

Tips and Tools for Storytellers:

Beginning and/or Experienced

By Scott Smith

Tip #1: Tell, tell, tell, tell to your friends, to your family, to your dog -- this is your practice time; when you feel you have practiced enough, practice 10 more times. You want to feel comfortable in front of your audience, you want this to be a positive experience, and so does your audience. The only way that is going to happen is by practicing. When you feel ready and have a good surplus of polished stories go find an audience that is willing to listen.

Tip #2: The most important thing I try to instill in new storytellers is to be yourself. There is no right or wrong way to be a storyteller. Watch and listen to as many storytellers as you can -- take what you can from them, learn from them, but don't try to be them. Develop your own style.

Tip #3: After you find a good story to tell, learn the essence of the story -- much like watching a movie, learn the pictures as they happen in the story not necessarily the words -- try sneaking the story into everyday conversations in small bite-size pieces. The story will develop, form, and mature with each telling.

Tip #4: Don't read; never tell the same story twice. Listening to someone read is not storytelling: it is an expository speech. Listen to your audience. Gauge their likes and dislikes; listen to what they say and do, listen to their body language. Adapt your story to what you are seeing and feeling. Telling a story the exact same way to each audience cheats the audience of the storytelling experience.

Tip #5: If you are a visual learner (even if you are not) create a story map. Create pictures to help you recall the beginning, the conflict, the climax, and resolution of the story. Then create a way to connect those pictures together.

Tip #6: Make sure the story speaks to you personally. A story you do not love to tell will be lost emotionally on the audience. If you don't believe and feel what you are saying the audience won't believe and feel what you are saying either.

Tip #7: The audience is your friend. So don't be afraid of them. The audience wants to see you succeed. In most cases they will admire you for standing in front of them and sharing part of your world with them.

Tip #8: Making mistakes is a natural part of performance. Eventually you will make a mistake so don't worry about it. You could tell a story a thousand times and the very next time you tell it blow it completely. If that happens, relax, stay calm, and move on. In most cases half of the people will never even realize you have blown it.

Tip #9: Once you finish a story -- STOP! Don't ramble on and don't feel you have to explain what happened in the story. Let the audience come to their own conclusions.

Tip #10: Manage your time so that you can fit in storytelling everyday. Whether it is family storytelling or storytelling in the classroom, most stories take less than 10 minutes to tell. During that 10 minutes you can teach listening skills, the use of language, values, morals, etc. Teachers, the workbook will be forgotten tomorrow, but the heart of the story will be remembered forever.

Tip #11: Get your whole family involved in the storytelling process by playing a game called, "Pass the talking fork, please." For more details go to www.familyeducation.com/article/0,1120,22-10295,00.html and read the article by Odds Bodkin.

Tip #12: Through storytelling we develop imagination. It is through imagination that simple connections are made to people, emotions, disciplines, community, and all different kinds of subject matter.