

Storytelling Techniques - The Jonah Story

Storytelling is one of the best ways to gain the interest of a class and to maintain an atmosphere in which all children can learn. Storytelling allows us to be enthusiastic over what we are teaching. It helps to spark the interest of students, engages their imaginations, and helps them to develop language skills. Revealing your enthusiasm for the printed word will go a long way in encouraging your students to read and to let their imaginations create visual pictures in their minds. They will discover reading a more enjoyable pastime than watching television.

With these thoughts in mind I would like to offer TEN techniques that might enhance your storytelling. I will illustrate them with the telling of the story of Jonah, pages 94 – 95 of the Grade 5 text, *May We Be One*.

- 1. Ask a question to introduce one of the characters of the story.**
- 2. Vary the tone of your voice and the pace of your story telling to match the action of the story.**
- 3. A simple prop can enhance the telling of the story.**
- 4. If the story has a moral you may want to use the “drip” method of repeating a key line throughout the story.**
- 5. Vary your voice for each of the characters in the story to match the mood of what they are saying.**
- 6. Speak clearly and enunciate well. Remember that reading a line differently will convey a different meaning.**
- 7. Be dramatic in your storytelling.**
- 8. Know your story well so that you can tell it without looking constantly at the book. It doesn't matter if you are not faithful to the text.**
- 9. Let the children fill in missing words at times.**
- 10. Stretch your listeners by getting the children to relate it to their own story or by incorporating it into a craft activity.**

In the telling of the Jonah story the numbers in red will indicate which of the ten principles is featured.

Jonah and the Whale

Prepare a cartoon of Jonah in the belly of the whale. You may have him on a raft, with a candle lighting the interior of the cavern, the whale's stomach. A suitable caption will help, e.g. "Let me out of here!"(3)

Ask the question: "What do you think it would be like being shut up in a place that is as dark as the belly of the whale?"(1)

OR

"Have you ever not wanted to do something so much that you went to hide from the person asking you to do it?" Have the students share the incident and their feelings.

The Story

Once long ago, God spoke to Jonah and said, "Jonah, I want you to go to the people of Nineveh and tell them that unless they change their ways, unless they get their act together, they and their city will be blown apart."

Jonah listened to God politely, thought about God's request for about one second, and shouted emphatically, (5) "No way, God! I'm not going to Nineveh. I don't like those Ninevites one bit. Besides, you're not their God. You are our God. Why would you want to help them?"

Jonah thought of a way to steal away from God so that he would not have to go to Nineveh. (2) He packed a bag carefully, snuck out of the house and went down to the wharf. He asked the captain quietly, "Where is this boat going?" The captain replied, "Tarshish."

"Good," said Jonah. "That's the opposite direction to Nineveh. There is no way God will get me to Nineveh," he chuckled. The captain looked at him blankly and told him he could bunk in below deck. Jonah felt tired and went to sleep.

While they were out at sea they ran into a huge storm. The waves were breaking over the ship, rocking it severely. The sailors, fearful that the boat would be swamped, began to pray to the gods, asking them to allow them to live through the storm. The winds got stronger, the waves higher and more powerful. The captain went to find Jonah. He shook him awake and shouted at him, "How can you still be asleep? Are you not afraid that we will be swamped by the huge waves? Pray to your God. This may be the last day of your life. Tell your God to come and help us. Only God can save us."

Jonah struggled to the upper deck. He heard the wind shrieking; the cold spray of the sea crashing over the boat drenched him. When the sailors saw him they began to shout at him. "It's Jonah. He's the one to blame for this storm. Never until now

have we felt such fury of the sea. Jonah is the source of our bad luck,” shouted one of the sailors. “Who are you? Why did you board our ship?” shouted another. “Where did you come from? I wish you had stayed there,” screamed another, trying to be heard over the wind. (5)

Jonah shouted over the wind, “I am a Hebrew. I’m running away from God. I don’t want to do what he wants me to do.” He looked fiercely at the sky and shouted, “No way, God. I am not going to Nineveh. I don’t like the Ninevites.” (4) Then, he added, “Stop the storm. I’m not going to go.”

Immediately, the wind increased, the waves got bigger. “We will all die,” shouted the sailors. “Tell your God you will do what he asks. That’s the only way we will get out of the storm.”

“God is mad at me. Throw me overboard, and that will calm the storm,” said Jonah. The sailors, alarmed at their coming deaths, prayed to Jonah’s God. “Oh God, do not let us perish if we throw this man overboard. Don’t hold it against us. This storm is your doing.” Fearing Jonah they seized him and his bag and tossed him into the wild sea. As soon as Jonah hit the water the sea calmed. The overwhelmed sailors praised Jonah’s God. They watched Jonah splashing in the sea, swimming frantically in the direction of Tarshish. Once again he shouted, “No way, God. I’m not going to Nineveh. I don’t like the Ninevites.” (4 & 9)

The sailors watched in horror as a monstrous whale, mouth wide open, surfaced behind Jonah. With one lunge Jonah and whale disappeared into the depths of the now calm sea.

When Jonah regained consciousness, he thought he was in a dark cave. However, he soon realized where he was. In anger he shouted, (9) “No way, God. I’m not going to Nineveh. I don’t like the Ninevites.” The whale began to swim fast. Repeatedly, he leaped out of the water. Then he sank to the depths of the sea. Jonah became frightened and began to pray to God to release him from this terrible dungeon. For three days and nights he prayed. Finally God spoke to the whale. The huge fish rushed to the shore, and spewed Jonah out upon the beach. Automatically, as he gathered himself off the sand, emboldened by being on dry land, Jonah shouted, “No way, God. I’m not going to Nineveh. I don’t like the Ninevites.”

God answered, “Jonah, Jonah, give it up. I am more powerful than you. I will pursue you until you do what I ask.”

“All right, all right,” said Jonah. “But this is the last time that I will do anything for you. Just look at me. There’s seaweed in my hair and ears, and half of my clothes have been digested by that horrible fish. No one in Nineveh will listen to what I have to say.”

God consoled Jonah and told him once again what to say to the Ninevites. This time he did not shout, (9) **“No way, God. I’m not going to Nineveh. I don’t like the Ninevites.”** He did what God asked. He didn’t think the Ninevites would listen to him, and God would have to destroy them.

Nineveh was huge. It took three days to walk across the city. Jonah walked for a whole day, shouting, **“You are in deep trouble. Unless you repent this city will become a heap of garbage.”** The people were horrified. Rich and poor alike turned from their evil ways. They put on sackcloth, fasted, and sat in ashes. Even the king, when he heard Jonah’s message took off his royal robe and put on sackcloth and rubbed ashes in his hair. He proclaimed that all people and all animals must fast and pray that this calamity be avoided.

God heard their prayers and relented. He promised not to destroy Nineveh.

Jonah saw that the city had been spared because the people believed what he had said. He was angry because the city had been spared. He shouted, (6) **“No way, God. I’m leaving Nineveh. I don’t like the Ninevites. I was afraid you would spare them. That’s why I was fleeing to Tarshish. Now, take my life from me. It is better that I die than live, knowing the Ninevites have been spared.”**

Then God spoke to Jonah, **“Is it right for you to be angry?”** But Jonah didn’t answer. He left the city. He built a booth on the sand and sat in its shade, and waited to see what God would do. To his surprise God made a shrub grow over him which provided him more shade. He was delighted. The next day as he sat under the shade of the shrub, God made the shrub die. The sun came up and sent its heat furiously at Jonah. Jonah grew faint, and parched from lack of water cried out, **“God, take my life from me. It is better that I die than live.”**

But God replied, **“Jonah, you are angry about a shrub you did not cultivate. Should I not be concerned about a great city in which there are one hundred and twenty thousand people? These people deserve my mercy as much as you do.”**

(10) **Ask the children if they can remember a time that they felt that God favored someone over them. Ask them to share the story and how they felt.**

Have the students draw a picture of their favorite part of the story. Tell them to tell why it was the favorite part of the story.

Ask the students to share what they learn about God from this story? What do they learn about themselves?

Ask the students to create a dramatization of the story, using props.

Have students read the spoken parts of the characters, i.e. God, Jonah, the sailors...