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# Storytelling Your Way into the Common Core and Beyond

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One of a school librarian's greatest delights can be the moment when you gather the children close, look directly into their eyes, and tell them a story. They lean toward you, taking in your every word. The group bonds, entering a moment of quiet intensity or playful joy as the story unfolds.

Recently, school librarians have said they miss the pleasure of sharing stories, but they don't have time with so many standards to address. Well now you have the perfect *reason* to tell tales—they fulfill many of the Common Core State Standards objectives!

As we worked on *Teaching with Story: Classroom Connections to Storytelling*,

we examined how storytelling links with Common Core State Standards. Speaking, listening, and writing standards link naturally to storytelling. Several standards apply specifically to storytelling and to folk literature. For example: RL 2.9, Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g., Cinderella stories) by different authors or from different cultures; RL 3.2, Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures...; and RL 4.9, Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics...and patterns of events...in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures (Common Core State Standards Initiative 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).

In school library settings, storytelling offers a pleasant pathway for exploring Common Core requirements. By listening to orally told stories and telling stories themselves, our students viscerally experience important elements of narrative such as story structure, characterization, and setting. They wrap their mouths around beautiful patterned language as they chime in on chants or retell stories themselves. *Teaching with Story* includes a chapter citing Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that can be linked instructionally to storytelling. Consult that chapter if you need to justify storytelling in your school library.

But storytelling is more than just an instructional tool supporting the CCSS. It's really the oldest tool in the teaching toolkit. An integral part of the human experience is using stories to make sense of our world. Current brain research increasingly offers support for the notion that our brains are wired for story and that narrative is an extremely effective way to fix ideas in the mind. In other words, story is an essential tool for teaching anything.

Throughout the ages, stories have been used by parents and teachers to impart lessons that build character and set expectations for behavior. Teachers and librarians with whom we work find "first week of school" stories can set the tone for the coming year. Your telling a simple story whose main characters learn a lesson you want to emphasize helps the class get the point that cooperation, sharing, and kindness are qualities your community will value. As the year progresses, refer back to stories of the lazy koala or the kind chipmunk, now a common reference point for your students. By listening to tales, children share an adventure, and they emerge from each storytelling experience a more closely knit group. In the school library setting, a told story allows you to quickly create a sense of community with your classes.

Bringing storytelling into the school library has many other benefits. In *Teaching with Story* we explore what we call the "7 C's of Storytelling in the Classroom": Community, Character, Communication, Curriculum, Cultural Connections, Creativity, and Confidence. We also include twenty of our favorite folktales that are easy to learn and particularly fun to tell.

## GRANDFATHER BEAR IS HUNGRY: *A Folktale from the Even People of Siberia*

Grandfather Bear woke up. It was spring!  
"I am SO hungry!" said Grandfather Bear. "I am SO hungry!"  
Grandfather Bear looked for berries.  
He looked and looked.  
"NO BERRIES! Too early in the spring."  
"I am SO hungry!" said Grandfather Bear. "I am SO Hungry!"

Grandfather Bear went to the river to find fish.  
He looked and looked. "NO FISH! Too early in the spring."  
"I am SO hungry!" said Grandfather Bear. "I am SO hungry!"

Grandfather Bear went to find bugs in the old log.  
Grandfather Bear began to shake that log.

That was the home of Little Chipmunk!

"Grandfather Bear! Grandfather Bear! What are you DOING!"  
"I am SO hungry!" said Grandfather Bear. "I am SO hungry!"

"Grandfather Bear, don't shake my house! I have food. I will SHARE with you."

Chipmunk ran down in his hole. He filled his cheeks with nuts.  
He ran back to the top. "Here Grandfather Bear!"

"Thank you Little Chipmunk. But I am STILL hungry!"

"Wait, Grandfather Bear."  
Chipmunk ran down. He filled his cheeks and ran up again.  
"Here Grandfather Bear!"

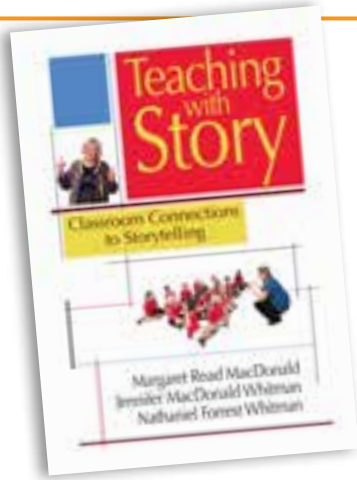
"Thank you Little Chipmunk. But I am STILL hungry!"

"Wait, Grandfather Bear." All day Chipmunk ran.  
Down and up. Down and up. Down and up.

At last Grandfather Bear was FULL.  
"Thank you Little Chipmunk! I want to give you a reward.  
Stand very still."

Grandfather Bear pulled his heavy claws SO gently...right down  
Chipmunk's back.  
He left five black stripes!  
"Now when anyone sees your stripes they will remember that  
you were kind and shared with Grandfather Bear."

Story is an essential tool for teaching anything.



*Grandfather Bear Is Hungry* is one of our favorite short tales to get you started right now. The simplified language in this version of the story makes it useful for work in ESL settings, and it is a fun story to act out with your students. We hope you'll give it a try and that you will continue to look for ways to bring the magic of storytelling back into the school library, all while supporting the CCSS!

You can easily see how sharing a story like *Grandfather Bear Is Hungry*, can not only be used effectively in the curriculum to meet the Common Core State Standards but also to transform a classroom by building community, reinforcing

character traits, enhancing confidence, extending creativity, improving communications, and connecting with other cultures. It is hard to imagine another teaching tool that can have so much positive impact on a child's learning. So why not select a story today and share it with a classroom full of expectant faces? It will not only expand their experience beyond the boundaries of the classroom, it will also brighten your day.

**Margaret Read MacDonald** is author of over sixty books on folklore and storytelling topics, including *Fat Cat* (August House 2001), *Mabela the Clever* (Whitman 2001), *Give Up Gecko* (Amazon 2013), and *The Storyteller's Start-up Book* (August House 1993).

**Jen and Nat Whitman** are educators and storytellers. They work at the International School of Bangkok, where Jen teaches kindergarten and Nat is the elementary school librarian. The three have combined their experiences with storytelling in schools to create *Teaching with Story: Classroom Connections to Storytelling* (August House 2013).

### Works Cited:

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#### STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Knowledge Quest, Publication No. 483-860, is published five times per year by the American Association of School Librarians, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611-2795. Annual subscription price, \$50. Printed in U.S.A. with periodical class postage paid at (Illinois). As a nonprofit organization authorized to mail at special rates (DMM Section 424.12 only), the purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes have not changed during the preceding twelve months.

#### EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION

("Average" figures denote the average number of copies printed each issue during the preceding twelve months; "actual" figures denote actual number of copies of single issue published nearest to filing date: September/October 2013 issue). Total number of copies printed average 8,200; actual 9,019. Sales through dealers, carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: none. Mail subscription: actual 8,363. Free distribution actual 520. Total distribution average 8,200; actual 9,019. Office use, leftover, unaccounted, spoiled after printing average 75; actual 75. Total: average/actual 9,094. Percentage paid: average 97.56; actual 92.73