The Oral Tradition Today
An Introduction to the Art of Storytelling

Liz Warren
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Acknowledgements:

I wrote most of this book while on sabbatical from my teaching responsibilities at South Mountain Community College, which is one of the Maricopa Community Colleges in metropolitan Phoenix, Arizona. I am very grateful to work for an institution that provides such a benefit to faculty.

The book was begun as a Learning Grant, another benefit provided by Maricopa. The stated purpose of the grant was to fund a two-semester learning community whose members would write a textbook for our Art of Storytelling class. It did not prove feasible for a group of people to write a textbook, but we did, after much discussion and dialogue, establish a vision, values, and mission for the book. We also outlined the chapters and what each chapter should include while thoroughly enjoying each other. This book reflects that work. The members of the learning community were Roseanne Belk, Gigi Connolly, Kathy Eastman, Nancy Jennings, Vic McCraw, Janet Means, Sandy Oglesby, Willa Ordway, Cheryl Rutherford, Jan Sloat, and Laura Watson.

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This book has been designed to accompany a college level class in storytelling, specifically The Art of Storytelling at South Mountain Community College in Phoenix, Arizona. In that class, students tell a folktale; a myth, legend or hero tale; a fact-based story; and a personal story. They collect, summarize, and analyze stories from five broad culture areas. They tell outside of class to audiences of six or more on at least three occasions and they attend performances by professional storytellers.

The chapters are meant to be read sequentially. Doing so establishes a foundation of skills.

Each chapter includes several stories. The List of Stories provides the names of all the stories and their cultures of origin.

Appendix A contains story exercises, reflection questions, study questions and questions on the stories for each chapter.

Appendix B includes the forms students need to complete the range of assignments required in the class:

- Story Summary and Analysis Worksheet for use with the stories collected from the culture areas.
- In-Class Telling Report Form for use in assessing classroom telling
- Instructions and forms for the Outside-of-Class Tellings

If you are not using this book as part of a class, you may still find the forms and exercises useful to focus your attention and to assess your progress.

A note about gender and third person pronouns: When writing about a hypothetical third person, I chose to alternate gender from chapter to chapter. When necessary, I use the pronoun “she” in chapters 1, 3, 5, and 7, and “he” in chapters 2, 4, 6, and 8.
Stories and Storytelling

= Story and Self
- Story has always been a crucial source of beauty, wisdom, and entertainment for human beings.
- The Story you tell is a reflection of your Self.

= Technique, Truth, Tradition and Types
- Storytellers utilize a range of Techniques that can be learned.
- Storytellers are committed to Truth even when the stories are not factual.
- Storytellers experience a deep connection to the Tradition of storytelling.
- There are many Types or genres of story.

= Observe, Occupy, Object, “Once upon a time”, and Open-hearted
- Observe the obvious and ordinary for story details.
- Occupy your story fully to bring it to life.
- Know the Object or point of your story.
- “Once upon a time”: Stories need strong beginnings and endings.
- Storytelling requires Open-hearted tellers and listeners.

= Research, Respect and Relate
- Research variants of your story and its history.
- Respect the culture and context from which it came.
- Stories Relate information and help us Relate to each other.

= Images and Insight
- Stories are sequences of Images conveyed by words and gestures.
- Bring all the Insight you have to the preparation and telling of the story.

= Emotion, Engagement and Energy
- The Emotion related by the storyteller Engages the audience.
- Fill your stories, even the quiet ones, with the complete Energy of your physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual presence.

= Structure and Style
- Stories have Structures which help convey images and emotions.
- You have a personal storytelling Style that is all your own.