Tip: If the exercise turns out to be difficult, the clouds can be removed gradually one by one.

Example:

A scholar hired a boatman to row him across the river. The boat was as long and slow as a snail. The scholar said, "Boatman," he called out, "Let's have a little conversation." Suggesting an interest to himself, he asked, "Have you ever studied phonetics or grammar?" "No," said the boatman, "I've no use for such tools." "Too bad," said the scholar. "You've wasted your life. It's useful to know such things." Later, as the rickety boat drifted into a narrow channel in the middle of the river, the boatman turned to the scholar and said, "Don't you know my mind that to you must seem dim, but, wise man, tell me, have you ever learned to swim?" "No," said the scholar, "I've never learned. I've immersed myself in thinking." "In that case," said the boatman, "you've wasted all your life. Alas, the boat is sinking." (See full story at the end of article).

### 5. *Proverb Story*

Proverbs are a valuable tool to enhance communication skills and can be used in various ways. The teacher suggests a proverb, and learners develop/find a story that surrounds the proverb and tell it.

Example:

Proverb: One bad turn deserves another.

Fable: The Fox and the Stork

Once a fox invited a stork to dinner. He prepared a tasty soup and served it in two flat plates. "Let us begin," said the fox and he soon finished drinking the soup. The stork could not sip the soup but simply sniffed its smell only. He said to himself, "I must teach a lesson to this fox very shortly."

Another day, the stork invited the fox to a dinner. He prepared a delicious soup and served it in a jug with a narrow neck. The fox tried to taste it but could not do so. Because of its realized that he was paid for his mischief. Learners can use this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBBymzF8hoI>.

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### 6. *Mixed Stories*

Sentences of two stories are muddled for learners to split, arrange, and retell or write the stories separately.

### 7. *Music and Storytelling*

Most stories are related to a topic. It can be a good idea to familiarize learners with the topic before reading, by using graphic organizers as a springboard to discuss the topic.

Example:

Topic: Juvenile Delinquency

Lesson: Reading

the lesson: Pre-reading

put: In the Ghetto by Dolly Parton ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_H5z\\_r1TMU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_H5z_r1TMU))

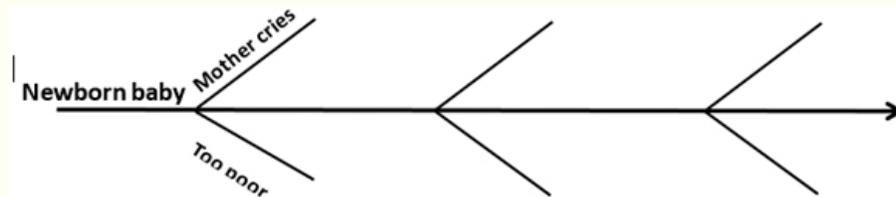
Strategy: Brainstorm-

ing

Tool: Fishbone graphic

Procedure: Learners listen to/read the story, team up to complete the fishbone and use it to retell the story or rewrite it using their own words.

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### 8. *Fractured Stories*

Fractured stories are rearranged to create new plots with different meanings or messages, different/ new characters, point of view, time and/or place but should be recognizable.

Example: The Tortoise and the Hare

The hare woke up and realized that he'd lost the race. The hare was disappointed at losing the race and he did some soul-searching. He realized that he'd lost the race only because he had been overconfident. If he had not taken things for granted, there's no way the tortoise could have beaten him. So he challenged the tortoise to another race. The tortoise agreed. This time, the hare went all out and ran without stopping from start to finish. He won by several miles.

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### 9. Comparing/Contrasting Original Stories with Fractured Ones

Learners are asked to find similarities and differences between original and fractured stories. Go to the link and find the fractured story of Little Red Riding Hood.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RksxFR-uMaI>

## Keys

### Exercise 1:

His note was directed instead to an elderly preacher's wife whose husband had passed away only the day before. When the grieving widow checked her email, she took one look at her messages, let out a piercing scream, and fell on the floor in a dead faint. At the sound, her family rushed into the room and saw this note on the screen:

Dearest Wife,

Just got checked in. Everything prepared for your arrival tomorrow.

P.S. Sure it is hot here.

### Exercise 2:

It was a dark and stormy night. I was alone at home and about to go to bed, when I saw a scary shadow figure at my window. "Who's there" I shouted. Suddenly there was a flash of lightning followed by thundershower. I saw a lion's face followed by a scary thunderous roar at the window. It was the lion from the local circus that had been announced missing on the television news channel. I felt very scared. I ran to my bed and pulled my blanket over my head. I started to shout for my parents but there was no reply. Then I remembered they were at a late night party.

### Exercise 3:

A scholar asked a boatman to row him across the river. The journey was long and slow. The scholar was bored. "Boatman," he called out, "Let's have a conversation." Suggesting a topic of special interest to himself, he asked, "Have you ever studied phonetics or grammar?" "No," said the boatman, "I've no use for those tools." "Too bad," said the scholar, "You've wasted half your life. It's useful to know the rules." Later, as the rickety boat crashed into a rock in the middle of the river, the boatman turned to the scholar and said, "Pardon my humble mind that to you must seem dim, but, wise man, tell me, have you ever learned to swim?" "No," said the scholar, "I've never learned. I've immersed myself in thinking." "In that case," said the boatman, "you've wasted all your life. Alas, the boat is sinking."

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