

# Stories to teach the standards

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Listening is the fourth and most neglected component of language. The California Reading/Language Arts standards address listening briefly, then cover speaking in relative depth. Stories – and the activities that come after them - can help students learn listening skills to meet the standards. When children tell stories, they learn quickly the speaking standards.

Stories, such as folktales and personal experience stories, also help teach the History/Social Studies standards, by humanizing facts about cultures.

Here are a few ideas for using the folktales I tell in my CDs

## *Sody Saleratus and other tales*

The title story is pure southern U.S. fun, with the familiar theme of the smallest and weakest using his brains to defeat the monster. Students can re-write the story from the squirrel's point of view, or the bear's. Young students can listen and retell the story – the song usually sticks in their heads.

*The Globe Goblin* is a kind of bully, isn't he? How does the old lady make him a friend? Which one gets the most out of the friendship? It is also a sequential plot that teaches organization.

*The Star Thief* could introduce science lessons about the universe for third grade science, generate stories about family customs for first grade social studies, and reinforce point-of view with the third person telling coupled with Johnny's way of looking at the events.

*Jack the Lazy Boy* is a great sequential story that teaches organization of events in a plot. It is also a fun story for kids to come up with alternative viewpoints, such as the princess's or her father's (e.g. *The Wolf's Story*) Students can also discuss what happens next? – do they really live happily ever after? Does Jack ever get an education? Does laughing make you a happy person? Many group oral and writing activities are possible.

*The Three Wishes*. Create a class wish poem, each line starting with "I wish..." Couple with other stories about wishes that come true. Have students discuss their wishes and how they can make them come true.

The time period of *Clever Elsa* is obviously before the modern age. Talk about how things have changed, from "going courting" to the chestnut blight – great introduction to 5th grade westward expansion studies.

***Misery, Folktales retold by George Pilling.***

*The Monkey who Wanted Misery* - I told this tale on the first day of school to all of my students. Some of them asked for misery, not knowing what it was. For the rest of the year, I could ask, "Are you asking for Misery?" and they knew what I meant.

*The Caged Bird* – This Sufi tale has counterparts all over the world. The lesson is that sometimes you need some help to escape a difficult situation.

*The Wise Old Woman* reinforces understanding of the Japanese reverence for old people (study of world culture, grades 7 and 10). It is also a fun story with a sequence of events that is easy to remember. Activities include: Students write or speak about a commonly held belief in their own culture that may be strange to others. Students create stories that show an aspect of their own culture and tell or present them to the class.

Somalia is a land of many questions and few solutions. *The Three Suitors* is a tale that fits, and can be used as a conversation starter about difficult world situations. It also lends itself to a "writing the ending" exercise (Boys – which suitor would you be? Girls – which one would you choose?), which can initiate class discussions about culture and understanding.

*The Four Grains of Rice*, from China, has an excellent moral for high school students. It can be compared to the biblical story of the talents to see if the stereotypes of cultures hold true.

*The Princess with the Horns* is a fun story from Italy. Magic and revenge combine, but losers remain as they are. The length of this story is a good exercise in listening for all students.

Book recommended

*The Storytelling Classroom: Applications across the classroom* by Sherry Norfolk, Jane Stenson, and Diane Williams. Libraries Unlimited, 2006 [www.lu.com](http://www.lu.com)

Organization

National Storytelling Network [www.storynet.org](http://www.storynet.org)