



Using Storytelling in Your Homeschool

by Sheila Carroll

“No, it’ll not do just to read the old tales out of a book. You’ve got to tell ‘em to make ‘em go right.”
From *Jack Tales* by Richard Chase

Would you like more zest and joy in your homeschool? Try storytelling. “But I not good at telling stories,” you say? After years of teaching people of all ages and from all walks of life to tell stories, I have come to the steadfast conclusion that absolutely anyone can tell a story—if they want.

Storytelling is for everyone. An advanced academic degree is not a prerequisite. Storytelling is a life skill, like reading or cooking or working cooperatively with others. Being a storyteller in everyday life means you can share a lively anecdote to help your child understand a difficult concept or win a look of love from your child by telling a funny story to lighten the mood.

By using storytelling in your homeschool you are bringing a great deal more than the enjoyment of stories. You are giving your children a foundation in orality. Just as literacy is the ability to read and write, orality is the ability to speak and listen. All four modes—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—make up human communication. Orality supports literacy. Storytelling is the highest form of orality.

The oral language experiences like storytelling are crucial to literacy because literacy is more than reading a series of words on paper. It is a set of relationships and structures, a dynamic system that one internalizes and maps back onto experience. A person's success in orality determines whether he or she will 'take' to literacy.

Put another way---the broader the range and depth of the oral experiences a child has in early childhood, the greater the range and depth of understanding they bring to the act of reading.

How can you bring a greater orality to your homeschool? Here a few simple, easy to do activities that require little or no preparation:

- Read aloud to your children everyday. Pick stories and books that have a strong plot and rich use of language. Avoid adaptations of well-known stories or books.
- Do simple nursery rhymes and finger plays with your children. If you have older children, teach them so they can tell to the younger ones. The Living Books Foundation Year also includes a complete collection of finger plays, or your local librarian would help you find a collection. A few

well-know rhymes are: “Jack and Jill”, “Hey, Diddle Diddle, the Cat and Fiddle”, “Little Miss Muffet”, and “The Itsy Bitsy Spider”

- Make storytelling a special time during the day or week.
- Tell stories about your own life. All children love to hear about when their parents were little.
- Tell simple well-known stories such as “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”, “Ten Little Monkeys” (say-along story). See if your children can tell parts of the story themselves.

These are just a few of the many ways to use storytelling. For a more thorough discussion about the importance of orality in learning, see the *Teaching Guide* in the Living Books Curriculum. To learn more about how to tell stories, try the following books or check your library.

Putting the World in a Nutshell: the art of the formula tale,
Sheila Dailey

This is a book I wrote for those who would like to learn simple, easy to tell stories in less than ten minutes

The Storyteller's Start-Up Book: Finding, Learning, Performing, and Using Folktales: Including Twelve Tellable Tales, Margaret Read MacDonald

This is an easy-to-understand handbook that gets you started telling.

The Way of the Storyteller, Ruth Sawyer

This is a classic of storytelling literature and one of my favorites that I go to for inspiration.

For websites, the two best are:

Story Net (www.storynet.org)

Story Telling Center (www.storytellingcenter.com)