

## **BEYOND THE CHALKBOARD: USING PROPS**

**Thanks to Terrance V. McArthur, Librarian and Professional Storyteller, for Insights and Ideas  
Compiled by Rachel Hedmanac**

Storytelling breathes with life and emotions through the oral tradition. Yet, even in the beginning of times, cultures have incorporated visual elements to connect more deeply with the audience than if only words were used.

### **Importance Of Props**

- Encourage learning in all the types of learning modalities such as the auditory learner, visual learner, and sensory learner
- Provide mind stimulation rather than usual sights and sounds from TV and videogames
- Understand plot and create organization
- Develop concepts
- Focus on presentation so as to remember for future use and application
- Turn story into mystery and encourage audience/students to ask questions

### **Questions To Wonder Before Using Props**

- Does the prop draw attention to the story or to the storyteller?
- Does the prop showcase the story or showcase the talent?
- Would the audience/student remember the prop or the story?
- Have you practiced with the prop so as to tell the story smoothly?
- What sense(s) do you wish to enhance by using the prop?
  - Smell? Sound? Taste? Touch? Sight?

### **When To Use Props**

- Beginning
    - Attention-getter (especially with young children although good for all ages)
    - Introduction as you as the storyteller/teacher
  - Middle
    - Part of story to enhance telling
    - Participation from audience/students
  - End
    - Provide symmetry to presentation of prop when used at the beginning
    - Create memory after the verbal version of story told
    - Visualize result shared through the story
      - Ex. Story of Invention of Cup Ice Cream Cone vs. Waffle Cone
- \*\*Use props sparingly so it does not turn into a show-and-tell and detract from the purpose of your presentation
- \*\*If telling more than one story, avoid telling stories with props back-to-back

### **Kinds Of Props**

- Chalkboards, Flannel Boards, Magnetic Boards
- Apron (with pockets or as a place with Velcro material)
- Flip Charts, Slides
- Overhead Projector (shadow puppetry)
- Big Books
- Objects
- Music
- Magic
- Puppets

### **Where To Find Props**

- Discount/Dollar Stores
- Attic/Basement
- Yard Sales
- Antique Stores
- Toy Stores
- Vintage Clothing Stores (hats, costumes, etc.)

### **Practice, Practice, Practice**

- Write key words of story to help remember on the object or back of flip chart
- Be confident in handling the prop versus looking it's the first time being used

### **Misuse Of Props**

- Too many props (One prop is a good number)
  - Splits attention for each extra prop used
  - Avoid by keeping many props in box and take out when needed and put back and take out the next prop or cover the items with a sheet
- Uncontrolled environment
  - Analyze if you want audience/students to pick out items (such as musical instruments) or if the freedom will warrant disruptions
  - Search for props that are indestructible in case an audience member/student runs up to touch it

### **Fun Factor**

Although preparation and practice will bring oohs and ahs, you must have fun with the experience. Your audience/students will know if you take no pleasure in using the prop(s) and will reflect the same attitude. At the same time, you may have fun with the prop but may not bring excitement for the audience/students. Know to whom you are sharing these stories to and respect the story. Enjoy!

### **End Thoughts**

“There are many [storytellers] who never use any kind of a prop, whereas, there are just as many more who do use one, two, or a variety of props when telling. It is really up to the teller whether or not and when or how he or she will make use of props.”

—Chris King, Professional Storyteller

“You may not have the training, talent, or skill of an Indonesian puppet master, but I promise you that your children will long remember the show you put on in your library or classroom, just as I remember the power of a play in a language I couldn't even begin to understand.”

—Caroline Feller Bauer, Professional Storyteller and Author