

Storytelling in Education? YES!

A Statement Concerning the Importance of Storytelling in Education
Presented by The Youth, Educators, and Storytellers Alliance (YES!) August 1, 2006
A Special Interest Group of the National Storytelling Network

Since the human race began, people have told stories to each other, to pass on family lore, values and beliefs, common history and heritage, to teach factual and conceptual information, to entertain, and to form bonds of friendship. Amidst the bustle of our visually-oriented, technologically-enhanced, multitasking, competitive world where we share information through text messaging, sound bytes, cell phones, and disks that we burn, we need to be reminded of our humanity. We pride ourselves as a nation of doers, but more and more we find ourselves in the position of observers as we watch others perform in movies, in rock concerts, or on television.

Storytelling helps students be active not only in presenting but also in focused listening and reacting, enhancing the vital skills of communication. Storytelling is an ancient art that strengthens and enhances skills that children need to acquire to function in today's world. As adults, we work in groups, sharing ideas and building upon them. Students practice the same skills, often working collaboratively in cooperative groups.

In all academic areas, storytelling enlivens the delivery of curriculum, accelerates and enhances curriculum learning, and engages learners. It encourages students to think about issues, and it can also deliver emotional and factual content beyond a child's vocabulary or reading ability. Storytelling helps students stretch and expand their thinking. Each state has learning standards that are supported by storytelling and storylistening. We know that storytelling produces enthusiastic and engaged learners; furthermore, qualitative and quantitative research studies show that storytelling can improve academic performance. Through storytelling:

- Connections and understandings are formed about and between the past, present, and future
- Horizons are broadened
- Understanding of and empathy towards other races and cultures is increased
- Auditory processing skills and listening skills are supported and practiced
- Visualization skills are expanded as children form pictures in their minds
- Sensory imaging is heightened as all senses are elicited: tasting, touching, smelling, hearing, and feeling
- Order is brought to students' worlds through use of thinking skills
- Decision-making skills are discerned
- Memory is enhanced and attention spans are stretched
- Fear of public speaking is reduced
- Writing skills are strengthened as students examine the structure of a story
- Characters, events, and settings are brought to life
- New vocabulary emerges
- Cultural literacy is conveyed
- Difficult scientific or mathematical concepts are introduced, explained and explored
- Students learn core academic skills including math and science as well as language arts skills
- Factual and conceptual curriculum material is effectively and efficiently taught

Storytelling is an art, a tool, a device, a gateway to the past and a portal to the future that supports the present. Our true voices come alive when we share stories. Members of the YES! Alliance, along with other members of our parent organization, the National Storytelling Network, will continue to bring love of story, the excitement of storytelling and the practicalities of using storytelling in education, in classrooms and in community work, to our fellow educators.

This statement was prepared by the Youth, Educators and Storytellers Alliance of the National Storytelling Network. To learn more about the activities and resources of the YES! Alliance, please visit our website at <http://www.yesalliance.org>.