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*Sincerely,  
Karen Haag*

## Tell Stories

Students are more successful at writing stories if they learn to tell stories first. Telling stories isn't a part of every student's childhood experience. Therefore, I found it's important to give children time to talk in the classroom before they pick up a pencil.

These lessons are the first lessons I teach in a unit on narrative personal and imaginative stories. I usually teach telling stories at the beginning of the year. I hope you have as much fun using them as we do when I work in classrooms. As my friend David Joe Miller says, "We are, as a species, addicted to story. Even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays up all night, telling itself stories." Let's take advantage on that innate love for storytelling.

I've found that kids just love working orally and revising on the spot. Part of helping with writing stories is teaching writers how to find topics – not a new one every day, but a topic the writer truly loves and wants to explore. So, share how you come up with story ideas. Let your students think about and share how they decide on topics. Also, you can check ideas for finding topics on <http://www.liketowrite.com/narrative.html> and <http://www.liketowrite.com/narrativetopics.html>

So, let's get moving!

### 4 Targets for these lessons

Mastering a target should take a day, but follow your kids and give them more time if they need it.

**Day 1-2:** Writers tell stories before they write them. Writers revise stories as they tell them by looking at their audience to observe what they do and do not understand. Writers check to see if there's a "lean-in" moment.

**Day 3-4:** Writers ask for help from others so they know how to improve their storytelling.

**Day 5-6 or 7:** Storytellers write and celebrate!

### \*Storytelling Lessons from Karen

1. Teachers write a personal mentor text to use for these lessons, find a mentor text that matches, or use Karen Haag's example written as models and included in this handout. Use my story, "A Daring Experience," to help you understand the lesson or use it with your students. I will refer to it throughout the lesson plan (page 7).
2. Materials you need for each lesson are highlighted. Smart Board = overhead, Doc Cam, chart paper, or whatever you have in your room. Basically, make sure all students can see.
3. EXTRA HINTS for teachers to consider are in blue.
4. TWS = Teacher will say something like... and S = student, Ss = students; T = teacher
5. Daybook = writing notebook or whatever you call a notebook in your classroom
6. This is a draft. If you see anything that is not clear or needs editing, please let me know!

## BIG IDEA ONE – Writers tell stories before they write them.

**TARGET Day 1 and 2:** Writers revise stories as they tell them by looking at their audience to observe what they do and do not understand. Writers check to see if there's a "lean-in" moment.

**The lean-in moment:** the magical moment when everyone gets quiet, leans in, and really listens to the story.

**TEACH:** T chooses a story to tell from daybook topic list.

**Note to teachers:** Plan a short narrative to share – one that has great action sequence in the middle. If you don't tell the story with a lean-in moment, model revising the middle based on what the Ss say they want to know. Then, you can retell the story with the new details. So, not to worry. If your story flops, just model how to make it better... which is what your Ss are going to do.

1. Explain that you will tell a story. Ask your Ss to observe to determine if there's a "lean-in moment". (Don't explain what a lean-in moment is yet, but for your own understanding, read the box above. This way you engage the Ss' brains as they try to solve your puzzle.)
2. BUT, as you tell the story, draw the Ss' attention to that moment. Give clues: "This is it! Do you hear how quiet it is right now? Everyone is listening!" Then keep telling the story.
3. **Ask the kids to tell you what made that moment special.** After you tell the whole story, ask Ss what made that an interesting spot in your story. Ask them if they noticed that everyone was moving around but when that part of the story came about, everyone got quiet. They HAD to listen to find out what was happening. That was the "lean-in moment" because everyone leaned in ☺ *(In my story, [A Daring Experience - page 7](#), most people consider the lean-in moment starts when I say, "He sailed out into the air.")*

Lead Ss to understand that good stories usually have these characteristics is common:

- a. Short beginning. Keep the beginning simple.
- b. Lots of action so the reader makes mental pictures
- c. Drawn out action and description in the middle – the lean-in moment: when everyone gets quiet and really listens to the story. It's magical.
- d. Ending that finishes off the story in a satisfying way.

**ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT:** Ask each student who has a story on his mind to tell a partner. T listens in to see what Ss learned from the lesson. T takes notes on what Ss know and need to know.

**LINK:** From listening in, choose 4-5 students who have an interesting story to tell. Assign the storytellers to a corner or space in the room. Send 3 or 4 other Ss along with the storytellers to be listeners. **Ask the storytellers to watch how people (their audiences) react to their stories.**

1. The S tells his/her story to her small group.
2. The T sits with one group (but watches others). The T takes notes on what happens in the group she's with. *(I have found that I don't need to be with all groups in this lesson. I need to watch one*

*closely and then use what I observe in the closure discussion at the end. If no one has anything to say in closure then I can say, well, let me tell you what I saw.)*

**SHARE: Bring the Ss back to the gathering space to discuss:**

- Ask listeners if anyone heard a lean-in moment.
- Ask the writers how they changed (revised) their story because of the way someone reacted to it.
- T shares what she observed.

**SUMMARIZE:** When writing, Ss should have that same sense of audience that they do when they're telling a story. Even though they're writing they should pretend they are "telling."

**Homework:** Ask the Ss to tell stories again for homework. Ask Ss to watch how people react to their stories and listen to their questions. Ask Ss to revise their stories and tell them again to be sure they tell a lean-in moment. Send home a **letter** explaining the homework to parents (see sidebar).

**Day 2 –**

**CONNECTION –**

1. Ask Ss what they learned when they told stories for homework.
2. Repeat the target for today: Writers revise stories as they tell them by looking at their audience to observe what they do and do not understand. Writers check to see if there's a "lean-in" moment.

**TEACH –**

1. **T tells a story that has a lot of holes.**
2. Ss ask questions about confusing parts.
3. After question & answer session, ask Ss what details they think need to be added to the story.
4. T tells story again with revisions this time.

Repeat **ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT, LINK** (choose different Ss to tell stories), and **SHARE** from Day 1.

Today, spend some more time modeling the questions students might ask that help the storyteller improve. (See homework box for examples.) Be stricter about insisting that storytellers tell a revised story based on the questions the audience asked – as you modeled when you told your story earlier.

Sample homework letter...

Dear Parents, October 2018  
Sometimes children need practice telling stories. For homework this week, we are concentrating on telling stories. As you listen to your child tell you a story, think of questions that you might ask that will help them make the story better.

Ask questions like...

1. And how did it end?
2. Exactly how did she... (get hurt, fall of the bicycle, etc.)
3. I'm not clear about what happened when... Tell me that part again.
4. What happened between... and...?
5. How did he look when...?
6. Did ... happen before or after...?

Talk through the parts you don't understand and then encourage your child to tell the story again without the missing parts this time.

To get writing homework credit, simply sign your child's notebook. He/she also needs to record the date and the title of the story.

Thank you!  
4<sup>th</sup> Grade Team

**TARGET Day 3-4: Writers ask for help from others so they know what to revise.** This lesson might need to be broken into 2 days. Or, on day 4 students could work in groups of 3-4. One person tells a story and the others offer compliments, ask questions, and give suggestions. The storyteller revises the story to make it less confusing or more interesting.

**CONNECTION** (Bring students to the gathering space.)

TWS: We’ve discussed how a writer finds a topic. For 2 days, storytellers practiced telling a story they selected. The audience asked questions about confusing parts. The storytellers revised their stories based on the questions the students asked. Therefore, we’re better at telling stories!

**TEACH** --- TWS: Today we are going to learn to be even better responders so that we all can improve our storytelling and writing.

**Compliments**

1. EXPLAIN that the first step in helping a storyteller is by giving compliments. Compliments help writers know what worked and what to keep in their stories. The best way to compliment a writer is BY USING THE WORDS THE STORYTELLER USED.

Either share the examples students told you when you told your story or what listeners said about Karen’s story. NOTICE there are 2 parts. (1) The words the speaker used and (2) the compliment – why the listener liked the words. For example, (from Karen’s story)...

What the audience quoted	Why they liked those words
I love when you said <i>he sailed out into the air.</i>	I got a picture in my head when you said that.
I noticed that you told me the floor was cement and I was already worried that something bad was going to happen.	That was smart.
You made me laugh when you said that Tom was in a heap on the floor and he said, “Get mom.”	I could see that picture.
I didn’t expect you to say, “go ahead fool,” to your brother.	I like surprises in stories.

2. Ask one child to tell a story to the class that they told in class or for homework. Remind the storyteller to watch the audience to see if there is a “lean-in moment.” If no one volunteers, have a story ready to tell and you will have to be the storyteller for the day or use Karen’s story as your teaching example.
3. When the storyteller is done, ask the class to compliment the speaker with specific praise, USING THE WORDS THE STORYTELLER USED AND EXPLAINING WHY THOSE WORDS WERE EFFECTIVE. If they can’t tell you why they liked what they did, then you can model what to say: “Oh I liked that, too. I like surprises in stories. Do you think that’s why you like that part?” Try to help Ss name why they liked what they did.

### Effective vs. Ineffective Questions

4. Explain how to ask effective questions. Share these questions that are effective ones that students might have asked about Karen's story or share questions about your story.
  - I wasn't clear whether your brother was younger than you or older than you.
  - Did your brother always dare you to do things or was this the only time?
  - How did your brother hit the wall at the bottom? Where were the stairs and where was the wall?
5. EXPLAIN ineffective questions. Again, use your story or examples that go with Karen's story: "What color were the scarves in the story?" and "Did your brother see the doctor again?" and "How did you get the idea for this story?" *are questions* but they don't help the reader tell a more interesting story. The questions are ineffective ones. They are off the writer's topic: her brother dares his sister to do things but pays for it in the end. The purpose of asking questions is to help the writer develop a meaningful story with details that matter – not just a longer one.
6. Give the audience time to ask the storyteller questions. Gently evaluate whether the questions are effective or ineffective. Asking questions is a difficult responsibility, but the students will get better with practice. So let them practice asking questions and explaining why their questions are ineffective or helpful. ALSO --- offer Ss the opportunity to write their compliments and questions in their notebooks while listening so they will remember them.

### Suggestions

7. The 3<sup>rd</sup> step in this process is making revision suggestions for the storyteller. Explain that the answers to the questions the listeners asked might be worth working into the telling of the story the second time. The author determines the value of the suggestions.
8. Ask the volunteer to retell the story with the suggestions the audience makes that he or she feels are appropriate.

**SHARE** Return to seats to reflect on and record important ideas from today's lesson. Students should be able to record learning about:

- (1) Compliment by repeating the writer's words and telling WHY you like them.
- (2) Ask questions that will help the writer improve the story.
- (3) Give suggestions to the storyteller.

**HOMEWORK** Either tell a story or write a story. Continue to build your topic list at the back of your notebook. As you notice things, write a reminder note on the topic page.

**Day 5-6 or 7:** Next, each S chooses a story, tells it 3 times to 3 different audiences either at home or at school, and then writes it with suggestions from those audiences. Ss share in some sort of celebration. For sharing ideas, visit <http://www.liketowrite.com/sharefinishedwork.html>

Karen's True Sample Story:

A Daring Experience  
By Karen Haag

My younger brother was always daring me to do crazy things. Usually, one or the other of us got in some kind of trouble.

One day, in the dead of winter, way up north in New York where I lived as a little girl, my brother and I were bored of playing in the basement. My 6 year-old, brother Tom got the idea to dare me to jump off the third step of the basement stairs. Since I was his older sister, I said, "No problem!" I made the jump easily. That made Tom mad.

Tom dared me to jump off the fifth step. "Just like this!" he exclaimed as he showed me how he wanted me to jump. I gracefully jumped off the fifth step to the concrete floor below. Now, Tom was really mad.

He was determined to beat me! He dared me to jump off the top step. I knew this idea was not a good one and so I said, "Go ahead, fool!"

Tom was steaming! He had dared me and he had to go through with it. He sailed into the air. He hit the wall at the bottom of the stairs. He slid down the wall to the floor and brought the shelves with him. Down came the boots, the hats, the scarves, the winter coats *and* the shelves. Tom laid in a heap covered in stuff at the bottom of the stairs. I walked over to him and stared down at my dizzy brother. He looked pretty pale and weak. With barely a whisper he groaned, "Get mom!"

Mom, who was used to these scenes with my brother by now, walked down the stairs. She carefully looked him over and asked him where he hurt. She slid her hand across the bone at the base of his throat. Mom said, "This boy has to go to the hospital!" She gathered him up and loaded him into the car.

Tom's collarbone was broken. Doctors can't put a cast on a collarbone. Tom's doctor told him to sit still for one month! Eventually, he healed and was back pulling more crazy stunts. Even so, he did learn not to dare his sister on a cold, winter day.