

## **Great Oaks from Little Acorns Grow** **By Karen Chace © 2005**

Once upon a time...Isn't that how all wonderful stories begin? In June of 2002 I heard myself saying "I would love to start a Storytelling Club next year" during a conversation with Lisa, a fourth grade teacher at our school. And like Jack's magic bean, the seed was planted. This year we ushered in our third Student Storytelling Club. Other storytellers often ask how it all began so I offer you a *very brief* blueprint of the pilot program, one which continues to be revised and nurtured each year.

### **Beating the Drums**

Enlisting Lisa's support was important since this would impact curriculum time. In September we began brainstorming ideas; the teachers agreed to offer the Storytelling Club to the third and fourth grade students.

### **First Steps**

I wrote the proposal, sent copies to the teachers, and requested their comments on day, time, location and curriculum connections; a crucial step for the teachers to feel invested in the program.

### **The Pitch**

Lisa and I met with the principal and explained our vision. Lisa's participation reinforced the Storytelling Club's faculty support. With the principals blessing I met with the PTO board, presented the proposal, and received full funding. (A Massachusetts Cultural Grant funded the program in 2003.)

### **Gaining Momentum**

I met with the students, explained the program, and provided letters for their parents outlining our goals. Permission slips were returned and the teachers began the selection process; self starters who could maintain their studies while undertaking this new program. However, I strongly suggested they consider those who experienced difficulty with traditional teaching methods. I believed they would benefit as well, if not more; an insight that has proven to be true again and again.

### **The Beginning**

I began with the fourth grade students in group format for ten weeks. I reiterated our goals; storytelling for their peers throughout the year and producing a Storytelling Festival in June. We created a Student Storytelling Contract outlining ways we would support each other throughout the year.

## **The Process**

As the weeks progressed they participated in many activities that demonstrated:

- Gesture
- Vocalization
- Intonation
- Mime
- Improvisation

Story genres were discussed, we visited the 398.2 section in our school library and I researched my personal folklore collection, choosing age appropriate stories for review.

I offered guidance but did not select their stories sharing my motto, “You don’t pick the story, the story picks you!” Through storyboarding, visualization and other activities they began to internalize their stories. They also learned how to use a microphone properly while practicing before the story group. Even the shyest child glowed once the lavalier was in place!

## **Building Bridges**

Group coaching sessions followed Doug Lipman’s methods of *Affirmations and Suggestions*.

Each student also received several individual coaching sessions with me. During these sessions I videotaped each teller and immediately played it back for their review. This self-assessment tool empowered them to identify their strengths and weaknesses, making a significant impact on their telling styles.

## **Let the Stories Begin!**

We began with a small audience format, telling in one classroom at a time for approximately 25 students. After a few weeks, I grouped two classes together; the tellers were now sharing their stories with approximately 50 students. We slowly progressed from the classroom, to a larger activities room, and finally graduated to the auditorium, which would be the setting for our June storytelling festival. \* *At this time I began the second ten-week group phase with the third grade students.*

## **Performance Support**

I was always present, staying within their direct line of sight. If they momentarily lost their train of thought they could look to me for specific visual cues. Their story buddies also offered encouraging smiles, a pat on the back and high fives! The moment they all feared, the moment when their fellow students would laugh at them, never materialized. Instead, they heard words of admiration, delight and or course, applause!

## **The Festival Finale!**

Without hesitation each teller stepped to the microphone, greeted 165 audience members and whisked us away on the wings of story. The evening showcased not only the confidence,

personality and skills of each student, but illustrated the virtues of camaraderie and team spirit. They found their voice!

Since 2002 sixty students have taken part in the program. The seeds were sown with one statement, "I would love to start a Storytelling Club", and we happily continue to nurture new tellers with each passing year.