

“Reading is clearly more than knowing letter names. After all, there are only 26 letters to memorize. Reading is so much more.” (Catherine Snow)

## **A Story**

*“I have a story to tell you. Oh boy, I’m so excited to share this one with you! Over the weekend, I got to go to a circus! If you’ve heard of the word circus before I’ll know it because you’re tapping your head.” Several of the students tap their head, others looks blankly at me, or the ground. After defining what a circus is together, I ask for students to put their hand on their head if they have an idea of something they might see at a circus. An assortment of animals and other fair items get listed off and eventually the whole room has ideas about things they’d see at a circus, including the students who didn’t originally tap their heads. I start to turn my back to them and say, “When I turn around I am going to see this room filled with frozen images of some of those things you said we might see in a circus.” When I turn around, students are making shapes, and after affirming the stillness of the ones who have their bodies as a frozen image, I begin tapping students on the head instructing them to come alive as the object or creature they’re playing. We have lions roaring, tents flapping in the wind, elephants bathing themselves, tightrope walkers, etc... We determine we would like to travel to the circus and see these things for ourselves! It will take some bravery, imagination, and my good-old, trusty travel blanket.*

*The students come up with a travel ritual, for example we might clap our hands together and altogether repeat “take us to the circus” three times while holding onto our corner of the travel blanket. “10-9-8-7..” the students count down as they giggle and hide underneath the travel blanket until, “zero!” Instead of the teaching artist greeting them, they’re met by a scarf-wearing, accent-touting circus master! “Oh! Hello! How did you get here?”*

*Some students offer comments like “We traveled here,” or “You’re actually Miss Chelsea, why are you wearing that scarf and talking like that?”*

*To which I reply, “Oh! Miss Chelsea! I know her, she’s an old friend of mine. Are you her friends?”*

*“Yes!”*

*“Well, thank goodness, because I need some brave young people to help me with this problem today. Do you know what brave means?” The students define the term and I ask them to show me what it looks like to be brave. The room is then filled with students standing tall and strong, some with muscles flexed. I introduce that in my circus, sometimes we show bravery with a special code. We rub our hands together. I demonstrate; they copy me. “Oh, good, thank goodness, it looks like there are a lot of brave students here! Okay, gather round, and let me tell you the problem!” They sit down in a clump near me, “a big storm hit our tent and collapsed it and all of the circus performers are out sick with ear infections! But we have an audience*

*coming to our circus tonight and we need to have a show! Oh what to do! Might you be able to help me?" They say, yes. "Look at my tent! It's a disaster!" I point to a strewn pile of scarves. How could I put it back together?" Do you have any ideas?*

*Students suggest things like, "We can put the tent back together and sew it up!" So we each place a scarf down and lay them next to each other and then the students are asked how many stitches we need to make in order to sew it up. Someone shouts, "ten," and we count to ten while making a stitching motion with our fingers and arms until the circus master exclaims:*

*"OH! How beautiful my tent is fixed! Thank you! But now, oh, now the circus performers, where could I find-one, two, three, four, five..." I count and tap on the head the number of students in the class, "twenty brave students who could learn to become circus performers for the show tonight?" They start rubbing their hands together, as was the signage we determined together to signal 'bravery. "Oh! You all! Wonderful! Let me take you inside the tent and get started."*

### **The Value of Story Itself**

The introductory example illustrates something we will discuss in depth throughout this paper: the power of dramatic arts to augment and enhance reading development in early childhood. The current emphasis in education, particularly with regard to reading, is focused heavily on skill building. This is indeed important at the early stages of reading, when students are learning how to decode and understand basic phonics (Hirsch, 2016). However, sight words and repetitive "drill and kill" on comprehension exercises are not what drive kids to love reading, in fact, just the opposite is true. Scholars argue that some of the most important work parents and teachers can do is to make reading and stories fun for their kids (Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003). Our research at foundry10 has focused not only on skill development through literature but also on students' enjoyment of the reading and story development process. Kids who enjoy reading will continue to read, and kids who like telling stories will continue to develop their imaginative capacity and expand their understanding of how to relate to stories they read or hear. We have heard from kindergarten students who explained that reading is "flashcards and memorizing words" and "not fun." It is a shame to hear comments, such as those, generated at a such a young age. Prekindergarten and kindergarten are excellent times to dive into the world of story. At these younger ages, children's minds easily engage with fantasy and the suspension of disbelief. Whether that reading inspires new creative efforts, allows children to imagine different realities, helps them understand the world, or just entertains, we find value in the power of story and children's ability to connect with it as a critical juncture to inspire new and continued interest in reading.

It is well established in the educational research literature that stories are important, whether from a social construct perspective (Paley, 1992), language development standpoint (Hirsch, 2016; Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003) or just when examining overall academic achievement (Wells, 1986). In fact, the number of hours that a child is read to while in their preschool years is one of the most accurate predictors of their later success with reading (Wells, 1986). Even

beyond academic performance, we firmly believe in the role of story as an essential component of a child's developing creativity and ability to extrapolate ideas so they can better relate to the world at large. Paley discusses how story can be used to illustrate a variety of concepts, controversies, and behaviors to help children understand much larger moral ideas (1992). While we can build children's vocabulary through the reading of stories, this is just one aspect of what we can begin to do with literacy. The benefits achieved through reading aloud with children is simply one tool in a wide variety of experiences and skillsets we can co-create with them through story. By adding in more forms of play and engagement, we can enhance these benefits while fostering an enjoyment of reading that will benefit the student even after the direct interaction.

### **Storytelling -- Another Way to Engage**

A concrete way to conceptualize storytelling is, "The oral presentation of a story from memory by an individual to a person or group. Movements, sound effects, and the use of props often accompany the oral elements of story presentation." (Gallets, 2005). In this sense, the story is not presented directly from a book, though it may be based on a story from one. As noted by Isbell, the primary reference point in a traditional oral reading of a story is the text itself as written on the page. However, when telling a story, the words themselves are not just memorized, but rather are recreated during "spontaneous, energetic performance," often with the active participation of the audience. (Isbell et al., 2004).

We can think of storytelling as a form of decontextualized language, which requires that the speaker set-up a clear structure and narrative so that anyone listening can follow along and understand. In effect, the listener has to be able to "get the point" of what the storyteller is trying to convey. This might be in contrast to other types of more contextualized language where a clear narrative structure is not as necessary (such as informal conversation amongst friends) or when reading the words another person has already written (such as when reading aloud from a text). In both of those instances, due to the shared nature of the context, details and structure can be omitted because enough shared information already exists to make the communication of ideas clear.

Engaging children in their own construction of stories through shared storytelling invites them to build context and clearly articulate the imagery they've created in their mind about the story. For example, when the storyteller in the opening example requested that students name things they thought might be at a circus, the students were tasked with building context for words they were already familiar with, like lion or tightrope, by associating them with a new word: circus. Then, students were asked to embody the imagery they created in their mind connecting words with their bodies through physical expression.

Although children are frequently encouraged to ask questions or engage with stories when read aloud, often their contributions are minimized due to the overarching structure of reading the

actual story. In addition, in dialogic reading the child and reader discuss how the story itself relates to their own lives as they read. This is not always easy for the adult to do well as making literary connections to everyday life sometimes does not feel natural to the uninitiated. In storytelling, on the other hand, this extension of the literature and dialogue is inherent in the structure of the interaction. Children are encouraged to repeat phrases, make sounds, and often have the opportunity to suggest variations of key story elements (Isbell et al., 2004). Ellis argues that development of a child's imagination is one of the primary benefits of engaging with storytelling. (Ellis, 1997). This benefit to the imagination is believed to derive from the fact that when engaging with storytelling, children are envisioning their own models of the scenery, characters and actions. Rather than simply looking at images that are provided from a book, children must use their own minds to not only generate the images themselves but to physicalize what they envision.

In terms of skill development, researchers argue that storytelling adds additional elements of whole language development, higher level thinking skills, cooperative learning, social skill development, motivation and self-esteem (Ellis, 1997). Much like in good oral reading, good storytelling asks the listener to consider the order of events, the key ideas, traits of various characters, the listener to make inferences and predictions, and in many cases allows for the children themselves to alter the course of events. Furthermore, listening to a story while visualizing and then engaging together with peers helps enhance attention and social capabilities (Isbell et al., 2004).

Interestingly though, sometimes the lack of images in storytelling can actually inhibit children's abilities to connect with the story. An anecdotal reference comes from Gallet who noted that during one study, a child who was in the storytelling group (not the read aloud group) confronted the researcher and asked if she could please see the image of the inside of a cat's stomach from the "real book" because she could not figure out how to picture that portion in her own mind. As a result of this difficulty, the child also struggled when trying to retell that part of the story because she was less able to make the mental connection that helped her to comprehend that section of the story. (Gallet, \*\*\*\*) Berkowitz argues that "sometimes pictures prevent a child from imagining - creating his or her own mental images of the characters and events in the story" (2011). We believe that there might be a fusion of the two worlds, that includes opportunities to visualize one's own images while also connecting back to a text. Reading aloud and storytelling, in combination, allow for active use of the imagination while still giving children a chance to connect with an actual story book and we call it dramatic storytelling.

### **Dramatic Storytelling -- How is it different?**

We define *dramatic storytelling* as a collective, shared, collaborative storytelling with a connection to a real book. In our examples, the appropriate age range for this style of dramatic storytelling is traditionally suitable for ages three to seven. For our design, we utilized local dramatic teaching artists to come in and work alongside teachers in classrooms. Our goal was to have classroom teachers able to lead the exercises, in their regular classrooms, largely

unassisted by the teaching artists, by the end of the program. In our model of dramatic storytelling, the primary storyteller, the teaching artist or adult, has the trajectory of the story arc based on an actual text, but the details are created by the children through a shared storytelling experience. Research suggests that reading and storytelling have a complementary relationship with one another with regard to language development and story comprehension; the two methods offer different benefits and combined with one another, provide an additive effect on overall reading development . (Isbell et al., 2004). Therefore, as a fusion of reading and storytelling, dramatic storytelling is likely able to strengthen both sets of skills.

In dramatic storytelling, there are essentially two stories happening; the first is built by the students with guidance from the adult storyteller. In this first one, students are asked to become the objects and the characters in a setting that has fundamental similarities to the second story, the actual text, that comes later. The storyteller's job is to weave together the children's suggestions of settings, characters, and solutions into the story they've created which will ultimately parallel the story in the given text. At the end of the dramatic storytelling experience, the storyteller reads the original book that the made-up story is based on. This becomes a model for the resolution to the problem in the story co-constructed with the children. In this way, the images in the book do not replace the solutions, characters, and settings that the children have created in their minds. Rather, the actual text provides additional ideas for the children to explore. This order of story creation and then story reading allows for children to make comparisons in their analyses of the two stories- the one they're reading and the one they're creating, which increases the accessibility of the themes inherent in the stories.

Dramatic storytelling captures the engagement and ability for students to explore creative solutions that comes with traditional storytelling without losing the connection to the written story in the excitement.. Children work with their peers and the storyteller through guided dramatic play, using props and tools to engage multiple senses (whether it's by interacting with an imaginary object or touching an actual prop), so that they can elaborate on and connect with the story on a deeper level. Dramatic storytelling is also a form of dialogic reading where there is process and reflection but also conversation about alternative solutions to the problem that the stories share. Naturally there are extensions into conversations about characters, their motivations, inferences about what a particular type of character might do, and connections from the imagined story to the real story. The dramatic arts elements provide additional extensions through embodied cognition as children move, interact with props and act out various components of the developing story.

Furthermore, drama based pedagogy, like dramatic storytelling, draws from both the social and cultural understandings of the students. How children consider conflict resolution and problem solving is often strongly related to their lived socio-cultural experiences. A child's understanding of what constitutes a celebration or even what a family unit consists of, may vary by these experiences, and dramatic storytelling allows for those different constructs to come through. It can provide a scaffolded approach to consider the story world, and both instructor and learner are co-constructing meaning through words, actions and the environment. (Lee et al., 2014).

We consider it a type of social constructivist learning which, as Lee et al. notes, is theorized to improve learning outcomes through deeper connections to concepts and greater learner participation (2014). Dramatic storytelling, specifically, allows for this constructivist learning while also including elements of traditional story reading and comprehension. Both traditional story reading and storytelling provide value for children's learning and socialization. We believe that the use of a more formalized practice that fuses drama pedagogy, socially constructed storytelling, *and* traditional reading provides an enhanced structure for children to develop a host of reading, social and problem solving skills.

## **Vocabulary Development**

*“By inviting children to listen, savor, chorally read, envision images, engage in creative movement, and manipulate literacy language during whole group, small group, or center activities, teachers not only provide opportunities for children to develop an appreciation for literature, they also support children’s ability to think about and explore how language systems work.”* (Labbo & Fields, 1996)

Story, in any of its formats, is an excellent way to expose children to a variety of words, meanings and sounds, and is a tool that works for language development (Kaderavek & Justice, 2002). Catterall described how dramatic activity is conducive to the advancement of communication skills, language and inter/intrapersonal understandings (1998). In particular, there is a sense of owning or embodying language as it is used when children participate in dramatic storytelling activities. Research on the dramatic arts has identified skills such as critical thinking, written communication and spoken communication as areas that are strengthened as a result of participation in drama based pedagogy (Catterall, 1998). There is a shared sense of purpose among children when they participate in dramatic storytelling as the group, together, becomes stimulated by the ideas and words allowing for a common usage and understanding of language together (Trostle & Hicks, 1998). Rather than exposure to a new word in an isolated context, children are asked to engage, embody and utilize the new terminology in order to express meaning and further the story.

Dramatic storytelling is a very different experience than that of having children sit and read silently or try to memorize words out of context on flashcards. Through the very nature of dramatic storytelling, children are asked to play around with language, sounds, and the meaning of the words they are using. The story provides a natural foundation for the discussion, usage and interaction with language. It encourages children to challenge the meaning and question the use of language itself. What does it mean to use that word? Does that word fit the personality of that character? What qualities are associated with that word? This line of questioning potentially leads to a deeper understanding of language and vocabulary.

For example, in the opening story, the children were asked to describe the word “brave” and show it in their bodies, in this case, by rubbing their hands together. Children then might be rubbing their hands together to indicate “bravery” when preparing to cross the imaginary

tightrope at the circus, using movement and sound to suggest their understanding of not only the word “brave” but the context in which “bravery” is required. This signal is then used throughout the storytelling when children are presented with a challenge to overcome and the character leading them asks them what they might need in order to conquer their fear. Through the exploration of different words in various situations children develop a stronger grasp on language application and overall communication skills.

Furthermore, Beilock describes how words are not simply “terms” that are defined. The context in which we encounter words gives them meaning and substance. Actions enable us to derive a different type of understanding of words and allow for children to explore how meanings can be different depending on their situational usage (Beilock, 2015). When we consider the fundamental importance of vocabulary usage to overall academic achievement, the idea of exploring words, ideas and meanings, in a context that feels genuine (versus a pre-determined word list or sight words), is vital. Words are not simply abstract concepts that students need to memorize. In order to utilize language effectively, being able to place and use words in context to communicate ideas is necessary. Dramatic storytelling offers opportunities to play with language within a semi-structured context. In dramatic storytelling, the community is exploring problem solving and how language can help a character. This empowers children to build connections between text and language, supplies context and can help them to link relationships between words in a strong way. Children are not just repeating word definitions back to an instructor or filling in a worksheet, they are actively engaging through participatory language and using dialogue and embodied actions to help internalize meanings and relationships. Through dramatic storytelling, students build connections that will ideally extend beyond the specific story and help them consider the many ways in which words and meaning can interact.

The teacher/storyteller will use gestures that tie the words of the book into their dramatic play and perhaps link it to a phrase that they can easily repeat. For example, the teacher wanting the students to repeat the phrase, “No, it’s mine!” while working with a book about sharing may put one wagging finger out on “No,” and then point to herself on “mine.” The children copy the movements and associate the words with them as they speak them aloud as a group. The storyteller can also provide a cue for student responses that relate to dialogue in the story. The book *Muncha Muncha Muncha* provides a good example, as whenever a bunny sneaks into the garden, the book describes the bunnies repeating the title phrase “Muncha Muncha Muncha”. In order to get students engaged physically and verbally the storyteller can prompt children by saying, “Whenever I hold my three fingers up like this, I want to hear you say ‘Muncha Muncha Muncha’ in your most bunny-like voice.” When the storyteller holds up her three fingers the children all repeat, “Muncha Muncha Muncha!”

This phonological aspect of language is utilized to help children play around with sounds and their relationships to actions and words. The texture and sounds of the phrase “Muncha Muncha Muncha” is illuminated more fully when the students are able to comprehend the language both verbally and physically, as they are being asked to do in dramatic storytelling. The storyteller

can easily encourage this choral reading and tap into phonological awareness by prompting students to repeat certain phrases and/or gestures associated with the story being read aloud or acting it out. This play with the rhythmic and lyrical qualities of language is considered by some, to be an exploration of the sound, feeling, textures and meanings of words themselves which is beneficial to overall language development (Rubin & Wilson, 1995). Dramatic storytelling allows students and teachers to go beyond the compensatory learning of words from a text and challenges children to interact with words on many different levels, expanding their understanding of language and phonics as a whole.

### **Story Elements, Comprehension and Social Engagement**

Vocabulary development and phonological awareness are two natural extensions of children's work with dramatic storytelling, but the benefits to overall reading development are even greater. Through the interactions with story, in combination with dramatic arts, literary elements are fleshed out, explored and elaborated on by the children.

One of the key predictors of academic success is the overall size of children's vocabulary (Hirsch, 2016). However, memorizing words without context does not help children build the strong neurological associations that will help to build a foundation for the retention of words/concepts or the comprehension of more complex words and topics (Hirsch, 2016). The integration of story elements and conceptual ideas takes children past simple word meanings and scaffolds understanding, thus broadening children's connections to larger ideas. We believe that dramatic storytelling inherently helps children to bridge the gap between simple word associations and the integration of larger conceptual story elements.

In dramatic storytelling, students are often asked to put a physical movement to the words either read aloud in a story or suggested by students in imaginative play. This physical life associated with words helps students build upon their understanding of the vocabulary. Conceptual story elements are explored in physical tableaux or as live action where students are interacting with characters that bring the story elements to life.

Lehr et al. describe comprehension, at its most basic level, as constructing meaning from a text (Lehr, Osborn & Heibert, 2005). They then build on this definition and further expand the understanding of comprehension by considering the multidimensional process of relating text to reader, text to text and engaging in activities related to the text and its concepts. Recognizing the story structure and related aspects such as setting, key events, character goals, and plot outcomes, as well as metacognitive reflection on feelings about the text, are essential components of overall reading comprehension. In addition, utilizing the structured retelling of stories has been shown to improve children's comprehension skills (Lehr et al., 2005). As noted by Rose et al., the very essence of reading comprehension is to be able to store and later retrieve information from a text (2015). Knowing how text relates to self, text relates to others as well as text in relation to other types of texts are all foundational pieces of reading which help children to better position language and story structure within their lives. These elements not



only help with retrieval of ideas from one story but also assist in connecting language and story in other meaningful ways to enhance language growth and idea comprehension.

In dramatic storytelling, the students try many possible solutions to the common story problem until they are presented with an opportunity to get feedback, like going to visit a character who might be able to help them, as we included in our program. That character then suggests the solutions the students previously tried as guided by the storyteller. During the dramatic play at this point, the storyteller created relevant reasons that the student-solutions might not have worked or missed something important in order to lead the students toward the solution they'll discover later in the text. While building perseverance and critical thinking skills, this is also an opportunity for the children to practice retrieving stored information as they tell the character recall their experiences with those solutions. In every dramatic storytelling class we have offered, a few children are able to stop the character before he or she leaves them with an already tried solution. They'll shout, "We've already tried that!" as the character is going back into her cave or wherever she lives. Ultimately the character will present them with a book. While reading the book, the children have an opportunity to see how the text relates to their experience. Once the book has been read, students are asked to make the connection between the story that was read and the story they've been performing, ie., *What worked in this book that we might want to try to work out our story?* With a sense of wonder the children notice the parallel between their co-designed story and the story described in the book. The storyteller will ask them to show her if they recognize the attempted solutions in the book as solutions the class has also attempted to use to solve the problem. Again, the children always retrieve the stored information and are able to relate the structure of the story to their own lived experience through the dramatic play. Thus, dramatic storytelling capitalizes on the ability for students to engage with story emotionally and physically, heightening their retention of the story elements.

When we consider these more imagery based forms of instruction we are asking children to visualize a scene with all of its composite elements, and link the segments together to form a coherent story. In order to do this effectively, children must have a clear idea of the story content and sequence and timing of the story segments (Rose et al, 2015). One of the goals of dramatic storytelling is to help children move beyond rudimentary memorization of story (remember, we are not asking them to memorize specific lines of dialogue) to form rich visual images that will help strengthen their mental conceptualization and memory, and thus, their comprehension of the story itself. Stein and Bransford discussed how elaborating on information to be remembered helps enhance memory and recall of the relevant events (Stein & Bransford, 1979).

Solutions, suggested by the children, are not just discussed aloud, they are acted out using bodies and imaginations. Instead of seeing a picture of a circus tent, the children are asked to become the circus tent and then the animals and artists performing within it. They might meet the circus master and have a full, candid conversation with him learning more about the details of the circus and how they can help him. They'll embark on a journey with the circus master, learning the ropes of how to be a circus performer. Later in the book, they'll see a picture of the

circus master and of other characters on the various circus exhibits. With dramatic play, the pictures and minimal dialogue in the book now create a rich backstory that is personal for the children. Elaborating on the elements of the story like settings and character through dramatic play allows for the children to integrate the story segments leading to greater overall comprehension.

Multiple studies have shown that well structured dramatic arts programs, with careful thought given to implementation, enhance children's understanding of text (Rose et al., 2015; Bell, 1991; Walker, 2001; Beilock 2015). Interestingly, students in one study by Walker found storytelling engaging but preferred to have stories read aloud to them (2001). This is another reason we believe offering a fusion of the two offers the best of both scenarios: the opportunity to engage with the text as is, but also to engage with creating a story at the same time. Beilock also cites research that demonstrates it is not just the repetitive nature of story segments in dramatic storytelling that may provide a benefit to students, it is the actual embodiment of the story that is important. Students who simply "reread" sentences a second time, in a classroom setting, thus gaining repetition, did not demonstrate the same level of understanding as those who were able to "act" and embody the story themselves. In fact, by acting out the sentences, it appears children were able to push themselves such that their brains actually showed similar responses to those of more skilled readers (Beilock, 2015). Through dramatic engagement with text, we are asking that children extend their thinking and understanding beyond a simple, base-level comprehension. By including a parallel problem that students are trying to solve, we are asking them to transfer concepts from one story to another. This dual-process enables students to access the key ideas in the story in multiple ways.

Equally, if not more, important to the reading comprehension benefits of dramatic storytelling is the social engagement with peers. Children are asked to engage socially, to share ideas, listen to others, and to work together to accomplish a similar goal. They are allowed to disagree with interpretations and demonstrate alternative ideas or visions of how the story unfolds, are navigating complex ideas together, and develop an understanding that not everyone is interpreting story elements the same way through active engagement with text. Children are not only comprehending the story itself but are also drawing comparisons and contrasting various story elements to other stories and experiences. Through dialogue and embodied action, they grow their understanding of the text and co-create based on their own imagination.

Imaginative opportunities are further extended through the invitation given by adults to children to listen and respond, chorally read and chant, incorporate creative movement and play with language itself (Labbo & Fields, 1996). In order for children to truly have these opportunities to engage and extend, it is important that the adults involved in co-creating the story are truly respectful of student voice and ideas. As research on play has demonstrated, well-meaning adults can overpower the play experience (Paul, 2012) and the same is true here. The adults provide the problem and the children are working to find the solutions through connections to the printed text. Moving beyond the printed page with its fixed images, children formulate their own mental models and pictures. For instance, children are asked to ponder how the wicked

witch might move or speak, thus more clearly defining the character and the attributes a wicked witch might possess. There may be discussions as to whether traits fit a specific character. Children can make inferences about the choices and actions that might ensue and engage in dialogue/disagreements regarding story progression. These conversations provide a genuine opportunity to discuss different perspectives and visions, both the author's and the children's.

The storyteller takes on the important task of not only listening to each student's ideas, but expertly weaving them together so that each child has at least one idea that is explored by the full group. Sometimes the storyteller will lead students toward ideas that parallel the written story. In elaborating on the details of the story, especially when acting out the characters or imagery, there is freedom for children's unique ideas to be expressed, either individually or as a group. The key to engaging students in dramatic storytelling is the ability to obtain their buy-in to the story by turning the tables on the generic structure of the teacher "telling" a story and the students "listening," and instead asks the students questions to help them arrive at a version of the story that is all their own.

## **Conclusion**

Dramatic storytelling is fundamentally different from both traditional reading and storytelling. All three approaches offer excellent ways to access literature, but the combination of multiple modes of access that comprises dramatic storytelling provides the most comprehensive experience for children to engage. There is a tendency in education to lean towards a particular methodology and then apply that same methodology everywhere regardless of context. Dramatic storytelling does not replace reading aloud or work that specifically focuses on print and basic word skills. What it can do is provide *another* tool for educators to enhance their overall repertoire of meaningful reading and dramatic arts related experiences.

The language and reading benefits of dramatic storytelling are a product that emerges from the active engagement of students with literature and imagination. Over time, the increased capacity for reading and engaging with story moves beyond simple comprehension into the ability to further imagine, elaborate and extrapolate from a text. This extrapolation enriches and expands how children integrate the concept of story. By introducing students to literature through a variety of mediums, including dramatic storytelling, we are, in essence, providing a wider array of mechanisms for children to identify themselves as readers *and* tellers of story. Our hope is that through increased access to a variety of tools for engaging with reading we can increase the likelihood that children will develop strong vocabularies, comprehend literature, and enjoy the process of reading.

*"You all have been so helpful to me. You saved the circus today!" exclaims the storyteller in her circus master dialect. The students travel back to the classroom via an imaginary ritual they've created, from their own suggestions, and lay on their bellies for a "tummy meeting." The storyteller, now back in the real classroom, asks them to identify various characters from today's story and the feelings those characters experienced. As the children point to various*

*“characters” in the classroom and grin, the class closes out. The observer is left with the image of 18 preschool children creating a frozen picture of something they would like to represent from the day’s story.*