

## **A Smaller Voice Can Make A Loud Sound**

Kids Involvement in Tellabration

By Kevin D. Cordi

For Peggy O'Sullivan

As producer for over nine **Tellabration**s I want to share with you what has lately spiced up our **Tellabration**s. It is the sound of little voices **mingled among the** larger ones, in others words, I have had the privilege of helping direct a completely student organized Tellabration!

For the last three years we have made our **Tellabration!** thematic. Our theme last year was "From the Trails to the Tales, The Gold is still in California." Over 200 student performers and five adult professional storytellers share in the celebration of the stories of California. We had a four-year-old open the program and over 240 people on stage ending with the song "Happy Trails." What an evening! We heard tales about The Oregon Trail and stories by middle school tellers entitled "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie."

However, this year was not to be missed either. We decided to honor our first storytellers, or in other words, our elders. The theme was "Older But Wiser Tales: A Celebration of Our Elders." This included a mime troupe, one of my students introduced his 76 year old grandfather Rex Bailey, swing dancing and so much more.

With the tapestry of home made quilts, one was sent from all the residents in a town in Missouri, others were over 150 years old, we celebrated in the joy sharing story and community.

The student mime performers reminded me of an important message. Jessica Savopolos and Margee Harris, sophomores, said, "Not many people believe that mime is a way of telling a story, but stories can be told in many different ways by various people. This includes by kids and teenagers. We believe that it does not matter who tells a story as long as it is told. Sometimes us kids can surprise others because of our boundless imaginations."

It was amazing to see second graders share the same stage with professional storytellers. The professional storytellers, including myself, shared a moment when we told an improvisational tale of the Appalachian story "Old Dry Frye." Whether it was **sophomore** Heather Costner's original tale entitled "Dear Grandma" or **senior** Michelle Austin's hilarious romp entitled "Old Folks Are Worth A Fortune," the tales helped bring us closer together. Perhaps the finest moment for all of us was when we joined hands and invited others to share our moment by remembering our elders. We shared that moment as a special community. Everyone was invited to share; adults and children of all ages shared the moment together.

However, **many** Tellabration! producers are reluctant to add children or young adults to their program. Some feel that they **need help or suggestions on how** to include

**youth** in the program. I would like to just offer some advice to help offset these inhibitions. With the right preparation, students will be a bonus to your performance.

These are just some few cardinal steps to remember.

1. **Allow Plenty of Notice:**

Students need to know early that you want them in the Tellabration! Give them *two* notices, a written and a verbal one. When you ask them to help out by telling a story, make them feel very needed. Let them know how important the event is and how much you would love to have them. Communicate this **message to** their parents as well.

2. **Give Deadlines To Have the Stories**

Students, like some adults, need the pressure of a deadline. Have a “First Look Day” and tell students that their performance must be ready in order to have it performed for Tellabration! **Then** give students plenty of time to practice. Offer **to** arrange **for** someone who can help direct or guide the story on “First Look Day.”

3. **Always Give Students Something To Work On**

Students hinge on **your** comments. Use a highly complimentary voice and manner, praise the elements of the story that you enjoy, and suggest some element of the story that will help improve the performance. Keep in mind however the age of the child and the gravity of the comments.

4. **Have High Expectations**

Students will respond to challenges. Don't simply say, “Tell any story you like.” Challenge them to tell their best, nine chances out of ten they will surprise you with the results.

5. **Highlight their importance in the Program and During the Show**

It truly is an honor to showcase a student's talents. Make sure the program and your announcement of the student reflects this. Also you may want to remind them of professional story etiquette. Remember this may be their first public performance.

6. **Send a Thank You Letter and a Certificate**

Always remind students that you enjoyed the performance. Design a certificate or use Tellabration! Certificates that simply say thank you for adding to our show. This is a certificate that will forever remain on the student's wall.

7. **Once you see kids telling, add them to every program.**

Think of the message that you are sending about the importance of sharing the word. Unfortunately, not enough students are telling or even watching storytelling performances. However, the “times they are a-changing.” In the last five years, the

youth storytelling performers are growing and in turn more and more youth are watching as well. Be part of a living legacy; add a **young** teller to Tellabration! **to** carry on the stories, and who knows, maybe in the future **that teller** will produce **his** own show.

Perhaps my student's should have the final word.

Justin Rodriguez, freshman, said, "I personally think that children are not involved enough in storytelling. From what I have seen from being involved with Voices Of Illusion, our storytelling club, children love to tell and what an honor it is to be involved in **International** Storytelling Week."

Michelle Austin, senior, said, "What comes to mind when one hears stories or storytelling? I am reminded of my younger years sitting around a 'magic carpet' listening to teachers or librarians read and **tell** stories. No doubt children love stories as much as adults. So why then should children not be invited to be involved in this wonderful art? Youth will carry on the storytelling legacy just as so many adults have done for so many years. Why not let the children and young adults begin the journey early? Who knows they might just steal the show!"

Whether they steal the show or share it, a small voice can make a loud sound if we listen to it.

Share your ideas **on bringing** youth to storytelling. **Feel free to contact me at:**

Kevin Cordi  
NSN "Youth **Storytelling** Co-chair"  
1276 North 10<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Hanford, CA 93230  
[KCTells@cnetech.com](mailto:KCTells@cnetech.com)  
(559) 587-0309