BEYOND THE CHALKBOARD: USING PROPS
Thanks to Terrance V. McArthur, Librarian and Professional Storyteller, for Insights and Ideas
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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

**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