

The Art of Storytelling (Jo Radner)

This series of playful, creative workshops will lead participants to find memories and shape them into stories, to experiment with traditional folktales from around the world, and to discover and enjoy their own most comfortable and effective styles of storytelling.

Week 1

INTRODUCING THE STORYTELLING WORLD

Participants will examine their own storytelling history, share some small stories, see some stories, and experiment with gentle improvisational games to learn about storytelling,

Introductions -- interactive exercises to learn about each other

Discussing our individual storytelling and story-listening experiences

Setting goals -- personal and group

Exchanging memory prompts

Introductory story games

Viewing and discussing different kinds of stories (told by Jo and other tellers, live or on film)

Almost all of the above activities are interactive and socially engaging. During the first meeting I will be learning the needs and strengths and goals of the participants; depending on the group, the activities in subsequent weeks may be changed. (What follows is a general plan, to be tailored to individual groups.)

Week 2

THE WISDOM OF FOLKTALES

Participants will be introduced to major concepts of cross-cultural folktale study and will explore ways of choosing, shaping, and telling folktales

Experiments with international variants of a folktale type; how to find, understand, and select tales.

(If appropriate for group members, some discussion of telling stories to children.)

Jo tells folktale.

Various ways of learning or practicing a tale are introduced: "Virginia Reel," telling to the wall, story maps, telling as gossip or news, etc.

Small groups invent ways to present short tales

Again, almost all of the above involve interaction and active mutual support among group members.

Week 3

MAKING FOLKTALES OUR OWN

Each participant will choose and create an individual performance of a folktale, exploring ways of developing characters, voices, gestures, and pacing.

Improvisational story games

Participants will choose stories and learn them by their favorite methods (from last week)

Exercises in developing characters: mime behaviors; rambling introductions; "interviews"

Paired and small-group storytelling

Introduction of useful, positive coaching/feedback techniques

The interactive exercises -- still the majority of the class work -- will be more challenging as the participants learn storytelling techniques and develop more ways of supporting one another in their creative processes.

Week 4

REMEMBERING AND TELLING OUR OWN STORIES

In small groups, participants will share memory stories in response to various prompts and will learn about the importance of family story sharing; then they will begin to develop their stories.

Jo introduces family and personal storytelling; why it is crucially important; how to retrieve memory stories

Participants share and discuss different types of memories in full group

Participants in small groups respond to story prompts and exchange memory stories

Each participant chooses one personal story and experiments with exercises to fill out characters and settings

Apart from the opening (5-minute) introduction, the entire class is participatory, with class members engaging and supporting each other. (All classes will give participants ample time to write notes about their discoveries, though most work will be oral.)

Week 5

FROM SEED TO TREE: CREATING FULL PERSONAL OR FAMILY STORIES

Participants will experiment with various methods of developing the "seed" stories from last week into satisfying, complete narratives

Jo models different ways of shaping personal stories

Participants explore these models, telling different partners their stories in different configurations:

Embellishment; Lead-up and Consequences; Same Topic, Other Episodes; Thematic Parallels

This is an entirely interactive week, with the exception of Jo's brief examples and the time participants will be given to record notes on their discoveries. They will work in pairs with several different partners during the session, and at the end may choose to tell their stories to the whole group if they wish.

Week 6

RETROSPECTIVE; PLANNING OUR FINAL PROJECTS

Participants will review the discoveries and story techniques of the previous 5 sessions and will choose the story they wish to develop as their final project; begin planning final event

Story games and improvisations will draw on the past 5 weeks and give us a springboard into review of what participants have valued in the course.

Participants will choose a story (either new or previously created) to rehearse and develop as a final project.

Jo will teach new rehearsal techniques.

Participants will learn/use more advanced coaching skills to support their colleagues.

Planning final event.

Participants will play with story techniques as a group, and will coach each other (following Jo's modeling) as they rehearse their final projects. All will discuss shape and publicity for final public event.

Week 7

OUR CULMINATING PRIVATE EVENT; PREPARING TO GO PUBLIC

Half the session will be spent on whatever final experiences the class has collectively decided on; during the other half we will make final preparations for next week's culminating public event.

These depend on the individual class's collective decisions.

Everything.

Week 8

CULMINATING EVENT

The culminating event will be a public storytelling concert. Depending on the anticipated audience and on the wishes of individual class participants, it may comprise a series of diverse, individually-told stories; or it may include group and tandem presentations; or some participants may choose to give readings rather than oral stories; or it might include interaction with the audience to evoke audience memory stories. All things are possible; the group will decide.