

Repetition & Sequences

Repetition and Sequences are the lifeblood of traditional tales. Apart from anything else, the patterns they make help the teller retain and remember the story. They also help the audience follow the story, give them an opportunity to join in and anticipate what will happen next.

Most people are aware of the 'rule of 3'. This doesn't only happen in stories involving three brothers or three sisters on a quest in which the first two fail but the third (and usually the youngest) is victorious. It also happens in many other ways: the house of straw, the house of sticks and the house of bricks in the 3 Little Pigs; the porridge, the chairs and the beds in Goldilocks and the 3 Bears. In fact Goldilocks has 'nested threes' - each time when the bears see the porridge, then the chairs and then the beds you get Daddy Bear saying 'someone's been', Mummy Bear saying 'someone's been' and Baby Bear saying ' someone's been

Repetition is so deeply embedded in the audience's expectations that the storyteller can use this to their advantage to refocus the audience (or maybe raise a laugh) by changing the exact wording of one of the later repeats.

In traditional African stories, repetition is used to stress specific aspects. Eg you will find in written versions of these stories repetition such as 'so long, so long, so long'. A more European way to do this would be to say, 'long, so long, sooooo long'.

Repetition can also lead to sequences. Here you can encounter the mirror that becomes a lake, the comb that becomes a wood and the lump of salt that becomes a mountain when the hero and heroine throw these in the path of the pursuer.

In the example story of Mrs. Ellis the well overflows to become a pond, a lake and then a mere.

(1) As a group, listen to the story at www.mythstories.com/Dez2.mp3

(2) Talk about where repetition and sequencing was used and see if you can identify any other opportunities for it. As this is a lengthy story, there is a summary outline below:

Mrs. Ellis

Now there is plenty of water in North of Shropshire, it wasn't always so.

Mrs Ellis was a lucky woman with a spring in her garden
Tasted like your favourite flavour
Neighbours came round and were given a thimbleful.

Then came a sunny dry summer

Only spring left was Mrs Ellis'
Everybody wanted her water.

Thimblefuls are one thing, bucketfulls quite another
Mrs. Ellis wouldn't share

The water kept welling up quicker than she could use it
Water crept over her garden
She didn't change her mind

Went into the kitchen
Water crept into her kitchen - Pond
She didn't change her mind

Went upstairs and into the bedroom.
Water crept up to her bedroom - Lake
She didn't change her mind

Went up the ladder into the loft
Water crept up to the loft - Mere
Changed her mind
But too late

Down at the bottom of that deep, deep mere lives a little old lady, Mrs. Ellis. She lives there with her little spring, which filled that mighty mere which took her name, Ellis's mere, or Ellesmere as we call it today.

(3) Get the group to retell the tale, putting in their own ideas for the repetitive and sequential phrases, or simply using the ones that the storyteller put in there.

Below is the outline of the Grimm's story of The Elves & The Shoemaker. Like all Grimm's stories, there are many versions.

Get the group to build this story using repetition, sequencing and – to reinforce the last session – incorporate some speech and dialogue, in the conversations between the Shoemaker and his wife.

Elves and the Shoemaker

Part One:

A Shoemaker through ill-luck had become poor.
Should he buy leather, or food?

(Chance for discussion with wife, to build their individual characters)

He bought leather for one pair of shoes
Cut them out, left them on workbench to sew the next day and went to bed
In the morning found a pair of beautifully crafted shoes ...

... and in came a buyer, who paid twice the normal price
So the shoemaker and his wife ate well

and he bought leather for two pairs of shoes
Cut them out, left them on workbench to sew the next day and went to bed
In the morning found two pairs of beautifully crafted shoes ...
... and in came two buyers, who both paid twice the normal price
So the shoemaker and his wife ate well and

and he bought leather for four pairs of shoes
Cut them out, left them on workbench to sew the next day and went to bed
In the morning found four pairs of beautifully crafted shoes ...
... and in came four buyers, who each paid twice the normal price
So the shoemaker and his wife ate well and ... and ...

and he bought leather for eight pairs of shoes
Cut them out, left them on workbench to sew the next day and went to bed

Part Two:

One evening, when he had become rich, shoemaker and wife decide to find out who has been helping them.
(chance for second discussion with wife, to reinforce their characters)

They hide in room and watch.
(this hiding happens again later, so create some phrases that can be repeated. Eg: creeping down the stairs, peeping through a hole in the door)

At midnight two elves come in – carrying hammer, nails, needle & thread – but they had no clothes on!

Part Three:

Next morning wife suggested she make the elves shirts, coats, vests and trousers and knit them some stockings/socks and the shoemaker makes them shoes.
(chance for third discussion)

Over the next few days they create masterpieces from the finest materials, wanting to show their gratitude.

Part Four:

One evening, do not leave out the cut leather, instead leave the clothes.

They hide and watch
(opportunity to repeat phrases from earlier hiding scene, with different emotions)

“Now we are boys so fine to see,
Why should we longer cobblers be?”

Elves leave, never to return

But the shoemaker’s fortunes have been restored and he and his wife live happily ever after.

Work on the repeat phrases

(1) Get the group to put each of the phrases:

1. He bought leather for one pair of shoes

Cut them out, left them on workbench to sew the next day and went to bed

2. In the morning found a pair of beautifully crafted shoes ...
... and in came a buyer, who paid twice the normal price

3. *So the shoemaker and his wife ate well*

.... in their own words, and suggest ways the final phrase can be augmented to show the developing wealth of the shoemaker and his wife.

(2) Get them to retell these

- In threes – one telling each phrase, remembering to increase the number of shoes/buyers/what the money is spent on regularly each time
- In threes – using the pyramid (*below*) as an aide memoire – each telling all three phrases, with the first teller choosing the words and the second and the third carefully repeating the same words with the appropriate augmentations.
- In threes – each telling all three phrases, with the first teller telling in full and the second and the third shortening the phrases so they still convey the meaning to the audience, with the appropriate augmentations.
- As individuals in a long line – each telling the next phrase in the story. This needs very careful listening whilst remembering the place in the story so the augmentations are added in the right order.

.... And in any other combinations they will find fun.

Generate Vocabulary for the two hiding scenes

Discuss how the man and his wife will be feeling in each situation, get the group to write down the words they want to use in each.

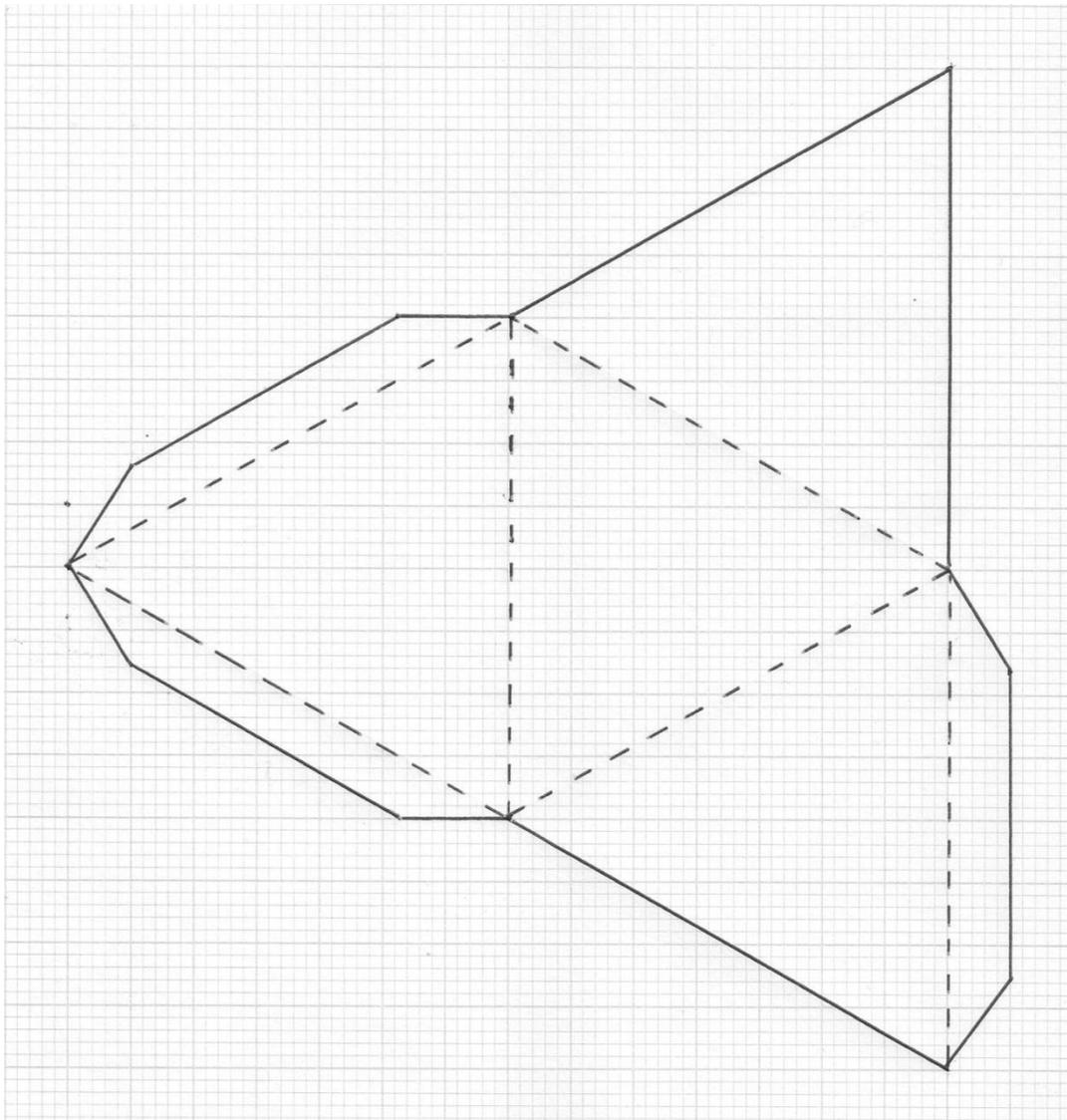
Then visualise the scene, concentrating on the spot the man and his wife will be hiding and their view of the workbench, and make sure the group shares the image – perhaps draw a group picture.

Finally ask the group to tell the first hiding scene (possibly saying one sentence each in turn). Then get the group to tell the second using as many

of the same phrases as possible but describing the different emotions of the people involved and outcome.

These sections 'anchor' the story and the group can now tell the tale, improvising the other parts.

A Pyramid - You can build a pyramid with pictures or words on each face to manipulate as an aide memoire for the repeat phrases and patterns, when telling the story. This can be particularly helpful for young storytellers, who tend to be rather self-conscious. The pyramid gives them and their audience something to look at.



To assemble the pyramid:

- Print out on card
- Cut round solid lines
- Score dotted lines
- Fold dotted lines inwards and glue tabs