

# Around the Fire: Oral Storytelling



ACTIVE LEARNING  
FOCUS

**FULL UNIT** – Teacher Facilitation Guide

English, Humanities, Grades 11–12

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

How is the experience of oral storytelling different from reading a book?

How can you tell a good oral story?

### LEARNING GOALS

Students will be able to:

- Understand the purpose of techniques used in oral storytelling.

## LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW

In this unit, students explore and analyze the purpose and impact of techniques used in oral storytelling. The unit culminates in students creating a story that is meant to be read aloud.

The first activity is a homework activity for students. Students will select a children's book and read it out loud to a group of people, preferably children. You will need about five to ten minutes to introduce this activity in class, and then students will complete it at home unless you choose to facilitate it (for example, you could set up a field trip to a local elementary school).

In the last few activities, students create and read an original story out loud to an audience. As best you can, you will want to plan for students to be able to have these experiences in order to fully grasp the concepts and skills in this unit.

## HOW TO PREPARE

1. Make a copy of the [Unit Guide for Students](#).
2. Preview the activities, including all resources. Take note that Activity 1 asks students to read out loud to one or more children: students should complete this activity at home if this cannot be facilitated at school.
3. Take note of any changes you would like to make and edit as needed to accommodate your students' needs. Consider which activities lend themselves best to teacher facilitation, group **collaboration**, and/or independent practice.
4. Review the learning artifact options and make a plan for which choices you will offer.
5. Make a list of must-dos before students begin this unit.
6. The facilitation notes that follow offer suggestions for how to best implement each activity, with active learning in mind.

## LEARNING ARTIFACT OPTIONS

An original story that is meant to be read aloud, with a reflection. Implementation options include reading for a live audience or virtual sharing via live or recorded performance.

## ACTIVITIES

### JUMP TO

- [Activity 1: Stories from Childhood](#)
- [Activity 2: Stories from Others](#)
- [Activity 3: Storytelling Techniques \(Part 1\)](#)
- [Activity 4: Storytelling Techniques \(Part 2\)](#)
- [Activity 5: Brainstorm Your Story](#)
- [Activity 6: Structure Your Story](#)
- [Activity 7: Write Your Story](#)
- [Activity 8: Practice Your Story](#)
- [Activity 9: Share Your Story](#)

## LESSON FRAMEWORK

### ACTIVITY 1: STORIES FROM CHILDHOOD

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**Learning Goal**

Experience reading a children's story to yourself and out loud to others.

**Supporting Resources**

[Page 1 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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Please note that this first activity is a homework activity. It should be introduced in class, but the introduction will only take five to ten minutes.

Another option is to complete this activity in class, if you can facilitate students reading children's books out loud to a group of children.

*SAY: When was the last time someone told you a really good story, one that made you laugh, made you cry, or got you so wrapped up that you just had to know how it ended?*

*Maybe it has been a while; maybe you haven't heard a really great story since you were a little kid listening to a bedtime story tucked up in the covers. But good storytelling isn't just for children. It's a skill that has been important throughout our history and one that still holds sway in modern culture.*

*During the next few classes, we are going to listen to several examples of powerful oral storytelling and figure out the skills needed to be an excellent storyteller.*

*Let's start at the beginning with the very first stories you probably heard aloud: children's stories.*

*First, for homework, find a children's story in a book. Read it to yourself. Then, read it aloud to a group of people, preferably children. Your options include:*

- *a group of children from your neighborhood*
- *younger siblings or cousins*
- *younger relatives or family friends via FaceTime, Skype, or another video call program*

*Afterward, answer this question in Activity 1 of your Unit Guide: How is the experience of reading silently to yourself different from reading aloud to a group of people? We'll come back together in class to discuss your experiences.*



## ACTIVE LEARNING

Encourage students to find a physical copy of a childhood story or book and read it out loud to a group of children (if possible). They can read to younger siblings, cousins, children in the neighborhood, etc. You may need to facilitate this for them, by reaching out to a local elementary school or public library. If students absolutely cannot find children to read to, they can read to a small group of classmates.



## DIFFERENTIATE

Students who can't be physically present with a group of children should be encouraged to use a service like FaceTime, Skype, or WhatsApp to video call friends or family. If necessary, students can record a video of themselves reading the story to share, but they should be encouraged to do a live reading in front of their audience if at all possible.

Students who do not have access to children's books at home or through the library may wish to use one of these online resources: [Epic](#) or [Storyline Online](#).

## ACTIVITY 2: STORIES FROM OTHERS

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### Learning Goal

Listen to stories from others.

### Supporting Resources

[Page 1 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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*SAY: Now it's your turn to listen to the stories of others.*

*Find and listen to several stories from several different places. No need to take notes; just watch and enjoy! Where can you find stories? Here are some options:*

- *The Moth Radio Hour*
- *spoken word poetry*
- *indigenous storytelling (oral traditions)*
- *NPR StoryCorps*
- *This American Life*
- *podcasts on Spotify or another site*

After listening to several stories, answer the following questions in your Unit Guide:

- Which story was your favorite? Which one was most appealing? Why?
- What was most striking or memorable about the stories?

**NOTE:** The above list is included in the Unit Guide for Students. Students should consider both the content of the story and the way it's told when answering the questions in their journals. Also, encourage students to view and listen to a variety of stories; this is an excellent opportunity for them to "go down the rabbit hole" in their exploration.



## DIFFERENTIATE

If students are struggling to find stories online, or if you'd like to group students to listen to stories, you can use the following resources:

Indigenous storytelling (oral traditions):

- [Native Storytelling](#): Thirza Defoe shares traditional Ojibwe and Oneida stories at the Smithsonian. The whole presentation is valuable, but students may wish to focus on the techniques in the story beginning at the 17:00 mark.
- [Two Hungry Bears](#) by Tamarack Song and Moses (Amik) Beaver ( story begins at 3:26 mark)
- [The Haida Creation Story](#) with Elder Bill Reid (the story begins at the 0:57 mark)

Spoken word and poetry:

- [Wake Up! \(Spoken Word Poetry\): Jesse Oliver](#)
- [Grand Slam Poetry Champion: Harry Baker](#)
- [Pages Matam: Looking for Your Voice? A Poetry Slam Champ Shows You How \(poetry about his mother begins at the 2:00 mark\)](#)
- [The Moth Radio Hour](#)
- [NPR StoryCorps](#)
- [Twenty Best Story Podcasts to Sweep You Away Right Now](#)

### ACTIVITY 3: STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES (PART 1)

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#### Learning Goal

Make a list of oral storytelling techniques.

#### Supporting Resources

[Page 2 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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*SAY: So what made those stories from the last activity memorable, appealing, or striking?*

*Just like authors use certain techniques when writing a story, storytellers use certain techniques when telling a story.*

*In your Unit Guide, make a list of all the techniques of oral storytelling you can think of (think back to what you just listened to in the last activity).*

*Separate your list into two categories: narrative techniques (techniques for what is told, like imagery) and presentation techniques (techniques for how the story is spoken aloud).*

Below are suggested techniques, if students are struggling to get started. Students can also conduct research, if needed.

#### Narrative techniques:

- characterization
- setting
- imagery (five senses)
- dialogue
- repetition
- hyperbole
- conflict
- suspense

#### Presentation (how it's told):

- facial expressions
- gestures
- tone
- voice volume
- eye contact
- involvement of the audience
- pacing: knowing when to pause, speed up, or slow down
- comic relief



#### ACTIVE LEARNING

Divide students into two groups: one responsible for listing narrative techniques, and one responsible for listing presentation techniques. Come together after each group has made a list to share findings (students should take notes). Or, divide students into two groups, but have each group list both techniques. Afterward, students can share and compare their lists on large paper in the classroom, or in a shared document.

## ACTIVITY 4: STORYTELLING TECHNIQUES (PART 2)

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### Learning Goal

Analyze the oral storytelling techniques used in a story of your choosing.

### Supporting Resources

[Page 2 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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*SAY: Now that you have identified the techniques storytellers use, consider which stories had the greatest impact on you. Pick the one story from Activity 2 that was the most striking to you.*

*Listen to that story again. This time, as you listen, stop and write down the oral storytelling techniques used. Make sure to include both narrative techniques and presentation techniques. (Tip: Use your list from Activity 3 to create a note-taking document for yourself.)*

*Once you have listened to the story and taken notes on techniques, reflect on the techniques you spotted. Describe the effect of each technique. You may need to listen to parts of the story again as you reflect. Answer the following questions in your Unit Guide:*

- *Does this technique capture your interest or draw you into the narrative? How so?*
- *Does this technique create an emotional response (humor, suspense, etc.)? How so?*
- *Does this technique help you understand the content or meaning of the story? How so?*

*Just as you would with a written text, encourage students to make specific references to the auditory text, supporting their analysis with evidence of the techniques from the story.*



### ACTIVE LEARNING

Choose a cooperative learning structure like a carousel or other strategy from the [Active Learning Menu](#) to keep students active and engaged.



## ACTIVITY 5: BRAINSTORM YOUR STORY

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### Learning Goal

Brainstorm ideas for your own oral story.

### Supporting Resources

[Page 3 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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**SAY:** *You've listened to the stories of others. Now, prepare to tell your own story. Brainstorm first, in any format that works for you, but consider the following questions as you brainstorm:*

- *Will your story be based on real-life events, imagined events, or a mix of both?*
- *Who is your audience?*
- *Why should this story be told? What do you hope to accomplish with this story? In other words, what is your goal or purpose?*
- *Do you want to model your story after one of the types of stories you have encountered during this unit (for example, a story from *The Moth Radio Hour* or a slam poetry performance)?*

*The preceding questions are included in your Unit Guide, along with space to brainstorm as you wish. It's okay if you are unsure about the answers to some of these questions. Your ideas might change as you continue to prepare to tell your story in the coming activities.*



### ACTIVE LEARNING

Encourage students to share their ideas with their peers in order to vet their options. For example, they might find partners to give one or more 30-second elevator pitches of the stories they would like to tell.

## ACTIVITY 6: STRUCTURE YOUR STORY

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### Learning Goal

Decide how you will structure your story.

### Supporting Resources

[Page 4 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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*SAY: You have an idea. Now, explore the various options you have for how to structure your story by checking out [the link](#) in your Unit Guide. As you read the description of each type of structure, keep in mind how different structures work better for different kinds of stories.*

*Choose a structure for your story. In the next activity, you'll write out your story using the structure you've chosen.*

[This link](#) in the Unit Guide includes the following structures: the monomyth, the mountain, the nested loop, the sparklines, in media res, converging ideas, the false start, and the petal structure.

Depending on the skill level of your students and how many of them are working on this activity at the same time, you may wish to discuss each type of structure as a class, weighing the merits and best uses of each.

## ACTIVITY 7: WRITE YOUR STORY

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### Learning Goal

Write your story in a format that works best for you and make a plan to include storytelling techniques.

### Supporting Resources

[Page 4 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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### DIFFERENTIATE

After students have chosen a structure, they should decide how they want to write their story in order to tell it out loud.

Below are some options:

- Write the story out fully.
- Use note cards.
- Use a graphic organizer or map.

Students should consider the pros and cons of each before deciding (that could even be a class discussion!).

**SAY:** *Once you've decided how you will write your story, revisit your list of storytelling techniques from Activity 3. Decide which techniques you will work to incorporate as you write and plan to tell your story. Write down the techniques you will use and how you will use them in your Unit Guide.*

## ACTIVITY 8: PRACTICE YOUR STORY

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### Learning Goal

Practice reading your story out loud.

### Supporting Resources

[Page 5 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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*SAY: Practice reading your story out loud.*

*Pick an appropriate setting in which to deliver your story to your intended audience. Remember that attention to your chosen audience should be evident in how you share your story, and your story should be short enough to be told in one sitting.*

*Continue to think about what techniques you can include in your story to make it more engaging and effective. After you practice reading your story out loud, revise it!*



### ACTIVE LEARNING

Facilitate ways for students to practice both alone and in front of an audience. The final learning artifact asks students to deliver their final story for an audience, as well; as such, they may wish to practice on a different person or group of people than those they will use for the final learning artifact. Consider asking students to peer review one another during practice sessions in class; ask them to provide their peers with feedback on both the story itself and the techniques the storyteller used to make the story engaging.

## ACTIVITY 9: SHARE YOUR STORY

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### Learning Goal

Share your story with your intended audience.

### Supporting Resources

[Page 5 of Unit Guide for Students](#)

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Students should now share their final story with an audience. Their story should be read in one sitting, with no distractions, so they should choose their place and time carefully (you may want to facilitate this for the entire class).

Although students have the option to share their story virtually, it is preferable that students be able to share it in person and gauge their audience's reaction. A live or virtual performance is preferable to a recorded video of the performance.



### ACTIVE LEARNING

Focus on feedback: Work with students to create a feedback sheet, or a survey, etc. for their audience to complete during and after their storytelling. After receiving feedback, conference with students individually or in small groups about the experience. Ask them how the audience responded to their story, what they think the overall effect of their story is, and how they achieved that effect.

Alternatively, facilitate a roundtable discussion after the performances during which students discuss which storytelling moments and techniques were most effective or noteworthy.

Get more resources like this at [www.opportunityeducation.org/resources](http://www.opportunityeducation.org/resources)