

Storytelling with Pictures

This unit has been adapted from the book *Draw and Tell* by Richard Thompson, Annick Press, 1988.

Summary: This activity involves students in learning a simple story and the elements of a picture that go with parts of the story to create a complete drawing, and then practicing both of them together in order to present to an audience.

Taken to the next level, i.e., writing an original story and creating simple visual elements to create a picture related to the story, it is also an excellent tool for developing creative thinking skills ability.

Grade Level: This activity is not primarily guided by grade level; it is for use with students who are already good at storytelling, or who enjoy drawing/doodling, or who are good at both, since it incorporates both skills. However, there are key concepts within all three grade levels' IRP key concepts which can be developed through this unit.

IRP Key Concepts (all middle school grades)

- Oral Language:
 - o Organizing information and practicing delivery
 - o Considering audience when presenting
- Reading and Viewing:
 - o Determining importance of ideas and information
 - o Constructing and confirming meaning of text, using structures and features
- Writing and Representing:
 - o Selecting a genre and form depending on purpose

Lesson One

Students should be gathered around either an easel with blank paper or the whiteboard.

- Begin by asking if they recall having stories (picture books) read aloud to them when they were young. What stories do they recall? Was the experience pleasant? Did they share the same books over and over, and if so, did they ever tire of them? Why or why not?
- Tell the story of “The Sleeping Beauty” aloud, drawing pictures of the key elements of the story as it progresses.
- Explain that the process of making pictures as you tell a story is called making a *story map* – does anyone remember doing this in their classes when they were in their elementary schools? The pictures needn’t go together to make a bigger picture, but you should be able to tell the story back to yourself or explain another’s story map to yourself or someone else.
- Explain that the students’ task in this unit will be twofold: we will begin with having them learn to tell a story aloud to an audience, adding pictures of elements from the story to make a story map.
- Discuss the process of picking out those elements of the story that lend themselves to making pictures; and the story map format (linear or circular, depending on the story). Emphasize that artistry in drawing is not important, just that the element be recognizable.
- Have them draw names of well-known stories out of a cup; read aloud; allow time for ONE trade with another student.
- Give students pieces of scrap paper. Split students up through the room and/or corridor, and have them begin by telling the story to themselves, drawing pictures of elements in the story.

Lesson Two

- Come together again and discuss the pictures each student has chosen for their stories. Does anyone have any suggestions for additional pictures? The person to whom the suggestions are being made is free to accept or reject them for consideration.
- Give students pieces of 11 X 17 paper for practicing putting together their story elements while telling the story aloud to themselves. Again, emphasize that the drawings need only be recognizable sketches, not detailed works of art

- When everyone has finished telling/drawing the story, have them pair up, flip over their paper and repeat it again to their partners.
- Things to discuss about storytelling to a group: pace; volume; enunciation; tone of voice; body language; eye contact with the audience; physical placement of elements so that they connect with each other to form a picture.

Lessons Three and Four (depending on the number of students)

- Have a practice session with all the students, reminding them of the presentation elements previously discussed.

Next Lesson

- Arrange with classroom teachers to have students do presentations to small groups of their classmates. Provide an easel or a piece of the whiteboard for each student storyteller.
- Debrief after the presentations – what did they feel went well? What areas, if any, would they like to work on to polish?

Next Lesson

- Explain that you're going to read another story aloud to them, but that it has a twist – instead of making a story map, the pictures you'll be drawing are going to fit together to form a bigger picture!
- Tell the first story from Richard Thompson's book, "Alexander", aloud, pausing at the appropriate places in the script to draw the pictures as outlined in the book.
- Discuss the story and the method of telling it by incorporating smaller pictures into a larger picture. How effective is it?
- Analyze the pictures as they relate to the story, and discuss the following questions:
 - Which came first, the story or the picture? [the story]
 - How did the author create the big picture? [tell or read the story aloud, making pictures of the phrases and details as it goes along. Add in details that aren't necessarily part of the story, but that are not out of keeping with it, e.g., the grandma's house was gotten to through the forest, but was there a stream or a pond beside the house? Adding it doesn't affect the outcome of the story]
 - How did the author combine the smaller pictures into a big picture?
 - This picture fits in with the story – are there possibly some other pictures that could've fit in, too? [this is a creative thinking activity, doesn't mean that the elements of the story could necessarily be woven into the story – it's just meant to get students thinking aloud]

- Tell the story again, and ask a student to come up to the board/easel and draw the elements in the appropriate places. Alternatively, provide paper for each student to draw the pictures while you tell the story, or give them each a marker and some space at the whiteboard.
- Next lesson, we will give you each a story to practice reading aloud and drawing the pictures that go with it.

Next Lesson

- Hand out copies of stories to the students (a different one for each student).
- Ask students to read their stories silently to themselves first, tracing the individual parts of the picture as they are added.
- After everyone has done this, ask for volunteers to read their stories aloud in front of the others. Do the drawings for them as they read the story, but instruct them that they must read the instructions about when and what to draw aloud for you).
- Each student will have, in their handouts, a complete diagram with numbers. Have students trace the picture with their fingers, starting at number 1 and going to the end, several times, until they are comfortable with it and can do it fluidly (this may take some longer than others to accomplish; if it helps, have them say the labels on the diagram parts aloud quietly while they trace)
- Students should practice again reading the story aloud while tracing the whole diagram; if they feel confident, give them a piece of blank paper and have them practice reading the story and drawing the diagram pieces. (This will require that students spread out in the room and/or hallway, to have space to practice without noise conflicts).
- After time has been provided for practice, regroup and discuss the storytelling/drawing process – what's difficult about it? What's easy about it? Does anyone have any tips or suggestions for others to make it go more smoothly? Go over the elements of storytelling reviewed above (things to discuss).
- We will be, again, presenting these stories to our classmates [and possibly also to other students at Sidney Elementary, if this can be arranged – this would be a voluntary exercise on the part of our students, as some of them may be nervous performing in front of strangers]
- Homework: practice at home, either by yourself or on a family member.
- NOTE: there may be students who want to write their own stories and create pictures to go with them. This is great!, but should be completed on their own time and then brought to class to share with the others.

Next Lesson or Two

- Have as many students as possible practice telling their stories while drawing the diagram. After each performance, do a group debrief, offering positive comments and suggestions for areas to work on, if necessary, especially all the elements discussed in the practice sessions (pace, volume, eye contact with audience, etc.)

Last Two Lessons

- Arrange with classroom teachers to have students do presentations to small groups of their classmates. Provide an easel or a piece of the whiteboard for each student storyteller.
- Debrief after the presentations – what did they feel went well? What areas, if any, would they like to work on to polish?