**2.O STARTING POINTS/ENABLING RECOVERY**

**2.1 Sources of Stories**

*Renaissance and community memory* − older people in the community know a lot about the local landscape, about personalities of past and present, and about the big historical experiences that have shaped your region’s history and identity. Collecting stories from older people is a rewarding process for everyone involved, especially if the stories are retold rather than simply stored in an archive.

*Local legends and local history* − libraries and local history collections are a repository of narrative material about your area, some of which may read back many centuries. This is an area where history and legend cross-fertilise with each other in a way which is entertaining and informative for residents and visitors alike. Often material sourced from local history needs to be redeveloped as a working narrative for telling and performance, using the principles laid out in section 3.

*Folktales of your region and nationality* − at some point in your history a folklorist or scholar may have collected folktales from your region. Alternatively some of your folktales may have been incorporated in national collections and archives. This material can be reclaimed in story form for your use.

*Literary Sources* − since the birth of written literature, poets, novelists, philosophers and theologians have used oral traditions and narrative in their works. Local legends, for example, may have been turned into polished literary works. Many novels or short stories seek to recreate local incidents and historical experiences. All of this material can be reworked by a storyteller as long as proper acknowledgment is made to the literary source. Most oral tellings of a story to your own local audience do not pose copywright issues, unless you intend to record or publish your version of the story.

*Contemporary stories* − real life incidents picked up locally, in newspapers or the media are a continual fertile source of contemporary stories which can be incorporated into the storyteller’s repertoire and material.

*New stories* − it is always possible to create new stories for oral telling, particularly for children. However, all such stories should observe the rules and principles of good oral material set out in section 3.

For a fuller account of kinds of stories see the Story Guide in Chapter 10.

**2.2 Contexts and Opportunities**

Traditionally stories were told at particular festivals and communal occasions, or at gatherings at people’s homes when neighbours visited each other. In many areas of Europe storytelling in these situations declined or died out over the last two or three generations.

Although storytelling is at its best in a relaxed and informal atmosphere, recovery requires active intervention to enable telling and listening in new contexts. Any place where people gather socially may potentially be appropriate. Here are some specific examples;

* A café, inn or pub where one area can be set aside to allow storytelling and eating or drinking to be combined.
* A library
* A school
* A museum or visitor attraction
* A care or community centre for older citizens
* Outdoor locations at key environmental or heritage sites (wet weather alternatives are desirable)
* A shopping centre where a quiet area can be set aside
* A village or church hall
* An arts centre, galley or small theatre
* Round a campfire or in a tent
* On a boat or coach between destinations
* In peoples homes entertaining guests or visitors
* In a hotel.

Each opportunity for storytelling has to be carefully planned and piloted so that the organisers/hosts can learn from experience. Not everything will go right first time, but soon the resource or service of storytelling will once again become established, better known and increasingly used.

**2.3 The Storytelling Renaissance Project**

This manual has been created from the results and experience of the European Leonardo Project, Storytelling Renaissance, 1999−2001. Four countries participated in the project, Germany, Greece, Scotland, and Iceland which coordinated the project. All partners worked within their region and organised workshops and storytelling events, to encourage a storytelling recovery in their area. It soon became evident that different approaches were needed in each country, depending on the status of storytelling. In Greece, the project evolved to a large extent, around the collection of oral stories from older people. This was done by young students who were given a special training to do the interviews. The German partner worked with a storyteller who is also an actor, and there, one of the project’s results was the start-up of a storytelling club. In Iceland, storytelling evenings were an important part of the recovery. There are hardly any professional storytellers in Iceland, so the first stage was to plant seeds and bring to light the possibilities of story-telling.

Of those four countries, the recovery of storytelling has come furthest in Scotland. However where the Scottish partner in the project is situated in Caithness, in the far north, the recovery has not come as far. The work there included the introduction of storytelling in a college curriculum for tourism students. The partners had good cooperation from the Scottish Storytelling Centre in Edinburgh, which is the only storytelling centre in Europe of its kind.

What we have learned:

* In all countries there has been a great interest in the project − fertile ground, people long to tell and hear stories.
* All countries have a storytelling tradition within their culture, which has been latent and is now brought back to the surface − in the spirit of a Storytelling Renaissance.
* So far, what has motivated the participants is their own delight in stories; and then that has led to storytelling events which have become an attraction for tourists and, on a few occasions, storytelling has been “added” to existing attractions.

There are already clear signs that the partners’ activities have initiated projects that will live on once this project comes to an end. It is our hope that this process of recovery will continue in both the participating countries and other European countries.

The project period has been a valuable learning process amongst the partners and something of everything we have shared has been brought together in this manual.

**3.0 WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY?**

In the past, anthologies have been put together with collections of legends, anecdotes, fairy tales and all kinds of stories. Often this material is basic and the stories are not ready to be told the way they have been written down. It is necessary to use the written material and turn it into a good story ready to be told. Some stories you may find are very short and seem to offer very little. In this case you must use your imagination and expand the story. Sometimes you may find very lengthy stories which may be very complicated and then you must narrow them down to their essence. The following hints may help you to decide what may be missing or what may be superfluous.

**3.1 Clear structure**

Each story needs a clear beginning and ending. For this reason many fairy tales begin with “Once upon a time…” and end “so they lived happily ever after” or “Wenn sie nicht gestorben sind, so leben sie noch heute”.

If you have a feeling that you must say “and here the story ends” then your story does not have a clear ending. There are many ways of ending a story. People can disappear or die or never come back, they can make an important decision and never repeat a mistake, they can get married or win a game, recover from a sickness or return from a journey. Usually the end of a story resolves a conflict or gives a solution, or it gives the answer to a question, so that there is no reason to go on telling the story.

There is a difference between a written story and a told story. In a written novel you may find several strings of action which at some point are intertwined or where only after some time the reader finds out what they have got to do with each other. If you want your listening audience not to lose interest, the story must not be too complicated. Therefore, it should have only one string of actions which is easy to follow. Also things should happen one after the other in a clear sequence. This also helps you to tell the story. You can avoid flashbacks adding something like “before all this happened, something else took place” and then come back from where you started and then continue from there. Keep to a pattern when first one thing happens and then the next and then the next and so on.

A clearly structured story can also have something like stanzas in a poem. The listener is able to recognise the beginning and introduction, several parts of the stories and a clear ending.

This can be made clear by repetitions. For example, in a story about a fisherman and his wife, the fisherman who wants to make his wife happy goes to the fish asking favours several times and each time he says a formula. Each time he goes back to the house, there is a clear marker; one part of the story ends here.

This helps you to remember the story, it helps the audience to listen and to understand, and it also gives the meaning to the story because the fisherman’s wife is never satisfied and she repeats her wishes too often asking for more every time.

**3.2 Clear Characters**

A clearly structured story also has a limited number of persons/ characters so that the audience can remember who is who and who does what. Each person has a function in the story concerning the meaning of it. Never introduce a person who does not have a function concerning the action or the meaning of the story.

The structure of a story also becomes clearer, when the characters have a certain place in it. The relation between characters is important for the story and the actions. There can be enemies and friends, opponents and supporters. The story can make friends out of enemies and vice versa. Often stories describe or tell about the changes of relations between people.

In a story, a person is a character, with certain properties. There are many ways to describe a person/character, for example describing the appearance, or using a special kind of voice in dialogues, demonstrating certain habits or movements, gestures, using a distinctive language for example a dialect. However, to keep the clear structure of the story, keep these things limited to the necessary so that the audience can imagine the character the way you want it. At the same time beware of too flat clichés. This might jeopardize the credibility of your story. On the other hand exaggerations can be humorous and, in the right context, clichés can make a story funny or interesting. And again there is a difference between written and oral stories. In a written story the author has the time and space and the patience of the reader to make a character complicated and to show many different sides of a person. If you tell a story you might get completely lost in characterising a person and thus lose the listeners’ attention. Therefore you need clear characters, identified by just a few properties.

**3.3 Dramatic Development**

A story lives from development. If things happen that do not contribute to any development the story becomes boring and static. Development often derives from conflict. So in a good story the conflict either already exists at the beginning, or something happens that creates a conflict. Then things develop to a crisis which demands a solution, a good one for a happy end or a bad one for a catastrophe. Most people prefer happy endings. Conflicts and the questions if and how there will be a solution make stories interesting. They are part of the tension in a story.

In written literature, there are stories with open endings, but these make people think and wonder how the story might end. This is one of the aims of short stories. For oral stories this is not the best solution although there is not such a thing as absolutely right or wrong.

**3.4 Word Painting**

A good story helps people’s imagination. In the beginning an atmosphere is created by describing a place or a situation using adjectives which create images. There is a difference between a “large house with beautiful extended gardens and a scent of flowers all around” and just a “big house”.

Also, throughout the story it can be useful to create a new kind of atmosphere; for example, if there is a turn in the story; if soon something good or bad or threatening will happen. Such an atmosphere can announce an event. It can also make an event totally surprising, if the atmosphere contradicts the event. However an atmosphere should not be created or used for its own sake, it should also have a function/purpose in the story.

**3.5 Use of Repetition and/or Special Word Patterns**

If you use rhymes, riddles, sayings, songs etc in your story, those can help to structure it. They also help the audience to remember the story and they may join in and participate. Children, especially, enjoy singing and clapping along or taking part in the story telling process making sounds for the wind or waves or horseshoes on the floor or a giant’s snoring. These elements can add to the story making it more alive and entertaining.

It is often better to use direct speech, giving different voices to different characters instead of reporting what a character said. This allows you to use different registers of language, dialect and individual speech characteristics.

**3.6 Examples:** The Hare and the Porcupine

by Wilhelm Schroder

**Clear structure of a story**

There is just one strand of action, one plot. Porcupine takes it easy with his family, meets Hare who is very haughty, they fuss and bet who will be able to run faster than the other. Porcupine calls his wife and tells her about the bet and what to do. Race starts; first lap; both start; while Hare is running, wife of Porcupine is waiting at the end of the field and shouts “I am already here”. Hare is surprised, runs faster, turns, runs back with wife; at end of lap husband is awaiting Hare and shouts “I am already here”. They repeat this many times until the Hare is exhausted and convinced that the Porcupine can run much faster than him. Porcupine takes the prize and enjoys life.

**Beginning of the story**

There are several possibilities. Of course you can start: Once upon a time… However, this is a very general beginning. A good beginning would relate to the situation you and your audience are in; for example you show them a field and you say: Do you know that here the race between the hare and the porcupine took place?

Or you could happen to look at hares and porcupines and ask “Do you know the story about…” And then you begin with describing a fine morning, the porcupine sitting in front of his house, looking into the fields, enjoying the sun, stretching and thinking: What a beautiful morning. I will take a walk and enjoy the nice weather.

**Describing characters**

The Porcupine is a person taking life easy, rather enjoying it, he is never in a hurry and he does not work more than necessary. But he is a nice guy at the same time because he is happy.

Of course you can describe the Porcupine just the way you read it here. But you can describe him also by his actions and by what he thinks “What a nice morning, I will go for a walk and enjoy the beautiful day.” While he walks, he can greet his neighbours and say hello and make comments on life, humming while he is walking. The Hare is a miser; he always works a lot and has become wealthy due to his industriousness. But he is also arrogant and not really happy. People do not like him very much.

You can describe the Hare by saying that he has already been working for hours when the porcupine comes. You can give him a haughty voice and a very distinctive way of speaking. Let him say things which make clear he is “polite” but not nice. Show his vanity by describing his fur as well kept and good looking, he can interrupt his work several times by cleaning himself etc.

**Relation between characters and change of relation after a conflict**

In the story of the Hare and the Porcupine there are just the Porcupine and his wife and the Hare. The Hare is very haughty and thinks he can run much faster than the porcupine. The Porcupine is smart and out wits the Hare by cheating together with his wife. In the beginning, the Hare seems to be the winner, in the end the Porcupine is. The conflict arises when the Porcupine greets the Hare and when the Hare haughtily looks down on the Porcupine. This leads to the bet.

**Exaggeration and repetition**

The hare and the porcupine run up and down a field and they run 75 laps, which is a long distance.

Every time the hare reaches the end of the field the porcupine says “ik bun all heir” (I am already here) and the hare wonders why the porcupine is already there and he says “Wedder um” which means “turn and again”.

This repetition gives the storyteller a chance to include the audience asking them to say what the porcupine says and/or what the hare says.

After each turn the hare becomes weaker and in the end he runs very slowly and is exhausted, his comment becomes slower and his steps become slower and finally he falls down gasping.

The end of the story is very short. The two porcupines take their prizes (a bottle of Schnapps and 100 DM) go home and have a party, enjoying life.

**4.0 WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORYTELLER?**

**Relating to Audience**

Good stories are important but equally important is the storyteller and their relationship with the listeners.

* 1. Empathy − likes people
  2. Establishes relationship/rapport
  3. Positions him/herself well in relation to audience and creates atmosphere for telling
  4. Meets people’s eyes
  5. Warms up audience and enables interaction/response
  6. Gathers interesting stories (a good listener?)
  7. Selects/develops appropriate programmes (length, tempo, mix of material)
  8. Varies programme, flexible in response to immediate circumstance.

**4.1 Empathy**

Storytelling is a way of sharing experiences and emotions. It enables both storyteller and audience to enter into the lives of the characters in the story, viewing life from their perspectives and feeling their joy, anger or pain.

A story is a precious gift that enriches both listener and teller and creates a bond of understanding and empathy between them. A good storyteller is full of enthusiasm for telling stories and bubbles over with the desire to reach out to others and make them laugh or cry or start to reflect.

The teller truly likes people and this spontaneous warmth towards others transmits itself to the audience and makes them feel very trusting towards the teller. The fact that the storyteller is often telling them tales of people not unlike themselves, who have faced the same or perhaps even greater difficulties, also makes them feel more optimistic about their own lives. Stories are often thought of as just entertainment, but they also reveal universal truths and often inspire the listeners or at least make them feel less alone.

Sometimes storytellers tell stories about their own lives but more usually their stories are not directly personal tales. However, the tellers’ own life experiences will affect the way they relate to and interpret the story for the listeners, so inevitably in the telling they expose their own personality and reveal their own feelings.

When presenting a story to an audience, many tellers make a conscious effort to think themselves into the particular situation or surroundings so they can visualise and identify with the characters and imagine that the events are happening to them. This enables them to tell the tale with all the power and directness of a first-hand experience.

Whatever the approach used, storytellers always try to reach the listeners’ hearts by skilfully painting word-pictures to enable them to identify with the characters and to understand and empathise with the dilemmas these characters experience.

**4.2 Relationship/rapport**

The moments leading up to the start of a story are quite precious. An introduction is useful as it enables the audience to tune in to the teller’s voice and allows the teller the chance to start to build a relationship with the audience.

The introduction may be as brief as a single sentence or can be used to explain some of the background to the story and where the teller first heard it. It is crucial that the teller makes eye contact with the audience from the very beginning so that every individual feels that the teller is speaking just to them.

The beginning of a story needs to capture the audience’s interest and attention and to set out the outline of the story. The beginning lets the teller set the scene, give information about the time and the place, the main character and the adventure to come.

Some tellers have starting rituals that involve lighting a candle, playing a few lines on the mouth organ or some other device to attract attention. One storyteller reveals that his grandfather, a Caithness crofter, used to clear his throat and spit on the peat fire − a sure sign to his audience that he was about to begin.

Other tellers deliberately try to establish a bond by getting the audience to link hands or join in a song and some find that teaching the audience a refrain that they will be asked to use later is a successful ice breaker.

The opening lines must transport the listener to another time and place, to the magical world of the story and a completely different reality. The “Once upon a time” opening line (or a Gaelic version which translates as “At a time in the world…”) may seem clichéd but is often used for children’s stories. By a simple phrase the teller can hook the audience’s attention and reel them in.

To establish rapport with the audience, the introduction can be used to direct the story at a particular group by relating it to their lives and experiences. If a teller is addressing people in a particular locale they may try to relate the story to the area by using some familiar customs or even place names in order to personalise the story for each audience.

The telling of a story should not be hurried. The good storyteller will build the story slowly at first but deliberately, using clear, simple language to paint word pictures to stimulate the audiences’ imagination, to hold them spellbound. Once they sense that they have connected with the audience the teller will guide them through the unfolding drama, reading their body language signals to determine the pace that suits them best.

Audience participation during the story usually helps to build on the tentative rapport established at the beginning and achieve a solid relationship between the teller and the listeners. The audience can be involved in a variety of ways from songs and chants, to finger clicking, hand clapping and foot stomping.

**4.3 Position and atmosphere**

The first priority in deciding where a storyteller should sit or stand during a storytelling session is whether the teller can see the audience and whether it can see them. Rapport cannot be established without eye contact and there can be no eye contact if the teller is hidden from view.

The exact position should, if possible, be decided in advance once the type of venue has been decided and the size and shape of the room, auditorium or outside area are known.

In a large auditorium or outside venue, the teller may need to stand on a raised platform and will have to ensure that they are positioned so that everyone, including people in the back rows, can both see and hear and don’t find their view blocked by obstacles such as pillars or trees.

In a small room the arrangement can be less formal but the same considerations apply. The teller should be sure to face their audience at all times and not turn their back on any part of the group. A semi-circular arrangement is usually favoured with smaller groups. The teller then can take up a position in the opening of the circle.

However, some tellers prefer the audience to be as close together as possible so reactions triggered by the story can spread quickly through the group and create a heightened sense of shared emotions.

The teller will normally stand at the larger venues and sit down at small ones but this is not sacrosanct and depends on the teller’s personal preference and what best suits the needs of the story and the audience.

In a large venue, where the audience is arranged in rows and there is no stage, the teller will have to exaggerate all gestures and make sure they come from shoulder height to ensure those at the back can see.

Lighting is also an important factor when deciding where the storyteller should be positioned. They should avoid standing near a window if the audience would be subjected to the glare of sunlight. Equally, having a spotlight may mean the audience can only see them in silhouette and they will be deprived of making eye contact with the audience and cannot see reactions to the storytelling.

The storyteller should not allow any space between them and the audience to act as a gulf between them. He should use it effectively for movement to enhance the story and to encourage audience participation.

To set the right mood and create the right atmosphere for storytelling indoors, the teller should re-arrange or even remove furniture, dim the lights and make sure they are comfortable with the space available and can work effectively within it.

They should take up a position where they can look into the audience’s eyes, as people are always more interested if they feel someone is talking directly to them. Above all the teller should strive to make the story-telling session an enjoyable and intimate experience even if it takes place in a large auditorium.

The way the teller sits or stands is important as body language conveys strong messages to the audience. The teller must look open and confident to gain the audience’s trust and interest and should adopt a relaxed open posture.

As mentioned before, a good opening is needed to transport the listeners to a different time and place so they can enter the world of story.

There should be no interruptions, no mobile phones ringing, nothing to detract from the warmth of the storyteller’s voice and the excitement of the story that is unfolding. A sense of togetherness is what every teller seeks to achieve.

**4.4 Meeting people’s eyes**

One of the advantages of telling stories rather than reading from a book is that the teller is better able to make eye contact with the audience; this is what creates the special relationship between the two.

No matter how magical and lyrical the words, studies show that they are not the major communication tool. Verbal communication accounts for only a minor part of the message received and vocal (tone of voice, stress, pace etc) and non-verbal communication (facial expressions, eye contact, posture, gestures and what is termed body language) add a variety of additional messages. What the storyteller “says” on their face or body sends very powerful signals to their listeners.

A story should be a gift from the heart, a symbol of the storyteller’s overwhelming urge to communicate with their fellow humans. Eyes can convey this warmth and make the listeners feel they are special and that the story is being told just for them. In this way storytellers connect with their audience and establish the special trust and psychological bond that exists between them.

Eye contact is also tied in with self confidence, as people who won’t meet the eyes of others are often thought to be shy, ill at ease or even dishonest. If a storyteller does not meet the audience’s eyes they will feel the teller is not confident enough to tell the story, they will lose trust in them, and their enjoyment of the story will be diminished.

It is the storyteller’s task to bring every story to life, to help the audience recreate the events and live the actions and emotions for themselves. They achieve this through their own personal skills and by drawing on their own personal insights and experiences but a teller is also greatly assisted by visual feedback from the audience.

Eye contact, like any other form of communication, is a two way process and by meeting their audience’s eyes, the teller not only gives messages to the audience but can read messages from them. If they look at the audience they can see by their eyes if they are understanding the story and if they are enjoying it. If the audience looks lost or bored the teller can use this feedback to modify the story or improve their presentation. If alert and responsive and seeming completely absorbed in the tale the teller knows that they have succeeded in their aim of reaching their minds and emotions. The gift of a story is from heart to heart…

**4.5 Warming up − interaction**

Part of establishing rapport with an audience involves breaking the ice and getting to know the audience. With a small group this is easily accomplished by informal chat before the session begins but, when this is not possible due to the large size of the group, then the storyteller will have to find other ways of reaching the audience and making them active participants in the storytelling adventure.

At the introductory stage, the teller can sketch the outline of the story and let the audience know that, to tell the story, they need help. The teller can then teach them rhymes, chants, or songs and ask them to participate whenever they give a certain cue during the story.

This technique has the double advantage of involving the audience and giving them an additional role. It also makes them listen more carefully and concentrate on the story more, as they have to watch out for the verbal cues which let them know it is their turn to speak or sing. It also gives them a greater sense of togetherness and creates a warm and friendly atmosphere at the venue. The normal barriers that exist between members of an audience, who have not met prior to the storytelling event, are likely to be torn down and friendships may even be started as a result. If the storyteller is successful in encouraging the audience to participate wholeheartedly, the telling of the story can be greatly enhanced because the plot is illustrated and brought to life, not just by the teller’s words and actions, but by the special effects created by the audience.

Audience participation can take a variety of forms. As well as the songs and chants mentioned above, the audience can be asked to clap certain rhythms to stimulate, for example, the canter of horse’s hooves; or they can be taught to stamp their feet, perhaps to illustrate the giant’s approach. The audience can be divided into sections and each group play a different role. If done skilfully this may represent useful dialogue between different characters within the story. It also serves to retain the audience’s close attention.

Participation can be quite minimal at first. As the storytelling session progresses, participation can be increased as it achieves its effect of warming up the audience and making them relax and feel more responsive. In some cases the teller may say nothing to prepare the audience but will allow them to join in quite spontaneously when they realise that certain words and phrases are repeated at regular intervals.

Any participation on the part of the audience is very rewarding for both teller and listeners and sometimes can be carried a step further. Guessing games and riddles can be employed, repetitions can change slightly from chorus to chorus and the audience can be given props to hold or asked to use mime and dance.

Organic storytelling can also be used. This actually allows the audience to help compose the story and determine the plot. The teller starts off the story and gives alternatives for the audience to select. Sometimes the teller will not supply a selection of possibilities but will simply use questions to invite responses from the audience about what happened next or what the main character did or said. If done well, this technique can result in the creation of stories which are imaginative, amusing and relevant to the audience’s lives.

Audience participation in storytelling is a technique that works well with most age groups and is one that the storyteller has to develop. When learning a new story s/he must actively look for ways in which s/he can modify the tale to allow the audience to join in. S/he must also be aware of how to calm things down if the audience gets overly excited and out of control.

* 1. **Gathering Interesting Stories**

It is important for the teller to collect stories which they like and will enjoy telling.

Some stories simply provide entertainment but most stories contain a moral or universal truth. The storyteller must share this belief or point of view as it would be very difficult, or perhaps impossible, for them to tell a story that they do not agree with.

The choice of stories is seemingly endless from fables to fairy tales and urban legends, but these have been categorised in a different chapter of this manual (see Chapter 10). Some stories the teller will gather will have a timeless message and will be tales everyone will be able to relate to. Other stories are more light hearted and deal with topical subjects that have an immediate appeal.

Many stories are full of symbolism where the characters or actions in the story represent something else. Other stories contain imagery which appeals to all the senses and stimulates the imagination. All stories will have action and suspense, a climax and final resolution as these are essential ingredients to hold an audience’s attention.

To be interesting, the stories must have a strong beginning, good characterisation and a clear plot that is easy to follow. However, many storytellers do not look for a story with a polished structure; they choose the tale for its intrinsic message and because it has something worth-while to communicate. They know that they can adapt any story and re-work it so that the structure and plot are quite accessible. They know they can adapt it to fit a particular audience and can insert opportunities for audience participation.

The storyteller may gather a collection of stories from books or from other people. They may become a good listener and learn to retell stories that they have been told. They may remember the stories of childhood or use their own life or the lives of friends and acquaintances as source material. As the years pass, the collection of tales in their repertoire will grow bigger and bigger and there will be an appropriate story for nearly every situation.

So, gathering stories is a pleasant task; for an interesting story is a memorable one. Stories are useful for all sorts of occasions and can be humorous, happy or sad. They can be personal tales; tales which reveal good and evil, tales which make listeners feel emotion, which move them, which relieve suffering and offer comfort and reassurance to average people struggling to cope with their lives.

* 1. **Appropriate Programmes**

The storyteller can select a mix of stories from their existing repertoire or can put together a special programme on a theme which is of interest to a particular audience, finding, adapting or creating suitable stories for them.

Whether s/he is simply selecting already familiar stories for a short session or developing material for a longer programme (or series), the selection of stories depends almost entirely on the audience and is based on their age, interests, attention span and perhaps a little on the context or purpose of the storytelling programmes.

It is not always possible for a teller to find out detailed information about a mixed adult audience but, when dealing with school or community groups or pre-school storytelling sessions at the local library, it should be easier to make the right selection.

The length of the programme will depend on whether it is a child/adult audience and the age and attention span of the group.

In general, most pre-school children will not be able to listen to a single story for much more than 5−7 minutes. For 6−8 year olds, this can be increased to 10 minutes. Upper primary pupils (9−11 years) enjoy longer sessions with a variety of story lengths. It is also a good idea to intersperse the telling with interaction such as songs, riddles or rhymes.

Adult storytelling sessions will range from 45 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes, with an interval for longer sessions. Adult programmes may be longer if they are attached to a training workshop or if there is more than one teller.

If school groups or library sessions are part of an on-going programme, at for example weekly or 2-weekly intervals, each session should be planned to stand alone even though you may be exploring the same theme over the course of time.

The type of audience, the nature of the event, and the type of stories being told will determine the tempo of the programme.

Programmes of light-hearted, humorous stories using fast-paced, active language require a quicker tempo, whereas more serious historical or

religious stories may need a slower delivery.

The pace of individual stories needs to be varied to keep the audience’s interest. The plot will make it clear where the tempo should increase when the action is reaching a climax and where the tempo should slow down again.

The mix of material will also depend on the storyteller, the audience and the type of storytelling programme. It is important for the teller to select stories from their repertoire that will fit the audience but they should try to make the programme as varied as possible to have something for everyone.

The categories of stories are quite extensive, ranging from folktales, fairy stories and fables to ghost stories and parables. These have been listed elsewhere in this manual (see chapter 10).

The teller should select from these, ensuring a mix of stories; some serious, some light-hearted, some happy, some sad, some with an unexpected twist in the tale. They may also choose to throw in a few riddles or jokes or may opt to follow the style of the traditional Scottish ceilidh which includes a mix of stories, music and song.

Moral stories, where good triumphs over evil, are especially appealing to young children but many adult audiences also like stories with a happy ending where man’s perseverance in the face of adversity is finally rewarded.

* 1. **Varying the Programme – Flexibility**

It might seem tempting for a storyteller to arrive at a venue with the programme of stories already fixed and to repeat this same programme (in the same order with the same links) over and over in different circumstances. This course of action, however, kills spontaneity and leads to boredom and staleness.

Obviously, the teller must plan and should have a clear idea of suitable material based on what s/he has managed to find out about the audience. However, They also need to be flexible and allow the session to unfold, to read the audience’s facial expressions and body language and learn what they particularly like and dislike.

A good storyteller should be confident that they have enough suitable stories in their “storytelling bag” (at least 15 if they want to tell 4 or 5) and that they can move from one to another quite effortlessly, providing spontaneous links between stories or perhaps adding light relief in the form of songs and riddles.

A typical situation can be woven into a story at the last minute or a favourite story adapted slightly to become more relevant or more entertaining for the audience.

A good storyteller is prepared for all eventualities and learns to take them in their stride. A crisis at the venue may result in a longer or shorter time slot. An unexpected cold or sore throat may affect the storyteller’s voice making it more difficult to tell certain stories. Interruptions may occur during the programme, perhaps in the form of a child trying to gain attention.

All of these difficulties can be overcome provided the teller is flexible and confident enough with their basic material and learns the art of “thinking on their feet” to make the best of any situation. The teller can lengthen or shorten the programme as they go along, request and use a sound system, and give a noisy child recognition for a moment before going on with their programme.

1. **WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORYTELLER?**

**Telling the stories**

Storytelling at its best is a live interaction between teller and audience. Everything the storyteller does should enable the listeners to help in creating the experience of the story.

**5.1 Naturalness − Relaxation**

The art of telling stories is to communicate with others in a simple, straightforward, down-to-earth fashion. Storytelling should not be confused with performance art. The storyteller remains her/him-self and does not need to go into dramatic mode or assume a false voice.

Of course if they are telling stories to a large group, they will have to project their voice but should strive to remain as natural as possible.

Telling a story conjures up the image of a group of friends sitting round the fire entertaining each other by swapping the gossip of the day or reminiscing about times gone-by.

This is the sort of cosy, congenial atmosphere the storyteller wishes to recreate even in a large auditorium and, in order to do this, they have to use their voice and their body language to project an image of friendly, calm control that the audience can relate to and trust.

Before starting, the teller should concentrate on relaxing and try to channel any feeling of nervousness into positive energy that will enhance the telling.

They should make sure their voice is warm and friendly and that their stance, posture and body language are all open and welcoming.

A relaxed but upright posture, whether sitting or standing, and the ability to make and maintain eye contact with the audience, conveys self-confidence and reassures the audience that the teller is in control.

In order to present a story well, the teller has to be sure they are communicating well, both with their voice and with their body. So if a teller stood with sagging shoulders, head bent, arms crossed and weight on one leg, they would not make a very positive impact and the audience would probably have grave doubts about their competence.

Non-verbal communication (posture, facial expressions, etc) is very important and must match the teller’s words in order to be believed. If a storyteller described a scene or person of great beauty with a big frown on their face, the audience would feel somewhat confused and would look for other signs of reassurance. So the teller must become very self-aware and not let any unwanted messages be passed on to the audience which may distract them or undermine the telling.

Nervousness and stage fright can quickly convey themselves to the audience so the teller needs to consciously smile and relax to let them know all is well. The teller must be aware at all times of the impression they are making on the audience and must learn how to achieve the desired effect by working out the signals they want to give and eliminating any negative messages.

* 1. **Voice and Breath**

The human voice is the storyteller’s most precious tool. It can be played like a musical instrument to produce a range of tones and effects to delight the audience. Flexibility and strength are the key attributes. A storyteller’s voice needs to carry well, it needs to resonate, to modulate in order to convey emotions but it also needs to be resilient enough to stand up to the rigours of frequent use without undue strain.

Clear articulation and a rich vocabulary with an awareness of the sound

quality of words, as well as their meaning, are essential so the teller can be confident they can get across nuances of meaning in the tale.

The tone and quality of the voice are very important. Rote memorisation of any story produces a stilted, sing song voice and should be avoided as storytelling is a spontaneous art. It is better to learn a story by reducing the tale to a sequence of incidents and internalising these either in words or as pictures. As each picture is recalled, the words that accompany it come naturally and fluently. See a description of Storymaps in Appendix.

Correct breathing is essential. The storyteller needs to breathe deeply, not superficially from the throat as this will produce a thin, monotonous voice. Storytellers need to do breathing exercises to have control over the voice so they are confident they can use it to maximum effect. Clear speaking requires control over vocal chords, tongue and lips and the flow of breath.

Nervousness affects the breathing by diminishing both quality and expressiveness and is a tell-tale sign to the audience that the storyteller is suffering from nerves and is not in control. Breathing deeply not only helps to control nervousness but it makes for inner poise before a telling.

Tellers can improve expressiveness by becoming acutely aware of the pitch, tone and volume of their voice and can practise articulating words with a rounded tone and good tempo to increase suppleness and resonance. It is essential for all storytellers to have complete mastery over their voice and to be able to speak with confidence.

* 1. **Response to / Articulating the Story**

In the best cases, the storyteller is indistinguishable from the story − they have become one. The teller has entered into the spirit and mood of the story and the only thing that matters is that the story should be put over as effectively as possible for the audience. The storyteller adapts the story to suit their personality and style of presentation while using language, both verbal and non-verbal, that suits the audience.

If the language used is powerful and effective, the audience will respond to it and concentrate on the story itself. The teller can modulate their voice to convey heightened tension or suspense or can lower it to a conspiratorial whisper. Whatever style or technique is employed in the telling of the story, it must be appropriate to the natural structure of the story itself.

The articulation of the words must be clear so the audience is able to

follow each part of the story with ease and with complete understanding.

* 1. **Variety of Voice**

To avoid monotony the storyteller needs to be able to vary their voice by changing the timing, volume, pitch and vocal quality.

The teller can alter the speed at which they speak by concentrating on matching it to the dramatic action of the story, speeding up before a climax and slowing down to indicate a more reflective episode. The rate of speech can be varied to help portray two different characters.

Tellers can vary their voice by increasing and decreasing the volume. Increased volume can be used for emphasis and to convey different moods such as anger, power and passion. Volume changes are also useful in dialogue to differentiate between characters.

The pitch of a voice changes from word to word and even rises and falls within words (intonation), reflecting a range of subtle meanings. Storytellers, like singers, have a range of pitch from low to high with the optimum pitch being about one-third from the bottom of the scale. A high-pitched voice is not pleasant for an audience to listen to but can be useful to portray certain character traits.

Voice quality is determined by timbre and resonance. Everyone has a different voice quality so this can be used to reflect personality and portray different characters in the story.

* 1. **Tempo**

Tempo is the speed of delivery during a story and reflects different emotions. Excitement, suspense, panic are portrayed by increased tempo whereas soft, nostalgic or reflective moods are shown by a slower tempo.

The tempo should be varied according to the needs of the text and the effect of changes of tempo is to provide interest and avoid monotony. During a telling the tempo can build up gradually or there can be a sudden change, perhaps to alert the audience to impending danger. There is a decrease in tempo after the climax of a story has been reached.

* 1. **Rhythm and Pause**

Rhythm refers to the grouping of words and to the flow of the language. This phrasing or rhythm of words is essential to maintain audience interest. A staccato rhythm is usual for a funny story. If a whole story were to be told in a monotone with all rhythmic flow eliminated, the audience would lose track of the sense of the tale and all humour would be completely lost.

A pause can be used to heighten the drama (perhaps just before the climax) by drawing the audience’s attention to the significance of what is coming next. It serves to create a tantalising wait, albeit brief, in which the audience has a chance to guess what will happen. This increases interest in the telling and creates a sense of satisfaction in the audience if they are proved correct.

The pause is a very useful tool for the storyteller but it should not be overused. If a teller constantly pauses for dramatic effect, it will have the reverse effect as the audience will no longer find it fresh and new and the element of surprise, that was present when the technique was first used, will be missing.

* 1. **Tone and Perspectives**

Tone of voice is a very powerful form of non-verbal communication. All the range of human emotions can be portrayed by subtle changes in tone of voice. A friendly tone, spoken with a smile, is warm, rounded and quite relaxed. A brusque tone is deeper with clipped words and breath coming in spurts; whereas anger has a cold, sharp edge to the words or unrestrained passion. Of course tone is combined with other factors: volume, breath, pace, emphasis are all interconnected.

By skilful changes in tone of voice, the teller, as narrator, can reveal their perspective on what is happening and also the perspectives of characters in the story. Tone reflects emotion and, just as there are positive and negative emotions, so there are pleasant and unpleasant tones of voice. This becomes a useful tool for the teller when portraying differences between characters and in emphasising the contrast between the forces of good and evil in some traditional tales.

As a story is being told the audience is looking for clues both from the words used and the tone of voice. The tone can reveal sarcasm and contempt, hesitancy or determination, relief and joy. The tone of voice also changes at various points during the narrative. After the climax, the voice has a ring of finality that warns the audience the story is about to end.

The audience can build up a picture of the characters in the story, can understand the point of view of the narrator and can also keep pace with the unfolding plot, all by paying attention to the different tones of voice.

* 1. **Sense of Climax**

Stories are gripping because they tell of characters who encounter problems or situations with which the audience can identify. The audience’s interest is held because they want to find out how things turn out.

The plot or basic structure of the story keeps the audience in suspense. Usually a story has a protagonist and antagonist and there is a struggle between the forces of good and evil. This conflict can be between people but often it is one person against society or the power of Nature.

The story begins with equilibrium or with a situation where the balance has been upset. The problems intensify and suspense continues to build. The suspense, struggle and conflict continue until a turning point is reached and the protagonist knows whether they will win or lose. There is no turning back from this point on and there has to be a climax.

A teller will build up the tension and suspense by the use of short sentences and increased tempo. After the climax they will allow the voice to fall and will slow down the rate of speech, using a more deliberate tone of voice that gives an air of finality.

* 1. **Conveying Recognition**

Stories, like any good interpretation, should aim to “relate, provoke, reveal.” A good storyteller will try to relate the story to the lives and experience of the audience by selecting appropriate material and by adapting the story by deliberately adding a comment to personalise it for the particular audience. Issues are presented during the course of the story which should provoke the audience to think about the dilemmas the characters face and how they themselves would resolve them.

The revelation comes after the climax, after the drama is over. The revelation is when the full meaning becomes clear and the audience has had time to reflect on the consequences and implications of the plot and to fully realise the point of the tale and the essential message that the storyteller is seeking to convey.

This recognition of the “universal truth” is a subtle process. The teller wants to ensure everyone appreciates their story fully but they cannot explicitly announce or explain the meaning. They have to rely on the audience picking up the trail of clues that they have given them during the story. Sometimes they will be able to read the audience’s body language and see that they have understood, but other times the teller just has to trust.

The storyteller must do all they can during the course of the story, by the skilful use of vocabulary, emphasis, tone of voice, pace and the art of the pause, to give the audience all the information they need to reach understanding once the final piece of the jig-saw has been put in place and the whole picture is revealed.

Recognition is sometimes not determined by the mind but is rather an intuitive understanding via the emotions. When the audience “senses” what the storyteller has laid before them, it reinforces the bond between them. It gives them a feeling of satisfaction and makes them feel gratitude to the storyteller. It is at this point that the listener has received the “gift” (the fairy gold?) the storyteller has offered.

Also, the audience may recognise that what has been revealed in the story is something that have always known deep down, but perhaps have not directly thought about or would not have expected in that context.

* 1. **Expression, Gesture and Movement**

Storytelling is not performance art. A story can be told just as well from the armchair relying on the power of the words. Exaggerated facial expressions, grandiose gestures and constant movement are not essential. However, in moderation, they can be helpful to illustrate the meaning and enliven the story.

Facial expressions are a form of non-verbal communication − the face mirrors the feelings and reflects to the audience the emotions the teller is communicating in words. This is why it is important, at least in the smaller storytelling venues, that the audience should be able to see the teller. It is also important for the storyteller to read the facial expressions of the audience to gather their reactions to the story.

Gestures can be directional, including shaking the head or pointing, or they can be expressive. Expressive gestures reveal feelings such as head in hands to convey despair, clenched fists to show anger, rolling eyes to convey good natured, amused irritation.

Both facial expressions and gestures must fit the emotional content of the story. They should be spontaneous and not planned or they will detract from the story. It is essential that they are not used excessively and appear natural.

Movement can be used to keep the audience alert and to reveal that the story is moving to a different place or time. The way the teller moves can indicate emotion as an elated character will walk on air whereas an unhappy one will look as if he is carrying a physical burden. Movement does not necessarily have to be from A to B. The teller can simply turn their head to the left and then to the right to indicate dialogue between different characters. Whatever movement is used must fit the available space.

It is important not to overdo the use of expression, gesture and movement. Economical use, just as with the art of the pause, is the most effective.

1. **GOLDEN EDICTS**

The following notes cover many of the things helpful to bear in mind for storytellers on their journey. After some of the points we have to put a little more flesh on the bones quoting (in italic) three professional storytellers who have provided their assistance for this project.

1. Be as prepared as possible. Know what story or stories you plan to do. Learn as much as you can about who will be listening and what the space is like. If necessary be ready to vary your programme in response to our listeners’ needs.
2. If you get to know your audience, you can tell them anything. Before you start telling stories on any occasion, say ‘hello’ and make sure they can hear and are comfortable. Position yourself whether sitting or standing so that you can see and relate to everyone.
3. Choose one short story that you enjoy. Choose one that is easy for you to remember. You can build up a repertoire but start with one story and learn to tell it well. Try to save longer stories for when you have more experience.
4. Tell your stories once, twice, many times. The more you tell it, the better it becomes. (Some people find it useful to tell their stories to a tape recorder and then play it back.) It may be easier to tell something you have heard than something you have only read.
5. Do not memorise. Stories are not recitations. Think of the story as something that has happened to you that you want to tell someone else. Each time you tell the story you will discover something new about it and surprise yourself.
6. You may find it helpful to make notes while you are learning but never use notes when you are telling to an audience.
7. Learn the bones of the story: the beginning, the end, and the bits you can’t leave out. Think of the story as a path with clear signposts.
8. Then think of the story as a series of snapshots. Then tell about each picture, keeping in mind what you can see, hear, smell, taste and feel. These are what make a story particularly vivid.
9. Do not worry about forgetting. Even the best and most experienced storytellers forget. Trust yourself. Your imagination and resourcefulness will rescue you. Also, do not be afraid to tell the audience if you’ve forgotten something and then go back to a place you remember and try again.
10. There is no right or wrong way to tell a story. Each person brings his or her own voice and charm to a story.
11. Enjoy yourself; be yourself. Then your audience will relax and respond. Encourage interaction with your listeners where appropriate. Allow your breathing and posture to be controlled but natural.
12. Never explain a story. The best way to ruin a good story is to tell people what it means. Always let the narrative carry the meanings − then your audience can take the story away with them and go on enjoying it in their own way.

**Dos and don’ts when working with children**

Try to ensure children are of a similar age − this makes choosing material easier.

Ask younger children to sit with their bottoms to the floor so the ones behind can see. Encourage them to leave plenty of room for feet stomping and hand rhymes.

Think about wearing brighter colours when working with children.

Vary your material. Children’s attention span is short so involve movement and interaction in the session − find the thimble / parrot or hand rhymes etc. Use props but only when practised. Plan the session.

Keep the story flowing; interruptions by children are often their way of participating so work out how to handle them in advance − relate what a child says and guide them back to the story; alternatively use eye contact to stop unwanted interruptions,

Encourage parents and teachers to stay. The Children’s Act (Scotland) suggests avoiding physical contact when working with children. Avoid 1−1 situations and don’t offer to take a child to the toilet − common sense.

Don’t try to come down to the children’s level − they will come up to yours.

Try not to rush the child. It takes some longer than others to get the joke or the gist of the story.

Don’t worry − children’s expectations are different from adults. To them the whole world is a magical story and the purpose of adults is to tell it.

Storytellers David Campbell, Scotland

Winifred Wrede, Germany

Linda Bandelier, Scotland

Joyce Brown, Scotland

1. **COPYRIGHT GUIDELINES**

**Copyright** − if you make up a story the copyright belongs to you. If you substantially rework and change a story from another source, the copyright of the reworked version belongs to you. Traditional stories remain accessible to everyone because behind all the different versions is a core story structure from which every storyteller can work.

**Good Practice** − If you originally gathered your story from another storyteller you should acknowledge your source when you tell the story. If your telling remains heavily dependant on the the original teller’s version, you should not publish, record or broadcast the story without the written permission from the storyteller from whom you heard the story. This is also true of stories which you have taken from a written version. If your telling remains heavily dependant on the written version, you should not publish, record or broadcast the story, without the written permission of the copyright holder, which is normally cited in the original publication.

**Courtesy and Respect** − Most storytellers are pleased to have their versions of traditional stories and, where applicable, their original stories retold orally. This informal process is at the heart of storytelling as a living tradition. However, some storytellers belong to traditions which expect stories to be retold in the form in which they were passed on. Other storytellers expect their stories to be reworked by each new teller. As a matter of courtesy and good practice it is important to respect the spirit and intention with which the story was told to you. If in doubt, speak to the storyteller in order to learn more about the origins, context and significance of the story and the way in which it was told. If you are in doubt about a matter of copyright, consult your relevant national institution.

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