

# THE ART OF STORYTELLING

## PART II

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The art of storytelling involves two aspects - the story and the telling. Last month's article was about the story. This month's article is about the telling.

A musical performance is analogous to storytelling. The musical composition is like the story. The teller is like the musician. Without the musician, the music would never be heard. Without the composition, the musician would have nothing to play. The art of the teller is just as essential as the art of the writer.

A good teller uses all the tools of the actor's trade: vocal variety, body language, props. Vocal variety involves volume, pitch, rate, and quality. The volume must be varied to add emphasis or dramatic impact. The pitch is varied to convey emotion and conviction. The rate changes to reflect mood and intensity. Voice quality involves tone, naturalness, vitality, and clear articulation..

Body language includes movement, gestures, facial expression, eye contact. Body language must look natural and spontaneous, and be integrated with the content of the story. Gestures must match the words. The emotions expressed by the story must be reflected in the teller's face. The eyes, eyebrows, and mouth play a vital role in displaying sadness, fear, happiness, anger, nervousness, excitement, boredom, interest, wonder etc. The message the listeners see must be the same one they hear. Eye contact includes the audience in the story. By making random eye contact with each section of the room, the audience has the impression the teller is talking directly to them.

Like the actor, the teller may use props to emphasize meaning, to add visual interest, and to focus attention. Props must be appropriate to the story. Using a prop successfully requires practice. Displaying it too soon or too late can decrease its effectiveness. The teller must be comfortable and confident in its use..

Just as the actor must learn his lines, the teller must learn his tale. How? There are two schools of thought on this subject. Some storytellers learn their story word for word as an actor learns his lines. Some remember scene by scene and image by image. They learn the structure, the scaffolding of the story and improvise the words as they go along. Some use a combination of both methods. Some learn a story by telling it over and over again until they know it by heart.

Another respect in which a storyteller is an actor is in developing the characters in a story. Like an actor, the storyteller takes on different roles - a child, a teenager, an old man, an old woman. He develops the traits, habits, idiosyncrasies, mannerisms, voice qualities, posture, gait that make the characters come alive - the tics that make them tick.

In one respect, however, the storyteller is not like the actor. The actor performs with the lights down. The audience is in darkness. The storyteller performs with the lights up. The teller wants to see the eyes of the audience, the expression on their faces, the response to his words. He responds to their response. The feedback the storyteller gets from the audience drives his performance. A synergy is created between the audience and the performer and also among the members of the audience themselves. Storytelling is a shared experience. This shared experience fosters a sense of community, which, in this age of mass media, is a rare and treasured event.

The storyteller must orchestrate all these elements - vocal variety, body language, props, memory, role playing, and responsiveness to the audience - in a dynamic interaction. This is what makes storytelling such an exciting and challenging craft.