

Tellers' Tips

Using action stories in early childhood storytelling

By Lee Castledine *The Storyteller* 2010

As a storyteller who specializes in storytelling for early childhood, some of the audience participation stories I tell are action stories, where the audience will do the actions and sound effects with me as I tell the story.

It is important to involve young children in a story, as this maintains their attention, enhances their enjoyment and comprehension of the story, and increases their active listening.

In an audience participation story, the storyteller has the main role of delivering the story, with the audience joining in with sounds, actions and repetitive phrases throughout the story.

Action stories are particularly good for toddlers and pre-schoolers, especially when told over and over again, as they remember the story sequence through learning the actions. By using action stories, I ensure that the whole audience is involved and attentive throughout the whole story.

There are many different variations of action story involving a hunt. I have seen another storyteller doing "The Lion Hunt" (I don't know the source of this story), and the best known picture book variation is Michael Rosen's "We're Going on a Bear Hunt", where the audience can participate in not only the sound effects and actions, but also in repeating each line of the verse after the story reader:

We're going on a bear hunt
We're going to catch a big one
What a beautiful day!
We're not scared." (Rosen; 1989).

I often tell an action story called "The Crocodile Hunt".

What follows is a 'bare bones' version that I tell to babies and parents, toddlers and kindergarten children. If I were telling this story to Infants and lower Primary school children I would add more detail to the story.

You might be inspired to make your own hunt action story.

You could have a knight deciding to go and hunt for a dragon, an Eskimo going to hunt for a walrus, or a Halloween story where a boy hunts for a monster.

The possibilities are endless - it's up to your imagination to make up the story and actions to go with it.

The joy I get from storytelling with young children is seeing their enjoyment — and their parents' or teachers' enjoyment - through participating in the story.

If you want to enchant your child audience, find a story that you love, think of how you can present it, then practise, practise, practise.



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The Crocodile Hunt

Once upon a time, a man went out to hunt for a crocodile.

He woke up in the morning and he yawned and he stretched.

Yawn and stretch

He kissed his wife goodbye...

Kiss the air 3 times

He opened the gate..

Make a creaking noise and mime opening a gate

And he walked along the track...

Feet stepping on floor

He walked through the long grass...

Rub hands together in long "whooshes" and make swishing sound

And he went over the bridge....

Thump chest about 8 times

Then he went up a hill...

Clap hands on thighs about 8 times

Right to the top...

He could just see his wife way down below...

Put hand above eyebrows looking down

So he cooeeee-ed to her...

Call out "Cooooooe"

Then he went down the other side of the hill....

Clap hands on knees about 8 times

Where he came to a river....

Make swishing noises and waves with hands

He Swam across the river....

Make swimming motion while saying "swim, swim, swim"

And then he saw.... a crocodile!

Say "Arrhhhhh!"

He called out for help...

Call out "HELP!"

He was so frightened that he swam back across the river..

Make swimming motion while saying "swim,swim, swim".

Climbed back up the hill...

Clap hands on knees about 8 times

Cooooooe-ed to his wife.

Call out "Cooooooe"

Ran down the other side of the hill.

Clap hands on knees about 8 times

Over the bridge

Thump chest about 8 times

Through the long grass...

Rub hands together in long "whooshes"

Back along the track..

Feet stepping on floor

Through the gate...

Make a creaking noise and mime opening a gate

Kissed his wife....

Kiss the air three times

And jumped back into bed...

Pull the covers over your head and say "Ah,hhh!"

And that's the end of the story!