

## **Adapting Programs Especially for Online Storytelling**

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Spellbinders Storytellers are accustomed to in-person oral storytelling in classrooms filled with active listeners. Because volunteers are faced with the challenge of sharing stories via videoconferencing, it is time to adapt, enhance, revise, and stretch our experiences. Our programs will be shorter and more choreographed, and we will want to continue to balance interaction, transition smoothly between stories and to encourage listening.

### **Opening and Introduction to Program**

Now, more than ever, your program opening needs to immediately capture listeners' attention. Begin with a "first contact" that draws the children in and sparks their curiosity. While there is no one right way to create a program for videoconferencing, a suggested format is outlined below:

1. First, consider a bookend that makes an inviting, friendly sound. Introduce the sound against an empty stage/background. Enter the space and create the sound again. Bookend examples: chime, rain stick little bell, rhyme, song, drum etc. Remember to check if your bookend is audible because even a loud instrument may not be heard if it is played continuously without time between individual sounds.
2. Normally we begin our programs with an introduction to the theme of the day or some background about the story. Consider opening immediately with the story. Something short, fun, engaging that will keep the attention that you earned with the bookend.
3. Then, introduce the whole program, briefly. You can give the source of your first story and slide right into the next story. Use notes if you needed to avoid too much "story talk".

### **Story Choice**

It's important to remember to avoid copyright conflicts. Choose stories such as fables, folktales, or traditional stories. If you are selecting a story from a collection of tales written by a storyteller, be sure to read the introduction and make note if the stories are "retold" folktales or if they are original stories prepared by the author. Often an author will encourage other storytellers to fashion the tales as their own and to keep the story alive through retelling.

Normally we can tell 12 to 15-minute stories in person. But it is much more difficult to sit still for a story told on a screen. Keep stories brief and engaging. Eight to ten-minute stories will be appropriate for online listening. Your program may only contain 2 stories along with transitions and bookends.

## Story Transitions

Of course, our traditional transitions between stories are appropriate. Offering factoids or highlighting specific vocabulary provides a way to keep attention as the program proceeds. Here are some examples of transitions that enhance virtual storytelling.

### 1. Chants and Stretches

A catchy chant or poem helps younger listeners keep their eyes on you. Until you know the “doddle” by heart, you can always post it on the side of your computer screen. As you say the chant, act out the motions while listeners watch and follow your gestures so their attention is drawn to the screen.

#### *Get the Wiggles Out*

*I wiggle my fingers, I wiggle my toes, I wiggle my shoulders, I wiggle my nose. But now there are no more wiggles in me. I'm as still as can be! Once upon a time...*

#### *Stretches*

*Reach way up to the ceiling. Reach way down to the floor. Reach way out to the walls. Repeat. Shall we do some more. Repeat. Now, sit quietly on the floor.*

### 2. Active Transitions

Between stories a simple 30-40 second, controlled movement such as “stand and breathe” helps listeners to return to listening and imaging. Examples of active transitions that encourage students to listen well in order to complete a task include sign language and listening exercises.

#### Sign Language

Introduce a few common phrases using American Sign Language. After a couple of story sessions, you can simply make the sign and listeners will watch and respond. To learn the ASL translations, go to

[www.signingsavvy.com](http://www.signingsavvy.com)

Examples: “Silence, please.”

“What’s happening?”

“Tell me a story.”

“Listen, please.”

“How much did you like that story?” “A little.” “A lot.”

### 3. Listening Exercises

The students answer simple questions about the story by using hand signals. Depending on the grade, the questions can grow in complexity. For example, after hearing the “Milkmaid and Her Pail”, check listening by asking students to show “thumbs up” for something that is true and “thumbs down” for something that didn’t happen in the story. Remember that you only need 4 or 5 items per exercise – just a brief transition.

Listening for details:

- |                                   |                |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| T: The milkmaid is poor.          | S: thumbs up   |
| T: The milkmaid sells the milk.   | S: thumbs down |
| T: The milk spills on the ground. | S: thumbs up   |
| T: The milkmaid buys a chicken.   | S: thumbs down |

Listening for inference:

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| T: Chicks hatch from eggs.                  | S: thumbs up   |
| T: The milkmaid was careless.               | S: thumbs up   |
| T: Lots of people buy the milk.             | S: thumbs down |
| T: The milkmaid doesn't care how she looks. | S: thumbs down |

### Interaction during Stories

#### Use gestures/movement

Spellbinders Storytellers know the value of interaction. Listeners often repeat and say lines with the storyteller; it’s engaging and fun. When using videoconferencing, whole group repetition is very difficult. We want to keep the interaction, so instead of asking listeners to repeat a line, ask listeners repeat a gesture or movement. The storyteller says the lines, the listeners only make the motions.

“And so, the oldest one counted his brothers. One, two, three...” Hold up fingers and ask listeners to do the same.

“The wind was so strong, you could hear it a mile away and the trees were bending to the ground.” Move your hand and arm across the screen – listeners do the same.

#### Sign Language

Again, specific phrases can be “signed” during the story. Teach the sign as you say it and eventually, you can simply use the sign as the listeners repeat using their gestures. “The girl said, “I’m looking for a (use sign language for this repetitive line) *“a red house with no doors”*.”

## Sample Program

**Program Theme: Self Image Focus: Adjectives**

**Grade 3**

**Bookend:** Chime against blank background. 2x before entering screen, 2 while taking a seat and one before putting aside.

**Story #1 – 3 minutes** “The Milkmaid and Her Bucket”

Aesop Fable

In olden times a girl who worked on a dairy farm and milked the cows was called a “milkmaid”. There once was a milkmaid named Mary from Minnesota....

### Introduction – 2 minutes

*Mary the milkmaid spilled the milk because she was imagining how she’d look in her new dress and silk ribbon. You could say that “her imagination ran away with her”. My name is Kathy and I’m with Longmont Library Spellbinders. I hope to join you once a month to share stories, right here in this space – our storytelling space. Because we won’t use written words or pictures, you’ll be using your imagination – you’ll make mind pictures. You could say that “your imagination will run away with you”!*

*Mary the Milkmaid from Minnesota wanted to look beautiful in her new dress and lovely silk ribbon for her hair. We often think about how we look, our clothes, hair, our walk and more. I have another story today about a man who makes clothes for a living. He is a “tailor” – a person who sews clothes.*

**Story #2 – 8-9 minutes** “The Tailor” Adapted from “Something From Nothing” – Jewish Tale

There was once a tailor named Tom from Takotna in Alaska. He was very poor...

**Interactive Gesture:** “He wore it and he wore it and he wore it, until he wore it out.”

### Transition – 3 minutes

*Mary the Milkmaid and Tom the Tailor had a lot in common. They wanted to look good. We described them as lovely, beautiful, handsome, stunning, splendid, fantastic, magnificent... I would describe you in the same way. You are lovely, handsome... You look good.*

*Let’s see how your listening looks. Show me, “thumbs up” if it happened, or “thumbs down” if it didn’t happen.*

*Tom the tailor is very rich.*

*The tailor probably lived in Florida.*

*Tom made a jacket out of a coat.*

*Tom made the most of what he had.*

*Tom made a vest out of a hat.*

*Tom was handsome.*

### Closing – 1 minute

*I’m so glad to meet you and look forward to seeing you next month. Maybe you’ll want to tell the stories to a friend, your brother or sister or your parents. When I see you next time, you can say, “Tell me a story” – Sign Language. Practice together without words.*

**Bookend** – chime 2x on screen, 2x off screen

**Review next month:** adjectives from above