

Story-telling

by Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims, Canterbury, UK

This is an interactive article so please don't just read it. The idea is that we have a sort of conversation. I say my part, back in February, when this was written, and you say yours now, as you leaf through the ETAS Newsletter. To start with, some questions:

- What sort of stories did you like when you were little?
- Did people read stories to you or tell you stories without a book?
- Who did you get stories from?
- What time of day did stories happen?
- Do you sometimes tell stories to nephews, ~~nieces~~, friends' children, your own children? Did you?
- Do you ever read stories to your classes?
- Do you ever tell stories to your classes?

It's rather exciting telling stories to your classes because they meet you in a different way when they see and hear you as a story-teller. If you haven't tried this before and want to, follow these steps:

1. Choose a story you really like a lot, maybe one you remember, maybe one you have recently read.
2. Mumble it to yourself so that you can feel you have got the shape and timing roughly right. Mumble it again if it wasn't right the first time.
3. In class, tell the students the story.

This is definitely one of the most effective listening comprehension exercises I know.

Your telling stories is important but so is helping your students to tell their own. One very nice way is to tell your class a story and then ask them to re-tell it to one another but putting themselves into the story.

Imagine I have just told you The Three Bears or Cinderella. Put this article down and re-tell it in your own words, inserting yourself into the story as a new character.

This form of re-telling often brings the student to tell what turns out to be a new story, simply using elements from the original.

Graph to story



This graph could show the amount of cod caught by EEC fishermen in the North Sea over a period of years.

It might show the pattern of my learning from birth to now.

Forget these two suggestions and decide what the graph represents to you and tell the story of the graph.

Graphs are a good starting point for getting students to tell stories, as they can represent any process under the sun. They have the added advantage of not being normally associated with stories.

Balloons

I can't ask you to try this technique here and now and so will simply describe what you might do in class:

- bring in a pile of balloons and some bits of string
- each student chooses a balloon and blows it up - s/he ties it up.
- encourage the students to play with the balloons and then to burst them
- now ask the group to recall experiences, films and books that they associate with balloons.

Playing with the balloons and then bursting them brings back memories, often parallel ones. Balloons are a rich trigger for stories from our pasts.

Should you want more exercises in the story-telling area, have a look at Once Upon a Time, by John Morgan and me. This was brought out in 1983 by Cambridge University Press and is shortly coming out in the Hueber "Forum Sprache" series. The book suggests a wide variety of stories you might want to tell.

The idea of adding yourself into the retelling of a story comes from the work of Christine Frenk (author of Grammar in Action, Hueber) and the balloon technique is from Active Techniques and Group Psychotherapy, by Ted Saretsky, Jason Aronson.

Autobiographical note on Mario Rinvoluceri

Feb 1985: still alive: brought out Grammar Games with CUP

1984 ♣ Spent three months in Europe doing roving teacher training - first heard of ETAS. Did workshop in Chur for teachers of Italian.

1982 : Workshopped in Hong Kong and Australia. Brought Challenge to Think out with OUP.

1970's : Worked first in Chile and then for Migros in Cambridge (Davies - Eurocentre).