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8 Storytelling Strategies for Teachers



If you want your children to be smart, tell them stories. If you want them to be brilliant, tell them more stories. **Albert Einstein**



We have been telling stories before we even had the words and language to do so. From the very first humans painting the walls of caves, through to modern-day tales of weekend exploits, we're devoted to storytelling as a way of conveying life experiences.

But did you know storytelling techniques can be a superb tool to help children develop a deeper level of understanding in any subject?

Psychology shows that 'events that contain emotional relevance are often more likely to be remembered than events devoid of emotional impact' (E. Kensinger). The anthropologist Peg Neuhauser has shown how stories specifically increase retention 'because the information factually, visually and emotionally is more likely to be imprinted on your brain'.

After speaking with a number of our teachers, we've brought together 8 powerful storytelling techniques that can be used in the classroom to help increase retention. Let's start at the beginning...



1. BRING SOUND INTO THE CLASSROOM

We all know that feeling. A certain song comes on the radio, one you've not heard for many years, and yet you're instantly transported back in time to a specific moment in your life. You vividly remember where you were, what you could see, even smell the same smells.

Sound has this incredible way of anchoring moments in time and capturing our emotions, as well as cementing learning, which is why it's such a powerful storytelling tool. It's why radio jingles stay with us for a lifetime, why remembering lyrics is easy, and why we can all sing the alphabet and the colours of the rainbow.



Action: Use sound stimulus to inspire their imaginations. Ask them to close their eyes and play them the sound of a spaceship taking off during Space Week, rainforest noises, a steam train... Introduce instruments to influence the story. If there's a fairy in your story, perhaps ring a bell whenever the fairy appears. If you don't have many instruments, encourage your pupils to use their desks to create a drumming sound at moments of suspense! Alternatively, use backing tracks associated with that topic when children are working, to really anchor the moment.



2. ENTERTAINMENT FACTOR

When something is entertaining and engaging, it's easier to concentrate. Oral storytellers engage people by using their body language, intonation and facial expressions to convey the meaning behind the language used, the story and the plot. This captures the attention of the listener, expands their interest in new areas and topics, as well as improving their reading motivation.



Action: Be sure to vary the volume, pitch and tempo of your voice to maintain interest, and don't be afraid to exaggerate! Also use the space and move about your classroom to add interest. Do you need to stay at the front all the time? Why not walk between desks, or involve props? Be creative in how you make the story feel dynamic. And never underestimate the power of a long pause for dramatic effect!



3. HARNESS EMPATHY

Storytelling is an unparalleled way of bringing human experiences to life - which makes it an incredibly powerful tool for communicating to children about other people, places and cultures. All too often, different cultures, religions or beliefs can feel too abstract for children (and indeed, many adults) to fully understand or connect with, which leads to them feeling distanced from it.

By using human stories to bring cultures to life, children are able to see that what may seem strange and foreign to them is actually not that different from what they know from their own lives. We're all human, and we all share many of the same motivations, fears, and passions. By helping children to empathise and identify those similarities on a human level, they're able to understand and engage with different cultures and cultural experiences.



Action: Find a human story to make abstract concepts tangible and easy for children to relate to. This can easily be interwoven with other subjects, like history or geography. For instance, telling the story of Anne Frank is a powerful way of helping children understand what life was like for Jewish children in Nazi occupied Europe. Her story allows children to imagine how she would have felt, the injustice of persecution because of your religion, and leads organically into a class discussion. If reading fictional stories, be sure to read from diverse authors to ensure you're giving children a multicultural experience of storytelling.



4. DON'T BE AFRAID TO INTRODUCE PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

We've already talked about how bringing human stories into your teaching can help make an impact with your students - but what about your own stories? You're guaranteed to pique your students' interest if you start talking about something you've been through yourself - especially if it's not the kind of story you usually hear teachers telling! This helps to build a rapport with your class and creates a sense of intimacy that can then be more easily reciprocated, with students feeling more comfortable sharing their own thoughts and experiences.



Action: Even the most fantastic and unusual stories have a basis in reality, and contain lessons about human nature, behaviour or society which children can learn from. When storytelling, take time to encourage the children to reflect on passages and break them down in a way they can relate to. For instance, if you're telling the story of Rapunzel, you can help them to understand how she'd feel by sharing an anecdote of the time you got locked in a bathroom and couldn't get out. You may have only been trapped for an hour - but you felt scared, and unsure about how you'd get out, etc. How much worse would it feel to be trapped for years at the top of a tower? By bringing your own personal, real-world experiences into your storytelling, you can make the lessons learnt from those stories feel more real.



5. WORLD BUILDING

The imagination is one of the most powerful tools in storytelling. When writing, world building plays a big part of it, allowing the reader to immerse themselves in the story by painting a picture of the world in which it is set. But one advantage to oral storytelling is that you can be *with* your listeners in a physical space, which can quite literally put them in the middle of the story.



Action: Why not take your students to a new space, perhaps out into the playground under the trees, and invite them to imagine the world in which your story is set as if they're physically there. For instance, perhaps those trees are actually at the edge of an enchanted forest. Or just take them into the school hall which can be a blank canvas for any setting, like the deck of the Titanic, for instance, or a London train station during the evacuations. Invite them to imagine they're part of the story in a physical way and it can create a powerful and lasting impression on them.



6. THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

The human brain is hardwired to love surprises in storytelling. Every good story entails twists and turns along the way, to keep the reader or listener engaged. When a storyteller sets the scene, and then introduces something which changes the way your brain has pictured that scene in your mind, your brain re-calibrates that scene to take into account this new information. It surprises you - but not enough to startle you. This is called the 'orienting response', and it's how good storytellers keep you hooked!



Action: When storytelling in class, pause after you've introduced a sudden change or a twist, and invite the children to discuss what an impact that's had on the story. How has it changed the plot? Where do they now think the story will go? What options are there now for the story to take? Make the most of their 'orienting response' to optimise engagement. This is really powerful in developing their comprehension skills - and you'll be amazed at their responses!



7. ENGAGE THEIR SENSES

Storytelling is a sensory experience. It's not just the words that paint a picture - but other sounds, sights, smells and touch that can truly bring a story to life. Why not introduce props, smells or tastes to help keep the children engaged in storytelling?



Action: Try introducing some scents into the classroom, a candle, cooking materials. Hand out some food (be careful to avoid any allergies). What can they feel around them, with their hands and their feet? Introduce different stimuli that will engage their senses, to help build a bigger picture in their minds - putting them firmly in the middle of the story.



8. MAKE IT IMMERSIVE

Bring your stories off the page and get creative! A single story can spark any number of ideas to bring into the classroom. For instance, after using now>press>play to tell the story of the Gingerbread Man to her class and inspire their creative writing, teacher Rachel Orr used an animation on FX Guru showing the gingerbread man and his gang running around the classroom at night! She even sprinkled gingerbread crumbs on their desk as 'evidence', which really captured their imaginations. To cap it all off, the gingerbread man had left a note to the class!



Action: Go on an immersive experience to truly bring storytelling to life. In a now>press>play Experience every child is given a pair of wireless headphones. Immersed in sound, they become the main character in a story, meeting people, discovering places and solving problems on an educational adventure they'll never forget. Book a call below and get access to a whole school 2 week free trial!



**Putting your pupils at the heart of the story.
Bring learning to life with free curriculum adventures!**

now>press>play is an award-winning, immersive audio resource for primary schools that inspires children to love learning by engaging them in the curriculum through sound, story and movement. There are 90 Experiences and 400 follow-on resources for the classroom.

In each Experience every child is given a pair of wireless headphones. Immersed in sound, they become the main character in a story, meeting people, discovering places and solving problems on an educational adventure they'll never forget.

From climbing through rainforest canopy in the Amazon, to fighting a woolly mammoth in the Stone Age, our inclusive audio adventures are uniquely designed to stimulate children's imagination. This child-centred and experiential approach to learning increases engagement, extends life experiences and inspires children to produce quality writing.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

99% rated now>press>play positively

90% would recommend now>press>play

FOR TEACHERS...

DELIVERS THE CURRICULUM

92%

said it enriches the curriculum by offering something different

85%

said it brings the topic to life

INCLUSIVE & ACCESSIBLE

70%

said it particularly benefits pupils of lower abilities

PROVIDES TEACHER SUPPORT

now>press>play is overwhelmingly used as a whole class activity across Key Stages 1 and 2, as well as EYFS

72%

said it was easy to set up and deliver

FOR CHILDREN...

INCREASES ENGAGEMENT

91%

said it helped to develop pupils' enjoyment of the topic

82%

said there was a greater willingness to participate and get involved with lessons

EXTENDS LIFE EXPERIENCES

2/3

For around 2/3 of educators, now>press>play enables children to experience life events that they would not normally be exposed to

DEVELOPS SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL SKILLS

1/2

Over 1/2 said it develops pupils' ability to empathise with another person or character

IMPROVES DISCUSSION SKILLS

2/3

For around 2/3 of educators, now>press>play helped pupils to retain key facts and vocabulary and developed their ability to articulate what they have experienced

INSPIRES QUALITY WRITING

69%

of teachers who have had the product for three years or more are using now>press>play as a basis for writing tasks

READ THE FULL REPORT

Putting your pupils at the heart of the story.
Want to try now>press>play in full, for free?

Book a call with one of the now>press>play team. We'll show you how immersive audio experiences can transform your learning and engage even the most reluctant learners. Book a call and get access to a whole school 2 week free trial!

BOOK A DISCOVERY CALL

