Story Retelling in the Elementary Classroom

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Story Retelling in the Elementary Classroom

Abstract
Story retelling is a natural approach to teaching language, for it centers on whole units of language. As an instructional strategy, story retelling can promote children's sense of story and oral and written language abilities. This paper describes procedures for fostering story retelling, accompanied by different means of story retelling and suggested pieces of quality literature.
Story Retelling in the Elementary Classroom

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Entitled: Story Retelling in the Elementary Classroom

Story retelling is a natural approach to teaching language, for it centers on whole units of language. As an instructional strategy, story retelling can promote children's access to story has been approved as meeting the research project requirement for oral and written language abilities. This paper explores the Degree of Master of Arts in Education. procedures for fostering story retelling, accompanied by different means of story retelling and suggested pieces of quality literature.

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Story retelling is a natural approach to teaching language, because it centers on whole units of language. As an instructional strategy, story retelling can promote children's sense of story and oral and written language abilities. This paper describes procedures for fostering story retelling, accompanied by different means of story retelling and suggested pieces of quality literature.
The purpose of every encounter with text for readers should be understanding (Clay, 1991). A major trend in instructional development in the language arts reflects this purpose. Many language arts programs are focusing on children creating meaning while engaged in the language processes within the functions of language. To facilitate children's involvement in the language processes, whole units rather than fragments are presented. Whole units provide meaningful experiences related to the genuine functions of language. Studying bits of language is not only meaningless but abstract, resulting in difficult learning experiences (Goodman, K., 1988).

One instructional strategy that centers on whole units of language is the retelling of stories. Retelling is said to be a naturalistic approach to teaching language because the function of telling about something is engaged in by most children (Cambourne, 1988). Story structure is an awareness of the elements.

Story retelling is the reconstruction of a literature experience. Retelling can be an oral interpretation of a traditional, contemporary, or a personal story. It is not meant to be a memorization, but a recalling of the elements of a story. Retellings can occur following listening to or reading a story. Listeners or readers tell what they remember about the story. Retellings can be done through speaking, dramatizing, writing, or drawing. As children gain more practice and maturity, their
retellings move toward more elaboration of detail as well as toward a more developed plot (Golden, 1984).

Value of Story Retelling

Story retelling can foster a sense of story and as a result, nurture oral and written language abilities. This strategy can also be used as an assessment tool of listeners' and readers' transactions (Morrow, 1985). Many educators have avoided using story retelling in their classrooms because they believed it was too time consuming (Morrow, 1985). Teachers now realize that time spent on retelling is of much greater value than time spent on instructing and assessing comprehension abilities through the use of workbook pages, worksheets, or teacher-directed questioning, for retelling promotes children's emerging thinking-language abilities (Pickert & Chase, 1978).

Developing a Sense of Story Structure

A sense of story structure is an awareness of the elements of stories. Stories have a setting (a time and place), characters, a plot (a beginning, a middle, and an ending), and a resolve that usually involves creating a message or theme. Developing a sense of story structure can extend the understanding of a piece of literature (Morrow, 1989).

By practicing story retelling, children can develop a sense of how stories are structured. They are better able to remember story information, relate the sequence of events, predict
outcomes, and become aware of the language. Even though it is important for a teacher to introduce and model how to retell stories, it is through engaging in the retelling process that children begin to internalize the structure of the story (Huck, Hepler, & Hickman, 1993; Morrow, 1988).

**Developing Listening and Speaking Abilities**

Retelling stories offer children opportunities to develop listening and speaking abilities. Children will need to actively listen during the reading of a story in order to retell it on their own. When teachers retell or read a story, they should present the story carefully to assist children's listening. Their story presentations should be similar to dramatic presentations with the use of facial and vocal expression to focus children's attention on the experience (Smith, 1994; Morrow, 1985).

To help prepare for listening, teachers need to introduce the story by telling the title and the name of the author and illustrator, guiding the students to look at the illustrations, and asking the children to make predictions about the story. It is also of value to find out what real-life experiences the children bring to the story (Morrow, 1989). This prior knowledge can support children's understanding during listening. During the telling of the story or reading of the story, stopping to get children's reactions or questions can extend their understanding. The teacher can also ask questions to guide children's thinking,
such as "What has happened so far? What do you think will happen next?". If the children do not respond, the teacher may need to do some scaffolding at this time (Morrow, 1989). Scaffolding is described as assisting children if they hesitate during the retelling experience. Scaffolding can help children discover how they need to proceed in the next retelling (Morrow, 1985). With practice, children become less dependent upon prompts from the teacher (Goodman, Y., 1982).

Story retelling offers children a meaningful way to develop speaking abilities. Talk can precede and accompany experiences with retelling. It is the natural companion for this literacy event (Staab, 1990). Talk can expand children's theory of the world, make understandings more precise, and increase retention of knowledge. As children put ideas into words, they are actually sharpening and deepening their understanding of the story (Lindfors, 1987).

As children learn to retell stories, they begin to use book language, or language associated with more strictly organized patterns of language. Children also can expand their vocabularies when they begin using the language of books in retelling (Huck et al., 1993). [Huck, 1980] offers several suggestions for adapting

Promoting Reading and Writing Abilities

Because many tasks associated with oral and written language are the same, instruction in one aspect of language can
foster ability in others. Thus, retelling activities involving listening and speaking can nurture reading and writing abilities (Applebee & Langer, 1983).

When children work in groups during a retelling activity, one child can be designated to be the reteller and the others the listeners. The listeners can take turns reading along in the book checking for the accuracy of the retelling. During this time, the listeners may also improve their own reading abilities by having an opportunity to read the text (Staab, 1990).

The way children use language in their daily writing is greatly influenced by the stories and poems they hear and read (Routman, 1988). An outcome of hearing and then retelling stories is that children will begin to use the language of the stories in their own writing. They may even pattern the stories that they write after that of a text.

**Procedures for Initiating Story Retelling**

Story retelling may be difficult for children at first. With much modeling by the teacher and peers and followed by scaffolding and practice, they will begin to engage in the process with more ease (Morrow, 1985).

Morrow (1989) offers several suggestions for aiding children in learning to retell stories: To begin story retelling experiences, stories with well-structured plots, repetition, and rhyme can facilitate the experience. Children should be told
before listening or reading a story that they will be asked to retell it when it is completed. Pre- and post-discussions of the story can also help children improve their ability to include the elements of story structure in their retellings (Huck et al., 1993). They can be encouraged in their retelling by suggesting that they proceed as though they are sharing the story with a friend. Audio tapes of retelling sessions can be made so children can collaborate with the teacher in improving their retelling and in assessing their progress over time.

In the early stages of retellings, Applebee & Langer (1983) suggest using scaffolding prompts. These prompts will support children as they attempt to reconstruct a story that they have heard or read. If children stop before the end of a retelling, they can be asked to tell what comes next or they can be asked a question that is relevant to their point of hesitation. Asking children to begin by saying, "Once upon a time . . . " can often help those having difficulty to start a retelling. Some questions that may prompt children who have difficulty retelling a story or who lack proper sequence and detail in their story are: Who was the story about? When and where did the story happen? Is there a problem in the story and, if so, how was it solved? How did the story end?
Story Retelling Activities

Through the use of centers, children can acquire the practice needed to make story retelling a natural activity. During center time, children can make choices about the type of retelling activity in which they want to participate. Teachers have found that this independent time can allow children to practice retelling in pairs and groups. With paired practice, children become more proficient and enjoy using this strategy (Gambrell, Heathington, Kapinus, & Koskinen, 1988).

Stories, contemporary and traditional, can be retold in many different ways: speaking, writing, dramatizing, or illustrating (Cliatt & Shaw, 1988; Harms & Lettow, 1992). A retelling can be done by simply restating the sequence of a story.

The following suggestions can be presented in a retelling activity (Bauer, 1993; Cliatt & Shaw, 1988; Goforth & Spillman, 1994; Harms & Lettow, 1992; Huck et al., 1993; Morrow, 1985; Pellowski, 1995):

Retelling Through Speaking

As children retell stories orally, they can use objects and pictures to aid them in remembering the story. These concrete images give them a sense of security.

Story retelling boxes. In retelling a story orally, children can be assisted in a concrete way by having major
objects from a story placed in a box for them to manipulate as they reconstruct the story. For retelling *The Mitten*, by Jan Brett, a white mitten and the figures of small animals can serve as prompts. While children retell the story, they can place each animal in the mitten as they occur in the story plot. Other stories that lend themselves to retelling boxes are: *If You Give A Mouse A Cookie*, by Laura Joff Numeroff; *The Cat Who Loved to Sing*, by Nonny Hogrogian; and *Goodnight Moon*, by Margaret Wise Brown.

**Flannelboard stories.** Pellon pieces that have been illustrated with the main characters and objects of the story can be sequenced on a flannelboard as the story is being retold. Such props help children focus on characterization, events of the story, the setting, the parts of the story, and the linear or circular plot. Example stories with linear plots are: Helme Heine's *The Most Wonderful Egg in the World*, Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, and John Howe's *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Marcia Brown's *Once Upon a Mouse* and Suzanne Han's *The Rabbit's Judgment* are stories with circular plots.

**Story ropes.** In ancient times, people recorded important events in their lives by tying knots on a rope. Elements and parts of a story can be illustrated on cardboard, attached to knots on a rope, and used as prompts for retelling the story. Versions of a story such as Trina Schart Hyman's *Red Riding Hood*
can be developed into story ropes. Other examples include The Jacket I Wear in the Snow, by Shirley Neitzel; The Big Sneeze, by Ruth Brown; and Lazy Jack, by Vivian French.

Clothesline stories: Illustrations of major story characters and objects can be attached with clothespins to a line. This activity can be especially useful in promoting sequencing. Friends Go Adventuring, by Helme Heine, can be adapted for this activity by making illustrations of Charlie Rooster, Fat Percy, Johnny Mouse, and other characters and attaching them to clothespins. Rosie’s Walk, by Pat Hutchins; One Fine Day, by Nonny Hogrogian; and The Chinese Mirror, by Mirra Ginsburg are other examples for clothesline retelling.

Puppets. As children recreate the dialogue of a story, commercially-made or student-constructed puppets of the major characters can be used. Stick puppets are easily made by children and take little storage space. They also can be used in shadow plays. Puppets of the animals and the robbers in the folk tale, The Bremen Town Musicians, retold by Janet Stevens, can contribute to group retelling. Each child can be given a character as a prop in creating the dialogue of the story. Other examples are The Little Red Hen, retold by Paul Galdone; Stellaluna, by Janell Cannon; and Moondance, by Frank Asch.

Pocket chart stories. In retelling stories through pocket charts, children can pull objects from the pockets of the chart
one at a time. The story, *The Doorbell Rang*, by Pat Hutchins, can be retold as a pocket chart story. As the characters are added to the story, the twelve cookies are redistributed. *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*, by Eileen Christelow; *Over in the Meadow*, by Ezra Jack Keats; and *The Tale of Rabbit and Coyote*, by Tony Johnston, are other examples of stories for this type of retelling activity.

**Magnetic stories.** A large aluminum cookie sheet or magnetic board can be used to create a magnetic story. The characters and scenery can be made of tagboard, and magnetic tape can be applied to the back of the pieces. As the story is told, the objects are attached to the cookie sheet. Using pictures of the animals that got on Noah's ark can aid children as they retell *How the Manx Cat Lost Its Tail*, by Janet Stevens. As the story progresses, more animals can be added to an ark that is attached to the cookie sheet. Other examples are *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault; *Shoes from Grandpa*, by Mem Fox; and *Grandfather Tang's Story*, by Ann Tompert.

**Sound effect stories.** Sounds associated with the characters and experiences of a story can extend its meaning and pleasure. Tapes, musical instruments, and other devices can be used to recreate the sounds. Having children create the various animal sounds in *Goodnight Owl*, by Pat Hutchins, can add greatly to the retelling. Other examples are *Barnyard Banter*, by Denise Fleming;
Jungle Sounds, by Rebecca Emberley; and Thump, Thump, Rat-A-Tat-Tat, by Gene Baer.

Retelling Through Dramatizing

Stories that involve characters' dialogues and actions are excellent for dramatization. The use of costumes and important objects from the story can add to the enjoyment for the reteller and the listening audience.

Dress-up boxes. A dress-up box can facilitate retelling stories through dramatizing. Using colorful scarves can add to the enjoyment of Ann Jonas' Color Dance. Other examples for costuming are Jenny's Hat, by Ezra Jack Keats; and The Dress I'll Wear to the Party, by Shirley Neitzel.

Group dramatizations. Several children can work together to reconstruct a story. The Rabbit's Judgment, retold by Suzanne Han, with its circular plot, can assist children in understanding plot structure. The children can stand in a circle as they retell the story. The retelling will end where it began. Other examples are A Fish for Mrs. Gardenia, by Yossi Abolafia (a story with a cause and effect plot), and Stone Soup, by Marcia Brown.

Monologues. An individual child can costume as a story character and present a monologue. Children will find playing the character of Anansi, from Eric Kimmel's Anansi and the Talking Melon, an enjoyable experience. Other example stories for
monologues are Jennifer Armstrong's Wan Hu is in the Stars, Eric Carle's Walter the Baker, and Tom Birdseye's Airmail to the Moon.

Life-size story characters. Children will enjoy using life-size cardboard characters to act out stories. Each cardboard character needs a hole big enough for a child’s face to show through. Young children will enjoy enacting the wild rumpus with Max and the Wild Things from Maurice Sendak's Where the Wild Things Are. Joanne Oppenheim's One Gift Deserves Another, and Piotr Wilkon's Rosie the Cat, are other examples.

Retelling Through Illustrating

Children enjoy retelling through drawing or painting a part of a story that is important to them. These illustrations can be used with an oral or written retelling of the story.

Flip card stories. These props can be made by duplicating, coloring, and mounting pictures on pieces of tagboard, or books can also be taken apart and the illustrations laminated and placed on a large ring for this activity. The linear story, The Three Billy Goats Gruff, by Paul Galdone, can be retold using this technique. Additional examples are No Jumping on the Bed! by Ted Arnold, and The Stonecutter, by Demi.

Map stories. Children can draw a map showing the various settings and movements of the characters in the plot. A map can be drawn on a large sheet of poster board. As children retell the story, the map can serve as a prompt to reconstruct the
characters and settings as the plot unfolds. *The Three Little Pigs*, retold by Margot Zemach, presents motifs moving through several locations; *Little Red Riding Hood*, retold by Trina Schart Hyman, and *Soap! Soap! Don't Forget the Soap*, by Tom Birdseye, can also offer interesting map stories.

**Filmstrips.** Parts of a story can be sequenced and illustrated on strips of paper to make a filmstrip. Vertical slits cut in each end of a shoe box will allow the strips of paper to be threaded through to make the filmstrip story. Stories with distinct parts are effective as the basis of filmstrips. Example stories for filmstrips are Eve Bunting's *The Mother's Day Mice* and Carol Purdy's *Mrs. Merriwether's Musical Cat*.

**Story aprons.** Velcro can be applied to an apron and to the backs of scenery and characters that the children have illustrated. As the story is retold, the characters can be added or removed from the apron. The cumulative stories *The Napping House*, by Audrey Wood, and *I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly*, by Glenn Rounds, lend themselves to a story apron story. Other examples are *The Gingerbread Man*, by Eric Kimmel, and *Caps For Sale*, by Esphyr Slobadkina.

**Nesting stories.** Nesting dolls, or nesting boxes, can assist in retelling if the characters or motifs are introduced in a story one after another in a definite linear fashion. The props can be made by illustrating story images on paper cones, rings,
or boxes that become progressively smaller. The Turnip, told by Pierr Morgan, can be retold using this method. The story can be reversed by placing the boxes back together as the final pull takes place and the turnip is pulled up. Other examples include The Cat Who Loved to Sing, by Nonny Hogrogian; The Wooden Doll, by Susan Bonners; and The Old Woman and Her Pig, by Eric Kimmel.

Story cloths. Story cloths originated in Africa. A story's characters or motifs are presented by sewing small colored scraps of fabric on a blue piece of fabric. The story cloth can be worn or can serve as a wall hanging. Children can make illustrations for Mary-Joan Gerson's Why the Sky is Far Away, Judy Sierra's The Elephant's Wrestling Match, and Gerald McDermott's retelling of the African folk tale, Zomo the Rabbit, also make interesting story cloths.

Chalkboard stories. Using colored chalk, the chameleon in Eric Carle's The Mixed-Up Chameleon can be followed through the story as it changes shape and color. Other examples are Don Freeman's Chalk Box Story, Leo Lionni's Little Blue and Little Yellow, and John Langstaff's Oh, A-Hunting We Will Go.

Retelling Through Writing. Stories can be retold through writing as well as speaking. Stories with strong organizational patterns are easier for beginners to retell. Listening, oral retelling, and relating activities.
Rebus stories. Rebus stories date back to ancient Egypt. These stories include images of the characters and objects incorporated into the story. Stickers or rubber stamps can also be used to illustrate the text. Examples are Zinnia and Dot, by Lisa Campbell Ernst, and Two of Everything, by Lily Toy Hong.

Newspaper accounts. Children can reshape events of a story into a newspaper format. Chicken Little, by Steven Kellogg, is an example of a story that can be retold by recounting the experiences of Chicken Little and her friends as they tell of the sky falling. Other examples are You Silly Goose, by Ellen Stoll Walsh; Seven Blind Mice, by Ed Young; and Naughty Nancy Goes to School, by John S. Goodall.

Diaries. Entries can be written from one of the character’s point of view. Assuming the role of Chrysanthemum in Kevin Henkes’ book Chrysanthemum, a child can write how the central character feels about her name. Other examples are It’s Too Noisy, by Joanna Cole, and The Fisherman and His Wife, by the Brothers Grimm and illustrated by Madeleine Gekiere.

Summary

Retelling stories can help to enhance children’s language abilities. As classroom teachers provide many literature and retelling experiences, children will begin to develop a sense of story structure and listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities.
Many enjoyable retelling activities can create active participation on the part of children in the language processes. This retelling technique can become a part of every instructional program.
References

Professional References


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Children's References


