

9. How to Teach Storytelling in Grades 4–8: An Overview

Before delving into the topics to teach, it is useful to consider an overview of teaching storytelling in grades 4–8.

Objectives:

1. Teach students to deliver an oral summary of various lengths.
2. Assess comprehension through factual recall questions.
3. Teach the students to hone their thinking skills with higher order thinking skills (HOTS) questions.

Prerequisites: The students should be adept at using mental picturing (i.e., concept imagery) to imagine what is happening in the story (see “Comprehension” in chapter 3.2 #3).

Background Information: The storytelling curriculum should feature economy in teaching. For example, Steiner’s recommendations for stories in the descriptive period prepare students for the history curriculum in subsequent grades. In addition, the stories in the explanatory period help with the teaching of geography.

When to Teach: Tell stories in English main lesson blocks. They do not need to occur every day.

What to Teach: Determine which storytelling curriculum indications you will use. See chapter 3.1 #3 and 4. Use the stories to teach and assess the objectives above.

How to Teach

Use the teaching rhythm shown in table 3.1.10.

- For oral summaries, see chapter 3.1 #10.
- For factual recall questions, see chapter 3.1 #11.
- For higher order thinking skills (HOTS) questions, see chapter 3.1 #12.
- (Optional) Have the class do a written response. Some choices include a written summary or HOTS question(s) (see “HOTS Questions Answered in Paragraphs” in chapter 3.6 #10).

Now that you have an overview, let’s consider the aspects of storytelling to teach.

10. Oral Summaries (Review)

There are three aspects of storytelling to teach. The first is oral summaries, which is part of the review.

Objective: Teach the students to summarize information orally (e.g., one sentence, one paragraph, or 1- or 2-minute summaries).

Source: *Continuing the Journey to Literacy* (Miltzer-Kopperl 2020, 190-194). Used in the online, on-demand course “Unlocking *Continuing the Journey to Literacy*.” Renewal of Literacy®. <https://renewalofliteracy.com>

Background Information: Professionals need to be able to summarize information and present it to colleagues both formally and informally. Oral summaries give students a chance to practice this skill.

When to Teach: Teach in English blocks during the review of the story, which is done the day after you tell the story.

How to Teach

1. At the start of each story review, present a challenge: summarizing the story in a different length (e.g., one paragraph, 2–3 sentences, 1 sentence, 1–2 minutes, etc.).
2. Let the students think for 30 seconds to a minute and jot down a few notes.
3. Call on one student at random. This student stands and gives an oral summary, using proper articulation, posture, eye contact, etc. (see chapter 3.14 #3).
4. Correct any information the student gets wrong. Also correct articulation, posture, etc.
5. Make sure everyone gets at least one turn over the block(s).

11. Factual Recall Questions (Review)

There are three aspects of storytelling to teach. The second is factual recall questions, which are also part of the review.

Objectives:

1. Assess to make sure the students understand the material.
2. Review the material before asking the students to write a composition about it.

Background Information

It is necessary to review the stories told as part of the storytelling curriculum. There are two ways to review. The easier way to review is through **factual recall questions**, or simple factual questions you pose to the class. They are the questions that cover who, what, where, when, why, and how. Students must answer in a complete sentence, using the language of the question in the answer.

Here are some examples of factual recall questions for the story *The Odyssey* by Homer.

- Who: Who is Odysseus's wife? (*Odysseus's wife is Penelope.*)
- What: What are Odysseus's men changed into? (*Odysseus's men are changed into swine.*)
- Where: Where is Odysseus imprisoned for eight years? (*Odysseus is imprisoned for eight years on Calypso's island.*)
- When: When does Odysseus dress as a beggar? (*Odysseus dresses as a beggar when he goes to meet his old swineherd and return to his palace.*)
- Why: Why does Poseidon hate Odysseus? (*Poseidon hates Odysseus because Odysseus has blinded his son, the cyclops Polyphemus.*)
- How: How is peace restored at the end of the story? (*Peace is restored at the end of the story by the goddess Athena, who tells the two opposing sides to cease hostilities.*)

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- How (duration of time): How many years after the fall of Troy does the story open? (*The story opens 10 years after the fall of Troy.*)

Note: Factual recall questions are also used with the reading curriculum (see chapter 3.2 #6).

When to Teach: Teach in English blocks, the day after telling the story (i.e., as part of the review).

How to Teach: Ask the questions and call on students. Make sure you also call on students who do not raise their hands or who are inattentive (Steiner 1998b, 662–663). You can also give these questions as a written quiz (see chapter 6.4 #5).

12. Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) Questions (Review)

There are three aspects of storytelling to teach. The last is higher order thinking skills questions, or HOTS questions. They are also part of the review.

Objectives:

1. Teach the students to think on a deeper level.
2. Review the material before asking the students to write about it.
3. Assess to make sure the students understand the material.

Background Information

It is necessary to review the stories told as part of the storytelling curriculum. There are two ways to review. The more challenging way to review is through higher order thinking skills questions (HOTS questions). **HOTS questions** go beyond factual recall questions because they require additional thought. Students must answer in a complete sentence, using the language of the question in the answer. Their goal is to develop five important thinking skills:

1. Identify the main idea
2. Make inferences
3. Predict outcomes
4. Draw a conclusion
5. Evaluate the material

The following examples are based on the story *The Odyssey* by Homer.

- **Main Idea** is when the students isolate the theme, moral, or most important element of the story (or a segment of a story).

For example, What is the main idea of the story about the sirens? (Answers will vary. Some possibilities are as follows: *Do not lead yourself into temptation, but if you do, take steps to protect yourself. Make sure your friends have your back. Forewarned is forearmed.*)

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- Inference occurs when students must read between the lines to deduce a fact that the author does not state directly. It can be a *why* or *how* question that considers cause-and-effect relationships that are implied in the text.

For example, Why does Odysseus disguise himself as a beggar when he returns to his palace? (*Odysseus disguises himself as a beggar so that he can size up the loyalty of his wife Penelope and his servants.*)

- Prediction occurs when students consider what might happen next in the story. Students draw upon what has happened so far, background knowledge, and their own experiences to make this prediction.

For example, What do you think happened to the blind Cyclops Polyphemus after Odysseus left? (*I think Poseidon asks Hephaestus to make him a new eye so he can see.*)

- Conclusion refers to when students use the material to arrive at their own unique thought. If inference is when the author states a fact indirectly that the students then must infer, conclusion is when the students go beyond what the author says and bring their own new thought that builds directly off what the author said.

For example, What can we conclude about Odysseus? (Answers will vary. For example, *We can conclude that Odysseus is clever because he uses his wits to trick his enemies and to stay alive.*)

- Evaluation occurs when the students make a judgment about the material based on prior experience or information.

For example, What do you think about Homer’s use of the phrase “the wine dark sea?” What do you think he means? (*I think the phrase “the wine dark sea” means that the water is a very dark color and you can’t see down into it at all—like looking into a glass of red wine.*)

When to Teach: Teach in English blocks, the day after telling a story as part of the review.

Note: HOTS questions are also used with the reading curriculum. See chapter 3.2 #6: Reading Skills.

How to Teach: Ask the HOTS questions and call on students. Make sure you also call on students who do not raise their hands or who are inattentive (Steiner 1998b, 662–663). You can also ask students to write a short answer to each question or assign one or more HOTS questions as longer writing assignments. (If you assign an essay or composition, make sure you have discussed the question in class first. If you use the questions to assess comprehension, do not.)