



# USING STORYTELLERS IN SCHOOLS

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*NATIONAL STORYTELLING WEEK is always the first week in February.* Schools often ask for more information about storytellers and this Factsheet has been produced to address questions asked over the years.

## WHAT IS A STORYTELLER?

- \* A storyteller is an artist, an entertainer and an educator. Storytelling is one of the most ancient art forms, stretching back for as long as humans have had speech.
- \* A storyteller uses words to take you on a journey of the imagination. Each person will hear something different as the story is created in the space between the teller and the listener.
- \* Storytellers may tell traditional folk tales, written tales, anecdotes, urban myths, stories from history, religious or moral tales, stories they have created themselves or which have been created for a specific event. Some storytellers will create a story spontaneously to suit the audience.
- \* A storyteller tells stories from memory rather than reading them from the book, memorising stories image by image not word for word.
- \* Storytellers may tell a story differently each time they tell it, interacting with their audience, choosing stories and images to communicate with them.
- \* Some storytellers use music, dance, song, pictures or puppets.
- \* Many storytellers offer workshop sessions, which may either teach storytelling skills or engage participants in creative activities linked to the stories.



## WHAT CAN A STORYTELLER DO FOR A SCHOOL?

Inviting people into school creates a special atmosphere whoever they are. Storytellers, authors, poets or illustrators all provide excitement and stimulation and are in great demand during National Storytelling Week in February, National Book Week and National Poetry Day in the autumn.

What is special about storytellers and storytelling?

- \* Storytelling supports and underpins literacy development across the curriculum. A storyteller can improve concentration, listening skills and help develop and enrich spoken and written language.  
A storyteller can stimulate the imagination, contributing to Speaking and Listening as well as Creative Writing, Poetry, Drama, Music and Art.
- \* Hearing and retelling traditional tales can provide scaffolding for children's own imaginative stories, giving the child a variety of frameworks to work from.
- \* Storytelling encourages a questioning attitude.  
A storyteller can create excitement and enthusiasm for History, Geography and Religious Studies as well as English language, literature and Drama.  
Some storytellers have stories which connect with the Maths and Science curriculum.
- \* A storyteller can widen the range of children's emotional, cultural and moral responses.  
Sensitive issues can be considered through the distancing frame of a story.  
Storytelling builds bridges across and within communities. Some storytellers have been involved in organising projects linking a school with the rest of the community.
- \* A storyteller can teach storytelling skills to pupils, raising their self-confidence. This has been proved especially effective with 'low achievers'. Older children can tell to younger, benefiting both groups by building the self-esteem of the older children and providing positive role models to the younger.
- \* Some storytellers can provide other types of workshop sessions. These can help inspire children's creativity through a range of follow-up activities, building on the fundamental base of all language, the spoken word.



## CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN BOOKING A STORYTELLER

With an ever-increasing variety of storytellers to choose from, how do you find those who will suit you? Whatever event you are planning, give yourself plenty of time. Many popular storytellers are booked up months in advance.

### **Have a clear idea of the sort of event you want:**

- Is this to be a one-off event or a residency?
- Do you want a performance or a workshop?
- What age groups will be involved? Will the ages be mixed?
- Have any of them special needs the storyteller should be aware of?
- Are you looking for stories on a particular theme or from a specific culture?
- Will it be formal or relaxed, a performance in front of the whole school or working with smaller groups?
- How many sessions will there be?
- How long do you want each session to be?
- How much audience participation do you want?
- What venue are you planning to use?
- Do you require the storyteller to work outdoors?

### **When you have an idea of the sort of event you are aiming for:**

- Look in the quick reference section of the Directory of Storytellers, note those who meet your requirements.
- Look in the County listing to see which storytellers are local to you.
- Look through the Directory and pick out storytellers who you like the sound of.
- Phone the storytellers on your short-list to discuss your needs, they may be able to give you more ideas about what you could do or help you modify your plans.
- Ask what they charge and if this includes travelling expenses.
- *Expect to pay at least as much as you would for a supply teacher.*
- Ask if they are available on the dates you want.
- Ask for a couple of references from people for whom they have done similar work.
- You do not have to make a firm booking at this stage.



**When you have decided which Storyteller you want to book:**

- Phone to confirm they are still free and are willing to come.
- Write to confirm date, time, place and fee.
- If you are sent a contract please complete and send it back in good time.
- Include a map and a timetable.
- If you have discussed a potential booking with a storyteller, and decided not to employ them, please contact them in good time so they can release the date for other bookings.

## GETTING THE BEST FROM YOUR STORYTELLER

Having any artist, writer, poet or storyteller come into school is an expense and you want your money's worth. How do you ensure success on the day?

**When you are planning the event:**

- Choose a venue where the storyteller and audience will not be disturbed.
- Think about how you will set up the space so the audience can sit in comfort and see the storyteller clearly. If there is to be a workshop ask the storyteller how they want the room set out. Discuss with the storyteller how long each session is to be.

**The week before:**

- Phone the storyteller to ensure that they have received your confirmation, map, timetable etc. Ask if there is anything they will need you to provide on the day. Will they be requiring lunch and if so do they have any special dietary requirements? Confirm arrangements for payment.
- If they are coming by public transport check to see if they need collecting from the station and when their train arrives.
- Tell the children there will be a storyteller coming into school next week and start building a little excitement about the event.

**On the day:**

- Most schools now have the Reception clearly marked, but in a large school it might be an idea to have a pupil keep a lookout to escort the storyteller.
- When they arrive show them where they will be working, offer them a drink, ask if they need help carrying anything from their car.
- Before they start make sure they have a glass of water, know where the toilets and staff room are, check if there is anything else they need.



- Ensure you are ready to start on time, late starts mean less time for the stories.
- If you are introducing the teller check how they want to be introduced and how to pronounce their name, many storytellers are happy to introduce themselves.
- Show the children that you value the storyteller's work by listening with them. Please do not use this time to do other work as children will use you as a role model for their behaviour in a performance setting.
- Do not leave the storyteller alone with the children, it is difficult to tell and supervise. This also ensures you are complying with the Child Protection Act.
- Avoid interruptions during the session as this can spoil the magic.
- At break times, if the storyteller has joined you in the staff room, ensure they are included in the conversation.

**Afterwards:**

- Give the storyteller some feedback - what went well, any concerns. The children might like to write, telling the storyteller which stories they liked.
- Ensure payment is sent promptly.



## NURSERY SCHOOLS

Many Nursery Schools wish to book a storyteller for a very brief session. To employ a professional storyteller for an hour may cost as much as employing them for half a day unless you organise other work for them. Co-operation with other Schools and Nurseries in your area is the key to getting the time you want at a price you can afford.

Give yourself plenty of time to organise the event.

- Talk to other schools, nurseries and playgroups in your area to discover which of them is interested in sharing a storyteller with you.
- If you are lucky you may find a nearby Primary School who is interested in filling the rest of the day.
- Contact those who have expressed an interest with a list of possible dates, ask them how long a session they would like and to list a first second and third choice if possible.
- From this information work out which is the best date and work out a timetable, remembering to allow travelling time. If there is a lot of interest you might even fill two days.
- Send a copy of your proposed timetable to each of the participating schools and amend it where needed.
- Find storytellers who tell to pre-school children in the Directory of Storytellers. Look at their entries and locations.
- Contact the storytellers who seem to best fit your needs, tell them what you are planning and ask them to give you a price for the work, including travel. If you can speak to them on the phone you will get a good idea about whether they will suit you.
- Having chosen your storyteller, contact the other schools and confirm the amount they will be asked to contribute, you might add a small admin fee for your time. Ask them to pay you in advance if possible so you have the money in the bank when you write the cheque for the storyteller.
- Phone the storyteller and confirm they are still free on that date.
- Send a confirmation letter to the storyteller enclosing a map of where they will be working and a timetable. A simple contract setting out date, times, places and fee, with an sae will enable the storyteller to confirm the arrangements quickly.
- If you have discussed a potential booking with a storyteller and decided not to employ them, please contact them in good time so they can release the date for other bookings.

If you need any more assistance in finding a storyteller contact the administrator at the Society for Storytelling, [www.sfs.org.uk](http://www.sfs.org.uk)