MORE
STORYTIME
MAGIC

Kathy MacMillan and
Christine Kirker

with illustrations by Melanie Fitz

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Keeping the Magic in Storytime

Principles of Engagement in Storytimes

Engaging storytime audiences really means catching and holding the attention of kids and parents. The techniques for doing so vary widely from group to group and depend on the ages of the children, their familiarity with storytime, the tone set by the presenter, group dynamics, and sometimes just the vibe in the room. The best storytime presenters are the most flexible—the better you are at reading your group and adapting materials on the fly, the more likely you are to keep children and adults engaged throughout the program.

The good news is that there are some tried-and-true approaches that will help engage children at storytime! Here are a few indispensable tips:

- Plan to use a variety of formats: books, flannelboards, storyboards, puppets, storytelling, perhaps even videos.
- Make your program as participative as possible. Don’t expect kids to sit and listen the whole time. Ask them questions, and make time for their answers. Invite them to act out stories, dance along with the music, or help place items on the flannelboard.
- Make sure your storytime materials represent a variety—alternate books with songs, fingerplays, bounces and tickles (for babies and toddlers), riddles (for older children), and poems.
► Practice! Be prepared so you don’t flounder during the program. Any moment that you seem unsure what to do next is a moment when the group’s attention can waver.

► Take care of the basics—make sure everyone can see and hear what’s happening. A child who can’t access the story is much more likely to lose interest and cause mischief. Prevent problems by taking a moment to handle such issues up front.

► Display words to songs and fingerplays whenever possible by using a whiteboard, chalkboard, printout, or projector. This practice supports word recognition for children and encourages those who can read well (older children and adults) to sing along and participate.

► Don’t forget to introduce yourself at the beginning of the program! This is a small detail, but it will help children and parents feel welcome.

► Use music to set the mood. Play upbeat music as children enter the storytime area. If the group gets wild, play calming music. Play “winding down” music during cleanup time. (One of our favorite not-so-subtle musical hints is playing “Happy Trails” when it’s time to exit the room!)

► Plan to present the material that requires the most sustained attention at the beginning of the program, when children are fresh. Save any loud or large-movement activities (such as the parachute activity in chapter 11) for the end, as it can be difficult to regain the group’s focus afterward.

► No matter how well you have planned your program, stuff happens. Always be prepared with alternatives should your group be younger than expected, have difficulty settling, or be more sedate than expected.

► Alternate large-movement activities with sitting-down times, so that you do not tax children’s attention spans too much.

► Engage parents whenever possible, so that they don’t sit in the back and chatter. One way to involve parents is to solicit the kids’ help. For example, you might say, “Kids, let’s all make sure our grown-ups brought their happy faces. Did they? Let’s see them!”

► Encourage children to make name tags before the program. Use their names whenever possible. If your group size allows, sing a hello song that incorporates each child’s name. If a child is being disruptive, sometimes simply using his or her name can bring that child back into the group without incident. You might say, for example, “Daniel, what do you think the crocodile did then?”

► Have fun! If the children see you enjoying yourself, they will enjoy themselves, too.

***Aligning with Benchmarks and Standards***

Various standards and benchmarks have been a part of the education world for years, with many states recently adopting the Common Core State Standards, which identify
the reading, writing, and mathematics skills that students should develop at each grade level. Though there has been controversy about the expectations of the standards, particularly among early childhood educators, the fact is that teachers, students, and parents all over the country are being affected by the implementation of these standards. If libraries want to remain relevant, they need to provide resources that align with those the schools are using. In some cases, the decision about whether to fund a library initiative may even come down to how clearly its supporters can articulate the library’s alignment with the Common Core.

The good news is that you probably already are doing lots of things in your storytimes that support the aims of the Common Core—the trick is to learn how to speak the language of the standards so that educators, administrators, board members, and lawmakers can understand how storytime contributes to those standards.

In More Storytime Magic, we have tried to make it easier to align your programs with the Common Core by coding each entry to indicate which of the standards that activity supports. For example, IIA1 refers to the listing of the standards in appendix B:

II. Mathematics
   A. Counting and Cardinality
      1. Count to 100 by ones and by tens.

The standards listed in appendix B focus on the skills a child is expected to develop by the end of kindergarten. In coding the activities in this book, we have highlighted the skills each activity supports, with the recognition that preschoolers are still developing language and numerical literacy. Therefore, any counting activity, for example, would support a child’s development toward the standard just cited. Early childhood educators and librarians have long recognized that early literacy does not mean the ability to read; rather, early literacy involves the constellation of skills, such as letter knowledge, vocabulary, and understanding of print conventions, that support later reading and writing. Similarly, we must approach the standards with the understanding that they are simply targets and that the stories, songs, rhymes, and activities we use in storytime support the broader language and mathematics skills children will be expected to master later in kindergarten. Many of our storytime materials already do this by encouraging children to compare sizes, classify, use language to describe qualities of objects, and use mathematical vocabulary. Aligning your programs with the standards does not necessarily mean doing anything differently but, rather, learning to describe your storytime activities in the language of benchmarks.

See appendix B for a complete listing of the standards.

Making Storytimes Accessible to All

The mission of the public library includes service to all, and that in itself should mean libraries provide accommodations upon request. But such accommodations are also required by law in the United States; under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, public entities such as libraries are required to provide accommodations upon
request to people with disabilities. This requirement may mean adapting your program plan, or providing an alternate entry for people with mobility impairments, or providing sensory-friendly storytimes with lower volume and less visual stimulation for children on the autism spectrum. Perhaps the most common accommodation requested for storytimes is an American Sign Language interpreter.

Despite the fact that accommodations are required by law, many libraries are shockingly unprepared to respond to requests for interpreters or other accommodations. It is vital that all public services staff know what to do when a request comes in and that costs for accommodations are incorporated into the library's budget at the highest level. Accommodations should be viewed not as “extra” services but, rather, as the cost of making the library's services available to the entire community. All program publicity should include a note about accessibility, with clear instructions and contact information for requesting accommodations.

All children in storytime benefit from the provision of accommodations, whether they are using those accommodations directly or not. The presenter's attitude is vital to setting the tone for inclusion and respect for diversity. The techniques for engagement listed earlier in this chapter are often even more necessary when children with special needs are in attendance.

Ask the child's parent what accommodations may need to be made in order for the child to get the most out of storytime. Accommodations may include the following:

**Placement.** Location is particularly important for children who are deaf or hard of hearing—they should be seated near the front of the room for the best sightlines. The interpreter should be as close to the presenter as possible, so that the children can follow both. For children with mobility issues, find a place that is easy to get to and will allow for maximum participation.

**Getting and keeping children's attention.** Some children with special needs—and some without special needs, too!—may find it difficult to transfer their attention from one task to another. Getting children's attention may be as simple as using a visual signal, flickering the lights, singing a certain song, or repeating a special verse. These sorts of rituals provide comfort for all children, but they are particularly important in helping children with special needs make sense of their world.

**Assessing understanding.** Adults typically assess children's understanding by asking questions. When working with children with special needs, you may need to allow additional time for children to process your questions before answering. Because of differences in learning styles, allowing an extra moment before calling on someone to answer can level the playing field for typically developing children as well. Some children naturally take more time to process than others. Another simple, effective way to assess your group's understanding is to ask a question and have all the children respond simultaneously using a sign or gesture. For example, you might say, “If you think the fox will try to eat the grapes, touch your nose. If you think the fox will run away, touch your belly button.” Structuring questions in this way also offers equal access to students who communicate through an interpreter, as the interpreting of your message necessarily means the deaf child will get it slightly later than his or her hearing peers.

**Turn-taking.** Many children with special needs respond well to visual or tactile prompts, so consider using a “talking stick,” stuffed animal, or other special object that denotes whose turn it is to speak.
Placement of props and materials. You may need to keep materials out of reach or even out of sight until needed. Children on the autism spectrum may become easily overstimulated or distracted. Keep your storytime area uncluttered to maximize their focus.

Mobility. Throughout this book, we have included many movement activities. Young children learn best when their senses are engaged, and movement is a valuable way to engage them. However, if you have a child with limited mobility in your storytime, consider choosing movement activities for the entire group based on what that child can do, so that he or she is not left out.

In essence, every child is an individual with special needs. Looking at your storytime with this attitude means that you accept and include each child. Attitude is the most important factor in working with children with special needs. Remember that, even if a child is behind peers cognitively, that child is absorbing language and information about the world through interactions with you and other children. Caring and inclusive experiences lay the foundation for self-esteem and further academic development.

When in doubt, remember—focus on what a child can do, rather than what he or she cannot do.

The activities in this book are recommended for storytimes for ages 2 and up. Entries especially appropriate for toddler storytimes are starred.
My Body

1  All About Me

I have two eyes so I can see, (point to eyes)
And a nose to smell things around me. (point to nose)
My mouth can eat tasty treats, (point to mouth)
And my ears hear when my mom calls, “No more sweets!” (point to ears)

IC2, IE5

2  *Bandage Song  (to the tune of “My Darling Clementine”)

Pass out colorful stick-on bandages (or paper cutouts of bandages) and encourage the children to place the bandages on the body parts mentioned in the song.

I’ve got a bandage, got a bandage
Got a bandage on my nose.
I’ve got a cut so I need a bandage,
Need a bandage on my nose.
. . . on my leg
. . . on my tummy
. . . on my knee
. . . on my foot
. . . on my arm
. . . on my ear

**IC2, IE5**

### 3 *Feet*

Act out the words as you say the rhyme.

Feet can kick and feet can stomp.
Feet can run and feet can tromp.
Feet can walk and turn around.
Feet can be still and make no sound.

**IC2, IE5**

### 4 *Fingers*

Open fingers, close them tight. *(hold hands open, then make fists)*
Wiggle them out of sight. *(wiggle fingers and move behind your back)*
Raise those fingers way up high. *(raise hands above head)*
Now wave them slowly side to side. *(wave hands side to side)*
Hold them open, curl them closed. *(hold hands open, palms up, then curl fingers closed)*
Tap them gently on your nose. *(tap nose with both hands)*
Lace your fingers tight together. *(lace fingers together)*
Now drift them down like floating feathers. *(wiggle fingers in a downward motion)*
Fingers shake and fingers clap. *(shake hands, clap hands)*
Now fold them gently in your lap. *(fold hands in lap)*

**IC2, IE5**

### 5 *Hands*

Happy hands go clap clap clap. *(clap hands)*
Nervous hands go tap tap tap. *(tap fingers on leg)*
Gentle hands move slow, slow, slow. *(move hands gently as if petting an animal)*
Proud hands say “Way to go!” *(wave hands in air)*

**IC2, IE5**
6  *I Have Two*

I have two feet, *(point to feet)*
I have two eyes, *(point to eyes)*
I have two hands to wave up high. *(wave hands)*
I have two legs, *(point to legs)*
But just one nose, *(point to nose)*
I guess I only need one of those. *(shrug)*

*IC2, IE5*

7  *Salon Days* *(to the tune of "Here We Go 'Round the Mulberry Bush")*

Mime the actions in each verse as you sing the song.

This is the way my hair is washed,
Hair is washed, hair is washed,
This is the way my hair is washed,
Water, shampoo, suds!

This is the way my hair is cut,
Hair is cut, hair is cut,
This is the way my hair is cut,
Chop, snip, snap!

This is the way my hair is dried,
Hair is dried, hair is dried,
This is the way my hair is dried,
Vroom, zoom, blow!

This is the way my hair is styled,
Hair is styled, hair is styled,
This is the way my hair is styled,
Comb, brush, go!

*IC2, IE4, IE5*

8  *Spider Crawl*

Pass out pom-poms to use as spiders, or use your bent fingers to represent the spider crawling.

The spider's crawling on my leg,
Where will he go?
There is no use in asking me—
Only the spider knows! *(jump the spider to a different body part)*

Now the spider's on my ______ (let children identify body part)
Where will he go?
There is no use in asking me—
Only the spider knows! *(repeat, jumping spider to other body parts)*

*IC2, IE5*
9  **T-E-E-T-H Flannelboard/Magnetboard** *(to the tune of "B-I-N-G-O")*

Discuss proper tooth care and demonstrate how brushing removes plaque from teeth. Place the teeth on the board with the letters over the teeth. As you sing the song, use a toothbrush to “brush” a letter away before each verse.

I always take care of my teeth,
I brush them every day.
T-E-E-T-H,
T-E-E-T-H,
T-E-E-T-H,
I brush the plaque away.

Continue, gradually replacing letters with brushing sounds, until you have brushed away all the letters.

*IC2, IC3, IE5*

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**More Entries Related to This Topic**

*Ball Balance Song, p. 131  *Bath Time Hokey Pokey, p. 49  Bouncy Ball, p. 131  *Bubble on My Nose, p. 49  *Buzzy Bumblebee, p. 56  Doctor, Doctor, p. 123

Happy Dance, p. 151  *Raining on Me, p. 113  Rapunzel Rhyme, p. 78  *Shake Your Eggs, p. 152  *Spider Song, p. 58  *A Zoo on Our Heads, p. 28

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**Feelings**

10  **Are You Happy?** *(to the tune of "Frère Jacques")*

Act out the facial expressions and actions in each verse as you sing the song.

Are you happy? Are you happy?
Yes, I am. Yes, I am.
I’m smiling ’cause I’m happy,
Clapping ’cause I’m happy.
Yes, I am. Yes, I am.

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Are you sad? . . . frowning . . . crying . . .
Are you angry? . . . stomping . . . grumbling . . .
Are you frightened? . . . shivering . . . hiding . . .
Are you excited? . . . bouncing . . . grinning . . .

IE5, IE6

11 A Balloon’s Tale: A Prop Story

**Items needed:** balloon, pen, puppet or stuffed animal

**Preparation:** Draw a smiley face on a balloon. You may wish to inflate and then deflate the balloon ahead of time, so that it will be easier to blow up during the story.

Once upon a time, there was a little balloon. *(hold up deflated balloon)*
He was so excited about his first day of school that he danced all around.

*(make balloon wiggle)*
When he got to school, he met his teacher, who was so nice. It made him feel so grown-up to go to school. *(blow up balloon a little)*
Then he made some new friends! *(hold up puppet)*
That was so much fun that it filled him up even more. *(blow up balloon a little more)*
Then it was time for recess! He loved that. It made his smile grow so big! *(blow up balloon even more)*

He got to play on the swings and the slide, and his friends said, “We like you!” That made him feel great! Like he was full of smiles! *(blow up balloon even more)*
But then . . . then one of his friends said something not very nice, and do you know how that little balloon felt? *(let the air out of the balloon)*
He felt like all the good thoughts had gone out of him. His smile went away. The little balloon felt empty. His teacher saw how he was feeling, and she had a talk with the class about words. “Some words can hurt people and make them feel like all the good thoughts have gone out of them,” she said. The little balloon nodded.

*(make balloon nod)*
That was exactly how he felt.
“‘But,’” said his teacher, “‘some words can make us feel like we are getting filled up again with good things.’ She looked right at the balloon’s friend. ‘Can you think of any of those words?’”
“Sorry,” he whispered.

The little balloon started to feel a tiny bit better. *(blow up balloon a little bit)*
The teacher went on. “Can you think of more good words that help people feel better?” she asked. *(invite the children to suggest words; if desired, write the words on a board to reinforce reading and spelling skills)*
Then the teacher said, “One of my favorite words is ‘love.’ It’s the kind of word that gets bigger the more we share it!” *(write love on the back of the balloon and then blow it up)*
The little balloon saw that she was right! The word got bigger and bigger as his smile grew. *(tie a knot into the end of the balloon)*
“Come on, friends!” he said. “Let’s play!”

Play a tossing game with the balloon. Ask each child to share a happy word each time the balloon comes to him or her.
It’s a good idea to have a backup balloon ready in case the one you are using pops! If this happens, say, “And then he almost exploded with happiness!” Then take out the second balloon and resume the story.

IE1, IE5, IE6

12 Bear Is Sad: A Participation Story

Use a stuffed bear or puppet as the main character of this story.

My friend Bear is sad today. How can you tell when someone is sad? (take answers from the children and show how Bear is doing those things; possible answers: frowning, crying, slumped shoulders, sighing, not interested in playing)

What could we do to cheer Bear up? I know! Let’s sing a song! What song should we sing? (take suggestions from children, then select a song and have everyone sing it together)

There! Now do you feel better, Bear? (make Bear shake head)

Oh no! He’s still not feeling better. What else could we do to cheer Bear up? (take suggestions from the children, but if anyone suggests a hug or kiss, act doubtful; if needed, guide children with the following suggestions):

► Tickle him (let each child tickle the bear)
► Tell him a joke (select a child to tell a joke or tell one of your own)
► Dance (put on some music and have everyone dance)
► Jump up and down
► Play peek-a-boo
► Have a snack (eat pretend cookies)

After each attempt, ask Bear if he feels better and have him shake his head.

I don’t know, Bear, we have tried so many ways to cheer you up, but you are still sad. Can you all help me remember the different ways we tried to cheer Bear up? (with input from the children, list the activities in order; use words like “first, second, then, next” to emphasize sequencing)

What else could we possibly do to cheer Bear up? (if any of the children says “hug” or “kiss,” seize on that suggestion; if not, have Bear whisper in your ear)

A hug? A kiss? I guess it’s worth a try. (have each child give the bear a hug and a kiss)

Do you feel happier now, Bear? (make Bear nod head)

It worked! He feels happy! How can you tell when someone is happy? (guide suggestions if necessary: smiling, laughing, bouncing, wants to play)

Thank you for helping to cheer Bear up! Yay!

IE1, IE5, IE6

More Entries Related to This Topic

The Little Ant, p. 56

Oh No, Little Dragon! Flannelboard, p. 77

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*Pumpkin Feelings Magnetboard Song, p. 121
*Small Bunny’s Blue Blanket Scarf Story, p. 135

Senses

13 *Night Owl Flannelboard and Sound Story


Night Owl listens to the sounds of the night, waiting for his very favorite one: his mother returning home! As you tell the story, play clips of the sounds that Night Owl hears and ask the children to identify them. You can find a collection of sound clips to download for the story at www.storytimestuff.net.

IC2

14 Senses Song (to the tune of “My Darling Clementine”)

Begin by inviting the children to list things they can smell. Write their suggestions on a whiteboard, chalkboard, or flipchart paper and use them in the second verse of the song.

I’ve got a nose, got a nose,
Got a nose right here. *(point to nose)*
And my nose is how I smell,
Got a nose right here.

With my nose, I smell ________,
I smell ________, I smell ________,
With my nose, I smell ________,
I smell ________, I smell ________,

Repeat the activity with other senses:

I’ve got eyes . . . and my eyes are how I see . . .
I’ve got ears . . . and my ears are how I hear . . .
I've got a tongue . . . and my tongue is how I taste . . .
I've got fingers . . . and my fingers help me touch . . .

IC2, ID2, IE1, IE5

Another Entry Related to This Topic
Transportation Sounds Game, p. 164

We Are All Different

15 I Am Special (to the tune of “Frère Jacques”)

I am special, I am special,
So are you, so are you.
We are both unique, we are both unique,
It is true, it is true!

IC2

16 Liking Song (to the tune of “Good Night Ladies”)

On a whiteboard, chalkboard, or a large piece of flipchart paper, make a list of things the children like, such as ice cream, kittens, baseball, and so on. Invite each child to add something to the list. If your group is older, you may wish to have the children write their items themselves, for writing practice. With younger children, write the name of each item on the list, spelling it out loud as you go. Then teach the children the song and invite them to sing it together, pointing to each person as you say his or her name, and pointing to the items on the list.

Katie likes kittens.
Bobby likes reading.
Tara likes bowling.
River likes hot dogs.

Before you sing each verse, review the children’s names and the words on the list that will be in the song. If you need extra items to fill out the final verse, add yourself or items that everyone likes, such as “storytime” and “the library.” For example:

Jenny likes porcupines.
Miss Kathy likes trains.
We all like the library.
We all like storytime!

ID2, IE1, IE5
17 What I Like

Pass out one star to each child. Then place the ice cream cone, cookie, and pretzel on the flannelboard. Invite each child to come forward and place a star next to the treat he or she would like best. Then count how many stars are next to each treat. On a whiteboard, chalkboard, or piece of flipchart paper, write the name of each treat and the number of children who voted for it. Point out that writing the word and showing a picture are different ways of showing the foods, just like the stars and writing the numbers are different ways of showing amounts. Ask questions such as the following:

► Which treat has the most stars?
► Which treat has the fewest stars?
► Does the ice cream have more stars than the cookie, or fewer?

Repeat the game with different kinds of drinks (milk, orange juice, water) and different kinds of toys (ball, blocks, teddy bear). Add the new items to the list and ask questions about each set as you do so. When you have finished all three sets of items, encourage the children to look at the whole list. Review the items and the numbers next to them. Ask questions about the whole list, such as the following:

► Which item got the most votes?
► Which item got the fewest votes?
► Did any of the items get the same number of votes?
► Did the orange juice get more votes than the ball, or fewer?

IIA1, IIA3, IIA4, IIA5, IIA6, IIA7

Another Entry Related to This Topic

*Apple-Dapple, p. 120
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