

Appendix A

Storytelling in outdoor spaces

As background to these activities, students would receive an introduction to storytelling: where did storytelling originate, what are the benefits of storytelling, what are the key-features of a well-told story (e.g., Eades 2005). Storytelling makes a terrific focus for a number of teaching units to achieve diverse curricular outcomes (e.g., language arts, social studies, science) and competencies (e.g., communication, citizenship, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation). Inviting community elders, seniors, or local authors to your class would inspire students to start developing their storytelling skills.

Activity 1: Getting ready to tell a story — Warm-up exercises along the Path

Storytelling is more than just reading the words of a story out loud. This activity encourages students to use different tones in their voice or body gestures to tell their story. If their voice stays at the same level or their body or facial expressions remain motionless, it will be boring! Demonstrate this by reading a paragraph of a story or folk tale — first with a flat voice the whole way through, then with a Robert Munsch-like voice.

Now ask your students to line up along the path (or any outdoor space), and ask them to take steps forward as they count to 10 in these different ways: 1) as if you were counting your loonies and getting more excited as you add them up, 2) as if you were a referee in a boxing match and you were counting someone out, 3) as a very little child just learning to count, 4) as if you were telling someone a telephone number when the cell phone reception was bad, 5) as if you were a frustrated babysitter who said “I am going to count to 10 and if you’re not in bed by the time I get to 10, you’re in big trouble.” Ask the students to come up with a few additional ways to count.

This second exercise demonstrates the importance of body gestures or facial expressions to storytelling. Continue along the path but stand 20 paces in front of the students before calling out what they have to pretend as they walk to where you are. Encourage them to pretend 1) that they are at the beach and trying to wade through water and occasionally trying to brace themselves against a breaking wave; 2) they are walking on the hot, hot sand at the beach; 3) they are wading through a foot of snow; 4) they are walking through a very sticky, mucky swamp; 5) their right leg is in a cast; then encourage the students to come up with alternative ways to move forward.

Now the students are ready to start telling their own stories.

Activity 2: Spin a yarn — Creating a fictional tale

For this activity, being out in nature provides a source of inspiration for students’ imaginations. Let them choose a story prompt related to something about the path or surrounding nature. Once they have chosen their prompt, ask them to sketch a story board or outline their story to start. Outline the following elements: How does the story start? What happens on the way to the high point of the story? What is the most exciting part of the story? What happens on the way to the end of the story? How does the story end? What’s different than it was at the beginning of the story? After they have completed their story boards, ask them to each “spin a yarn” for the class.

Here are some prompts that can serve as inspiration for writing their stories outdoors:

- Write about what your life would be like if you turned into a squirrel/crow/animal of choice. What would you do every day?
- You’re in a magical forest — what makes the forest magical? What magical properties do the plants and animals have?
- You wander along the path and come across a flower that no one has ever seen before. Describe it — colour, texture, scent. Does it have special properties?
- You get transported back in time to this very spot when the dinosaurs lived. What would happen to you? How would you survive?
- You discover a magical portal along the path. Where does it lead to?
- Write a scary story that you would tell around a campfire.
- One day while walking along the path, you meet a little elf coming out of a mushroom. Write about your encounter with him.
- Write a story about a colony of ants living along the path.
- You’re a scientist and you’ve just discovered a new type of bug. Describe what it looks like, where it’s from, and what you’re going to call it.
- Imagine a world where all the (pick an animal) can talk. What would those animals living on the path say?
- You’re on a hike and a bird starts talking to you. What do you do? What does it say?
- Make up a story about where thunder or lightning comes from.

Activities with storytelling are endless, and you’ll be delighted to see how storytelling units can spark your students’ imaginations.