This article aims at describing certain strategies that would help teachers become better storytellers. The demonstration was done for primary school teachers by narrating a story called ‘How the Bean got its strings’, the ‘desi’ version of a Grimm’s fairytale.

**HOW THE BEAN GOT ITS STRINGS**

Many years ago, an old woman in a village decided, one morning to make a special vegetable curry. She went to the market and bought many vegetables like brinjals, potatoes, tomatoes, drumsticks, onions, ginger, and beans. Once home, she washed them all up, lit up her earthen furnace (choolah) with straw and charcoal pieces, placed a large pan on it and poured in the oil. She then tossed in a few mustard and cumin seeds along with curry leaves. As the oil heated and the seeds began to sputter, the old woman began chopping the vegetables but lo! Something went terribly wrong! One green bean, slipped out through the woman’s fingers, just as she was about to cut it, and fell to the ground.

“I certainly do not want to die and be fried in oil!” said the bean angrily and he began to run. A piece of charcoal and a strand of straw, in the choolah, saw the bean running away and decided to flee as well. “We do not want to be reduced to ashes!” they cried out indignantly. The old woman was shocked to see the bean run, followed by a piece of charcoal and a strand of straw. “Stop! Come back!” she cried out but the three friends had already gone!

Bean, Charcoal and Straw ran as fast as they could. Suddenly, they came upon a tiny stream and they did not know how to cross it. Straw had an idea. He lay across the stream thus making a bridge. “Walk on me and make your way to the other side!” he told his friends. Bean daintily crossed over but when Charcoal tried to do the same, the straw felt hot and began to sizzle.

“Ooh, I can’t hold on any longer!” he said and fell into the stream along with Charcoal. Bean, standing on the other side found the sight so funny that he burst out laughing and split his sides. “Ouch!” he wept, “I’m torn. Who will repair me now?”

A kind tailor-bird sitting on a tree took pity on Bean, flew down to his side and began stitching him up. Soon, Bean was sewed up and he felt very relieved and happy.

It is believed that from that day on, all green beans have strings!

**Storytelling strategies:**
Strategy 1: Use of real Objects

The storyteller, while narrating the story used real objects like straw, charcoal pieces, spices, and vegetables. This was done with the objective of arousing the interest of the listeners and also, to demonstrate learning strategies for children. If teachers, especially in the primary levels, could use easily available materials to tell a story, then wouldn’t it be easier for students to visualise more clearly the story situation? Also, the students’ sensory abilities would develop by seeing, touching, smelling, or touching the objects like carrots, beans, brinjals, ginger pieces, mustard, and cumin seeds brought in by the teacher into the classroom.

Strategy 2: Think of an Ending

The storyteller deliberately stopped the story at a particular point (climax) where the three friends, Bean, Charcoal and Straw stood near a gutter and did not know how to cross it. The audience was asked to come up with different endings. Here are some of their comments:
1. The bean jumped and crossed the stream…
2. The bean and his friends took another route and avoided the stream…
3. The bean turned back, disappointed…

The aim of doing such an exercise was to demonstrate a technique where children’s imagination and story sequencing skills can be developed. By thinking of an ending to the story, the students participate more actively in storytelling and also use inference to end a story well.

Strategy 3: Eye Contact

The storyteller narrated the story, a second time by deliberately looking down at her feet, fiddling with her pen and shuffling her feet. The members of the audience immediately said that they found the story boring. The storyteller then explained why it is important for teachers to look at their students and use appropriate facial expressions and gestures while taking a class or telling a story. By doing so, the teacher not only makes her class interesting but ensures that her students concentrate and enjoy studying.

Strategy 4: Voice Modulation

The storyteller told the story by modulating her voice to suit the different characters. For example, the old woman had a croaky voice; the bean spoke squeakily, the charcoal talked hoarsely while the straw just whispered. This was done to break the monotony of the narration and give the story a real-life feel. If teachers could use this technique in class, it would certainly help students imagine and identify better with the characters in a story.

Voice modulation exercise:

The storyteller picked up four real-life events and asked a few volunteers to imagine themselves in those situations and start counting from 1-10. The events were:

- A mother asking her child to come out of the washroom because the school bus had arrived.
- A referee in a boxing match counting 1-10 for a fallen boxer to stand up.
- A child playing the thief in the hide-and-seek game.
- A student who stammers but has to count aloud in class.

The aim of this exercise was to make the audience relive a particular situation and modulate their voices to suit the people that are part of it.

Post-Storytelling Strategies:

Gauging Story Comprehension and Creativity of Students

The storyteller finished narrating the story and spoke of some storytelling games that would help teachers gauge the comprehension levels of their students.

Retelling

Story retelling is an important pedagogical tool to help students improve their memory power, oral communication, listening abilities and sequencing skills. Students need to learn how to listen and narrate a story well. If the teacher does this by using a game or an activity, children become more motivated and creative. Below are a few suggestions:

Spinning Yarn Activity

A spinning yarn with knots tied at irregular intervals was used to help the audience retell the story of the bean. The storyteller began retelling by pulling the string until she reached a knot.

"Once there lived an old woman in a village who wanted to cook ‘sambar’ for lunch…” she began. She then passed the yarn to the person sitting next to her and he had to pull the yarn and continue retelling the story until the second knot was reached. “The old woman slowly walked to the village market and bought many vegetables like onions, brinjals, potatoes, ginger, beans etc…” The game continued thus until the entire story was retold by the participants using the knots as ‘changing points’. This activity is a fun way of developing memory and oracy skills in young students.
**Story Creation through Story Bag Activity**

A small bag with assorted objects like pencils, erasers, beads, chalk pieces, sharpeners, pens, and rulers was brought to the table by the storyteller. She then asked a volunteer to close his eyes and pick up an object from the bag. It turned out to be a pencil. The volunteer had to begin a story around the pencil like, “Once upon a time in an old pencil box lived a smart pencil. She wore a beautiful black and red dress and had a sharp lead…” The storyteller then asked a second volunteer to come and pick up an object from the bag and it turned out to be an eraser. The participant had to immediately continue the story started her colleague by introducing the ‘eraser’ into it. The second volunteer said, “But there also lived in the same box, a jealous eraser. He was fat and small and wore a shabby grey dress and did not like the good-looking pencil so he hatched a plan…” After, the other members from the audience picked up an object from the story bag and a beautiful story was woven with everybody’s participation. This activity is a good strategy to develop oracy skills, story sequencing and imaginative abilities of students.

**Effective Teaching Tool**

In recent years, storytelling has been used extensively in classrooms across the world to develop various language skills along with other abilities like visualisation, creativity, inference, and logical thinking. Stories are also told to inculcate right values in our students. It is therefore important for teachers, especially in primary levels, to become good storytellers and make classroom teaching more interactive and joyous. In this context, the strategies described in this article may come in handy.

**Category:** Teacher Development  
**Subject:** Arts  
Language  
Others  
**Board:** All boards  
**Grade/Standard:** Early Childhood Education  
Class 1-2  
Class 3-5  
Class 6-8  
Class 9-10  
Class 11-12  

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