

Audience Participation Storytelling

© Fran Stallings www.franstallings.com

WHY?

- Tradition: in many cultures, the audience takes an active role in the telling.
- Investment: your listeners will be more deeply and actively involved in the experience.
- Safety-valve: wiggly, distractible listeners get a positive, structured outlet for their energy.
- Reinforcement: verbal repetition, physical actions, and discussion help listeners remember the sequence and content of the story.
- *FUN!*

HOW do you invite and control participation?

- Teach and rehearse first, practicing start/stop cues -- OR --
- Demonstrate during the story, then rely on listeners to take it from there -- AND --
- Use cues: an informal nod, eye contact, an expectant pause, a direct request, or a formal signal or gesture.

WHERE does participation belong in a story? Participation fits naturally into stories that have:

- Actions -- gestures, motions, mime, finger-plays, sign language
- Sounds -- realistic (animals, bumps and crashes, squeaky door, wind etc)
-- fanciful (colorful words to give sound-pictures of movements)
- Repetition -- chants, phrases, songs
- Predictable words, or lists that keep on growing
- Dilemmas -- open endings, problems to solve through discussion.

MORE TIPS

- Listen and watch. Attend storytelling events, study other tellers' work with an audience.
- Experiment. Find out what works for YOUR audience--and for you.
- DO ONLY WHAT FITS YOU. If you feel foolish or uncomfortable leading an activity, your audience will feel even worse than you do.

WHAT IF THEY WON'T JOIN IN?

- An individual listener may be having a hard day.
- Some ages, some groups, are just *too cool* to participate openly. Don't insist.
- Even if some listeners don't seem to participate, a good story gives everyone plenty to work on with mind and heart. Story-listeners are working hard.

REMEMBER: a good story is good *plain!*

##

Joining In: An Anthology of Audience Participation Stories and How to Tell Them, edited by Anne Pellowski (Yellow Moon Press 1988)

The Ghost and I: Scary Stories for Participatory Telling, edited by Jennifer Justice, Joseph Bruchac (Yellow Moon Press 1992)

Teaching As Storytelling: An Alternative Approach To Teaching and Curriculum In the Elementary School by Kieran Egan (University of Chicago Press, 1989) what types of STORIES fit the emotional and intellectual development of students at different ages.

Donna Washington's blogs about "overt" and "covert" ways to enlist audience participation:

<http://donnawashingtonstoryteller.blogspot.com/2016/11/audience-participation-covert-and-overt.html>