

Characterization

Storytelling is not merely telling a story as an outsider. The storyteller should get involved in the story, and move between description, narrative and dialogue, not only with their voice but with their stance and gestures.

This is not the same as acting. The storyteller does not act out the story as a character. They are the one voice on stage; they have to be narrator and all the characters and most importantly, themselves sharing a story they love with the audience.

The storyteller must stay in command of centre stage and keep the audience's focus on them. They have to show the audience the whole story, including communicating the essence of each of the different characters. Small, aimed movements, like a change in their stance or a gesture, or a change of voice, can amplify the entrance or exit of a character's intervention in the story, acting as signposts helping the audience better follow the plot. **The storyteller never becomes an actor, but characterization is a key tool of good storytelling.**

Now let's play some games, which explore these ideas.

1. Princess and Pauper

First STAND like a Princess

Then GESTURE like a Princess

Make it clear that the gesture can be arm, head or whole body movements but must be done standing still. (Some storytellers do move about the stage, and sometimes do this in character, but don't encourage beginners to do this. It is extremely difficult to do well).

Then SAY 'Good morning, how are you?' like a Princess

Then:

First STAND like a Pauper

Then GESTURE like a Pauper

Make it clear that the gesture can be arm, head or whole body movements but must be done standing still. (Some storytellers do move about the stage, and sometimes do this in character, but don't encourage beginners to do this. It is extremely difficult to do well).

Then SAY 'Good morning, how are you?' like a Pauper

Let the group do this in turn, so they can see how each other tackle the task and share and learn from each other. They will find there is no correct way to do this - and nor should there be - because storytelling is all about each

individual storyteller finding the best way for them to communicate with the audience.

2. The Shared Lunch

A **'shared lunch'** is a typical plot device which allows the hero/heroine to be given the solution to their problem as a result of an act of generosity on their part. Often the piece of advice/answer the hero/heroine is given makes no sense at all until later in the story.

As individuals, think up an encounter between the Princess and the Pauper in which the Pauper begs for food and the Princess agrees to share her lunch. Make it short, with a few sentences of narration and a couple of sentences of dialogue per character.

TELL this to the rest of the group, trying to alter your stance, your gesture and your voice to help the audience follow the change from narrator to Princess to Pauper.

3. The Old Woman and the Pig

(You can read the story below)

TELL the story to the group, without any characterization.

TALK about the old woman and discuss what the group think she is really like (her character, not her appearance). How would she stand, gesture and speak?

Split the group into pairs or small teams and ask them to find stances, gestures and voices for all the other characters in the story, including inanimate objects like the stick and the rope.

Retell the story as a team. Try this a few times, to give everybody a chance to be something different.

The Old Woman and the Pig

An old woman was sweeping her house, and she found a sixpence.

'What,' said she, *'shall I do with this sixpence? I will go to market, and buy a little pig.'*

And so she did.

As she was coming home, she came to a stile and said

'Piggy! Piggy! Get over the stile, or I shan't get home tonight.'

But the pig said *'No'*

She went a little further, and she met a dog. So she said:

'Dog! dog! bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'

But the dog said 'No'.

She went a little further, and she met a stick. So she said: *'Stick! stick! beat dog! dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'*

But the stick said 'No'

She went a little further, and she met a fire. So she said:

'Fire! fire! burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'

But the fire said 'No'

She went a little further, and she met some water. So she said: *'Water! water! quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'*

But the water said 'No'

She went a little further, and she met an ox. So she said:

'Ox! ox! drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'

But the ox said 'No'

She went a little further and she met a butcher. So she said: *'Butcher! butcher! kill ox; ox won't drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'*

But the butcher said 'No'

She went a little further, and she met a rope. So she said:

'Rope! rope! hang butcher; butcher won't kill ox; ox won't drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'

But the rope said 'No'

She went a little further, and she met a rat. So she said:

'Rat! rat! gnaw rope; rope won't hang butcher, butcher won't kill ox; ox won't drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'

But the rat said 'No'

She went a little further, and she met a cat. So she said:

'Cat! cat! kill rat; rat won't gnaw rope; rope won't hang butcher; butcher won't kill ox; ox won't drink water; water won't quench fire; fire won't burn stick; stick won't beat dog; dog won't bite pig; piggy won't get over the stile; and I shan't get home tonight.'

But the cat said, *'If you will go to the cow, and fetch me a saucer of milk, I will kill the rat.'*

So away went the old woman to the cow.

And the cow said to her: *'If you will go to the haystack, and fetch me a handful of hay, I'll give you the milk.'*

So away went the old woman to the hay-stack; and she brought the hay to the cow.

As soon as the cow had eaten the hay, she gave the old woman the milk; and away she went with it in a saucer to the cat.

As soon as the cat had lapped up the milk:

the cat began to kill the rat;

the rat began to gnaw the rope;

the rope began to hang the butcher;

the butcher began to kill the ox;

the ox began to drink the water;

the water began to quench the fire;

the fire began to burn the stick;

the stick began to beat the dog;

the dog began to bite the pig;

the little pig jumped over the stile;

and so the old woman got home that night.

It helps put the right words into a character's mouth if you know more about the character's motivation and attitudes.

4. In the Psychiatrist's Chair

As a group example chose a well-known tale like Goldilocks. Be the Psychiatrist and ask the group to respond as Goldilocks. Ask questions that are directly relevant to the story: eg:

'Goldilocks, do you make a habit of looking round other people's homes uninvited?'

'Do you like porridge?'

and 'What time do you normally go to bed?'

Break into pairs, with one being the psychiatrist and one the character and try out the technique with other well-known characters; eg: the Big Bad Wolf, Cinderella, Rumpelstiltskin.

Traditional tales often use stereotypes; the hero, the villain, the wicked step-mother, eldest daughter/son, middle daughter/son, youngest daughter/son. We know the step-mother is wicked; she is called the wicked step-mother. The picture of the character is painted by their very name.

Traditional stories can be developed by putting 'flesh on the bones' of these stereotypes.

5. Stereotype Hot Seating

Ask the group to role-play the wicked stepmother and question them, eg:

'Can you tell me about each of your daughters?'

'What are your hopes for their futures?'

'What's your idea of a perfect husband for each of them?'

'How do you want to spend your old age?'

Some characters in traditional tales seem unidimensional, attributing a stereotype to them makes it easier for the group to develop him as a rounded character when telling the tale.

For example: the Prince in Cinderella (who is traditionally handsome and wears a crown). Tell your group that he is the Hero. Hero denotes bravery, courage, strength of purpose, nobility of spirit, a dashing force for good. The Prince will turn from the passive character, who dances with Cinderella and then sends out his servant with the glass slipper, to a 'quest' character who actively searches for his lost love, so much easier to tell in an engaging story.