

HOW TO. . .tell a terrific story

by Phil Myers & Denise Peterson

A story is a TRUTH, a concept wrapped up in words that makes people listen intently to what you're saying. It is a DOCTRINE that grabs a kid by the heart and draws his mind right into the events as they unfold in the story. It is an IDEA dressed up in everyday clothes. You are going to tell a STORY!

It might be an Old Testament history lesson, a parable of Jesus, a tale of danger or rebellion or love or disobedience or rebuke. The story might be about a missionary with a passion to reach a village in Germany, or a pastor who lived long ago and was burned to death for preaching the Gospel. A king or a prophet or disciple or apostle. It may be how a small boy began praying for prisoners in Ireland.

But you are going to transport the 25 pairs of eyes who stare at you for the next twenty minutes to a place with real people far away. You are going to capture their little hearts and let them follow you through a jungle, sail on a wobbly boat across the Sea of Galilee, eat a fish sandwich that Jesus just made out of a small boy's lunch, sit in a dirty hut with a missionary who is translating the Bible from somebody's gibber-jabber into a paper book, or teaching adults how to read A-B-C-D in their own language. And your STORY is going to do all this!

You ARE NOT GOING TO BORE A SINGLE CHILD by reciting a long list of hum-drum events which you read from the Bible to put him to sleep. You are going to ignite a flame of evangelism in his little soul—to start a hunger to love Jesus more than chocolate, or pizza, or even his mom or dad. You are going to prepare your own heart so thoroughly that your own soul burns with a desire to hug-these-little-ones-into-a-love-for-the-Lord-Jesus. You are going to take each one by the hand and place it gently in the nail-scarred hand of our dear Savior.

You are going to tell him all about the Savior and then lift him so he can sit on the lap of the one who died for him. You are going to spend as much time as it takes *[it may take several hours]* to prepare this “story” so that you can fully expect the Holy Spirit to do amazing things in the hearts of those kids whom the God of the universe has placed in your care. You will slowly begin to see the enormous responsibility placed on your shoulders to use the Word of God TO CHANGE LIVES! You are going to do this with a STORY!

As you tell your story you are going to teach. You are going to look deep into the eyes of every child sitting before you. You are not going to be glued to reading the Script. You are going to “own” the lesson and let it roll around in your heart for several days before you infuse it into the minds of your children. You are not going to postpone your preparation time until the night before you stand as God's mouthpiece. You are an ambassador commissioned in heaven to bring God's message to these little ones who are so close to the ground. You will stand *[or sit]* before these kids prayed-up the best you know how.

You will teach while you are filled with the a Holy Spirit and yielded to His will. You are only a tool, yes, a tool to do a task which the Holy Spirit cannot accomplish without your human body, but your mouth can only speak what your week has taken time to prepare. A story, a STORY!

Okay, now come the list of “Dos & Don'ts.” Pay Attention! or you will be doomed to such an ineffective ministry that Mary herself would have been disappointed to send Jesus to your class and God will be sorry that He allowed you to teach His Holy Word.

Heart & Head preparation:

1. Pray for Wisdom. Pray for clarity in presentation and pray that the kids will Listen.
2. Set aside enough time to prepare your lesson - do it the same day every week.
Sit in the same chair.
3. Learn the story very, very well. Read it over so many times you can't forget the important parts.
Jot down significant points you must remember.
Memorize your first and last paragraphs. *Read them in class if you must.*
Write a list of questions you will ask before, during, and after the story.
Tell it aloud before a mirror *[or your cat]* especially if you've never told a story with the passion I've described above.
4. Write enough hints down so that you can do it smoothly by referring to your notes.

- A. Highlight your notes and try to tell the story just looking at those words or phrases
 B. Then put just the highlighted words on a card
 C. Plan the parts when you are not going to be reading anything and just looking into their eyes!

* Write out completely. . .

- your first sentence [*read them even though you memorized them*]
- the first 3-5 words when you shift from scene to scene [*this is the hardest part to make smooth*]
- your last sentence

* Then eliminate all the words you can without forgetting anything

[This is what you may hold in your hand when you speak. It can still be a whole page.]

5. Prepare it so well that you're pretty sure you can concentrate on the kids' responses as you speak instead of on "what comes next." *Yes, I know that the learning curve is pretty steep for those of you who are just beginning this new trek, but be patient with yourself. You can do this. Teach with a yielded heart. This gives God the opportunity to work in the hearts of the kids. The only evaluation you must give yourself is, "Was my teaching filled with the Holy Spirit?"*
6. Your voice
 Be enthusiastic. **Shout**, w-h-i-s-p-e-r, smile, frown ☹, cry, change voices, but make sure you're interested in the story yourself.
 Be sincere.
 Be personal. Talk as though there were only one kid in the room and he were sitting on his bed and listening with rapt attention.
 Move around: point, march, shrug, stoop, stamp your foot, clench your fist, get angry, laugh. Last week I yelled at the top of my lungs, "**BE YE KIND!!**" Three times. Emily jumped! I also whispered it.
7. Learn to lean on the Lord for help. You may have been teaching for years with your own gift of gab. Stop it! From now on you will consciously teach with the power of the Holy Spirit, the power that raised Jesus from the dead. Don't worry about mispronouncing words, forgetting details, spitting on the front row of kids, misquoting Bible verses, the pains in your feet or back, your fear of making mistakes, your pride of wanting to be eloquent or fancy or as good as somebody else. You are a sharp sword in the hand of a mighty God! All He needs is your very best, yielded to the Spirit.

And if you must, drop to your knees in front of your students and pray aloud that the Lord will take your preparation—"It's the best I can do, Lord. Use it to Your glory."

Then get back up. Wipe the tears out of your eyes. Sniffle, and start where you left off!

What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee. Psalm 56.3
Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for thee. 1 Peter 5.7

Have confidence that your staff will be praying for you while you are teaching.

By the way, there a many times I have cried while I have been writing a lesson to teach adult as well as preparing to teach my kids. This is one of those afternoons. You are heavy on my heart. *Phil*

8. Look into kids' souls through their eyes. Every single kid, often.
9. Some of you are not born story tellers. My daughter and I are. But you can learn to do a bang-up job, you'll just have to practice more than my daughter and I do. We can just think it through carefully and say the words in our minds. Perhaps you'll have to find a practice room and tell your story twice [*or more*] aloud to a special photo on the wall or to a stuffed animal.
10. **Great first sentences:**
- "There were 3 lessons Mr. Lynch taught me in the fourth grade."
 - My father thought he was teaching me to be honest, but he actually taught me to steal."
 - "Have you ever been as scared as I was when one night I opened the door to the shed and. . .?"
 - "Philip was a missionary kid in Africa and he would have been squeezed to death by the 12 foot boa constrictor snake behind him, if he hadn't obeyed his father's instruction the very first time when he spoke in a normal tone of voice. How good are you at obeying your parents the first time they tell you to pick up your room, or take out the trash? Do you wait until they raise their voices?" *Ahem, kids train parents and Bible Clubhouse leaders to raise their voices.*

11. Lousy first sentences: Why?

- “There is a Bible story I know you’ll like.
- “There is a Bible story I know you’ll like. It is found somewhere in the New Testament.”
- “There is a Bible story I know you’ll like. I heard it when I was your age and it became one of my favorite Bible stories.”
- “I can’t find the verse that says we are supposed to. . . , but. . . .”
- “As I was preparing my lesson this morning. . . .”

12. THINGS TO **DO**:

Talk about sin every week and present Jesus as the Savior.

* We are either trusting Jesus as our Savior to take us to heaven, or

* we are trusting on our good works to take us to heaven.

Keep your hands from fidgeting. Use your hands for meaningful gestures often.

Stand where everyone can see your face.

Ignore distractions as much as possible. Your glances at distractions will draw the kids’ eyes to look at the distractors as well. *Your staff is in charge of kids who are a distraction, not you.*

Speak loudly enough so that the last row can hear.

Talk, don’t preach. Don’t use your “school teacher” voice.

Weave the message of salvation [*practice aloud in front of a mirror, and you can learn to explain it clearly in 2 minutes—see my blogs on evangelism*] during the story at the most natural place. You may even have to set the pictures you’re using aside and use another “object” while you’re explaining the Gospel. Then pick up the “story” again where you left off.

Use at least one different method of teaching every six weeks or so.

Such as:

-pretend you’re an angel whose telling the lesson

-wear a paper bag mask

-sing during the middle of the story

-go outside *I take kids to cemeteries when I teach on the resurrection.*

-sit on the ground and gather the kids around “a campfire”

-kids act out one of the scenes

*put name tags around 6 kids necks *I keep a stash of lanyards with clips so I can put them around kids’ necks quickly*

* use simple costumes [*wigs, shoes, or oversized shirts*] *I carry 2 plastic bags which contain 6 simple costumes, and I can dress a kid up in about 10 seconds.*

-pass out Bibles [*or scripts*] and have kids read different parts

-put it on PowerPoint *I rarely use it. For the amount of time [and I’m pretty fast] it takes, I feel I can use other more **effective** means with children.*

-teach the whole lesson with [*carefully prepared*] questions, charts, maps,

-simple stick figures on sheets of paper or white board

-puppets without a stage *Yes, sock puppets will still work magic.*

13. THINGS TO **DON’T**:

Don’t fiddle with your hair, jewelry, buttons, or keys in your pocket

Don’t wear loud or jangly earrings, distracting clothing, or make-up

Don’t turn your back to any of the kids

Don’t moralize at the end of the story. They should have gotten the point already. But you can certainly review by asking them,

“What about you? Are you going to make the same mistake that David made in our story?”

“What promise of God did David forget [*or remember*] in our lesson?”

“There were 3 things we should always do. What were they?”

Don’t ask questions unless you want them to answer. Ask lots of questions to see if they got it.

Don’t apologize for your story, or visuals, or your preparation. If you’re unprepared, confess it to God, and maybe ask someone else to teach whose heart is prepared.

NEVER TEACH UNPREPARED PEDAGOGICALLY OR SPIRITUALLY!

Stay in your car and confess your sin even if it makes you late.

Don’t touch the microphone [*if you have one*].

13. **Remember about retention**

If you want kids to remember what you taught, use their ears, their eyes, and their mouths.

Give a **review**:

7-question quiz

Shout-It-Out!

Contest

One kid retells the story in 1 minute

Match the name with the event

Pin-the-tail-on-the-right-answer

Begin with a review of last week's lesson [*maybe with the same 5 questions you had asked at the end of last week!*]

Repeat the **memory verse 3 times** during the Bible lesson.

14. Make sure you know what change you want to take place in their behavior.

State it quite clearly at least **3 times** during the lesson. Ask for a decision.

Here are well-worded "invitations" to give the Christian child as you close your lesson.

"Will you pray this week for missionaries to go to Iran?"

"What time is easiest for you to remember to read your Bible? Before breakfast? After breakfast? Before dinner? Before you put on your pajamas?"

"What are you going to do to please God the next time you feel like yelling at your mother?"

"If David was afraid and told God 'I will trust in Thee' will you trust in Him, too?"

15. **Only visualize** the parts of the lesson you want them to remember.

Special important words

Verses you want them to remember

Important events

Names that are significant

Use pictures, posters, photos, name tags, maps, hats, tracts, ad infinitum.

Use objects to cement the lesson on their skulls [*rock, flag, palm leaf, amulet, knife, bone, egg, Cross, rat poison, life preserver, money, flowers, matches, balloons, scroll, Bible, phone, ticket, bicycle, real blood, fake blood, band aids, spikes, chain, adoption papers, glasses, screwdriver, costumes of world religions, etc.*] *I've even brought my blue crotch-rocket motorcycle.*

I think I've used 'em all.

16. **Polishing a Bible lesson**

- BIG IDEA—What is the major *thrust* of the lesson? This is every kid's "take-away."

Repeat the 4-6 word phrase in your BIG IDEA at least 5 times!

Visualize it: poster, card to take home, white board

- EXAMPLES of the BIG IDEA:

God wants me to help others.

Talk to God every day - thank Him, intercede, & praise

Be quick to obey.

Be slow to anger

Pray that missionaries go to China [France, Brazil, or Niger]

Don't grumble or complain!!

- Memorize the key points every kid should know at end of Clubhouse
[this is the review quiz at the end]
- All important facts, names, places, Bible verses used
- Weave this truth into several spots in the story. Once, very close to the beginning. The last time *as you close, just before prayer.*
- Plan your review. [*see point 13 above or see archive: Law of Review, methods, section #2*]
- *Feelings* you are trying to arouse:
 - hatred for sin
 - love for those who. . .
 - sadness for. . .
 - disappointment about. . . .
 - How will next week be different if they apply the lesson?

- What do you want them to say when Mom says, “What did you learn today in your Bible class?”
- Things to do [*changes to make*] next week in school or at home
- Try to make one song fit the *BIG IDEA* you are teaching this week.
- You must know the memory verse cold! *word perfect*
- Choose an *object lesson or mini-illustration* or story which demonstrates the lesson you will teach. Perhaps another staff member might tell this before the lesson time.
- See if you can get everything in the whole Clubhouse meeting to point to the *BIG IDEA* of the lesson.

This may take you 2 or 3 hours a week at first. Don't despair.