

## **Using Oral History to Lead to Writing Fluency**

*Elouise E. White-Beck*

*Taylor Allderdice High School*

**Overview**

**Rationale**

**Objectives**

**Strategies**

**Research**

**Classroom Activities**

**Annotated Bibliography/Books and Articles**

**Filmography**

**Web Sources**

**Appendices/Standards**

*Oral History, noun*---a narration of an incident or a series of events or an example of these that is or may be narrated, as an anecdote, joke, etc. from Latin, *history*

--Dictionary.com

## Overview

*Tell me a story.* What do those words conjure up for you? Do you recall your childhood, maybe a specific time or place or loved one? Or do you recall your own children or grandchildren begging you for a story? Where do the stories come from? Quick, under pressure, imagine you're suddenly pressed to come up with a story. Say you're driving down the road with three children straining in their seatbelts arguing about nothing. Then you hear it: *Tell me a story.*

I am driving down Bigelow Boulevard past the “french fry” sculpture during rush hour. I don't remember where we were going or why; I don't even remember how many kids were in the car but my first impulse to calm them and redirect their attention was to tell them a story. I *do* remember that I told *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

Oral history is an important kind of storytelling. Each story from the past is a link in the chain of our history. My children love to hear stories about when they were little. In my family I have the reputation of telling the same stories ad nauseum, but the kids will sometimes say, “Tell a story about me when I was little.” The prizewinner here is the time I stopped at *Long John Silver's* and brought home the snack-sized meals without the extras. My three-year-old opened hers and exclaimed mournfully, “There's no ball doggies!” These anecdotes will become part of the stories they will include when they tell their own children and grandchildren stories. Or when they teach, or become writers or mentors to other younger people.

There are stories that happened when they were too little to remember but they were *there*, so they own them as memories. I have stories that I take ownership of because they are about events that my parents experienced when they were children. Now that they're gone I feel obligated to tell their anecdotes as well. My father, son of poor immigrants with five children, watched one of his elder siblings being punished after complaining about having cabbage for dinner

again. He jumped up from the table and ran around yelling, “I like cabbage! I like cabbage!”

As I record these anecdotes I realize that I have never put them into print before and I feel a certain satisfaction and sense of doing justice to the past; I am happy to *write down* stories that have been in my head and in my mouth for so many years. Now other people will read them and smile (I hope). And the links reach farther back into the past. This is how we connect the generations and the eras. It makes us feel safe and connected.

Whether stories are real or made up, they make us into a community of listeners and tellers. It’s a simple and magnificent thing. Stories are glimpses of life that people tell for a variety of reasons. The most crucial part of this experience has stayed with me and served me well as a teacher as well as an everyday member of the human race. This came from my Intro to the Theater class and described the four basic reasons why people first performed any kind of art listed above. Examples of these still conjure up images of cave men recounting a funny incident on a journey to make others laugh, singing a song to teach their children important survival lessons, acting out a particularly successful or dangerous hunt to commemorate the event, and dancing around a campfire to give thanks or beseech the gods.

Storytelling is an art that can accomplish any one, any combination, or all of these four basic reasons why artistic expression developed. The structure of a story is equally important. Rather than devise a lame definition of my own I will fall back on Aristotle:

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

--Aristotle,

*Poetics*

This seems obvious, but what Aristotle painstakingly explains in his widely studied and revered *Poetics* is that there are steps to follow for a story to unfold. This is clearly defined and delineated in his the *Well-Made Play* chart (see **Appendix A**).

For those who want to become storytellers there are handbooks and guides to help them along (see Bibliography) with suggestions for finding stories, choosing genres, and practicing the telling, but most people simply tell stories without any training as part of their nature. We like to relate funny, unusual, intriguing, and annoying things that have happened to us or ideas that we've been brooding about. The bottom line is that everyone can do it.

## **Rationale**

We need to hear others' voices. From the time we are in the womb until we reach our deathbeds, we hear other people's voices. Writing is another way to hear someone else's voice. When you read something written in first person, like this, you are hearing a specific person's voice; you are listening to my voice as you are reading.

People keep journals for many reasons: to remember specific events, to record appointments and other information, and to leave as a record for their families or future generations. I love reading autobiographies, memoirs, and diaries and I have wondered why. Part of this is the connection to the past; to other people who have lived in ways not so different from my own. What may be the most important link, though, is hearing another person's voice. When I read my journal I am hearing my voice from the past. Sometimes it comforts me when I'm faced with a problem, sometimes I am reminded of how I survived a traumatic event, and sometimes I am reminded of how happy I was at a particular moment.

If students can hear voices when they read and then realize that what they write gives life to their own voices, they will have made a great leap in understanding communication between people through writing. The theme of the tenth grade year in the Pittsburgh Public Schools' English curriculum is "The Individual and Society." The stories, poems, plays, and novels are center on this theme. Using an existing novel in our curriculum will highlight this link between the individual and society and the importance of telling, listening, and writing. Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying* will serve as the vehicle from which to base this study, particularly the children's Christmas program in Chapter 19. Through a combination of listening, telling, reading, and writing, students will come to understand the interplay of these four activities and will better appreciate their own abilities in each of these areas. In the process, students will experiment with different methods of learning to tap into their multiple intelligences and promote confidence in their varied abilities. If this can be demonstrated as a valuable tool in understanding the world around us, this unit will be a success.

## **Objectives**

Students who have struggled with writing since they began school may be so discouraged by the time they reach high school that they may feel that there is no point in continuing to try. They know they can talk and read the newspaper, and email and text messages, and who cares about spelling anyhow? This unit will demonstrate how important "voice" is in writing. Beyond simple messages and lists, students will understand the human connection that can be accomplished through narrative. Students will read and comprehend, listen and comprehend, and ultimately write and comprehend that there is a real human quality to the voicing in their own writing as well as others. Incorporating several different styles of learning, students will experience success in the areas in which they excel and will discover strategies in dealing with the areas that have been problematic. The culminating project will be a response to literature using Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying* in which they will discuss the effect of Jefferson's diary on Grant Wiggins and on the reader. The hope is that students will apply these observations and techniques in their future reading and writing, and in the stories they will tell throughout their lives.

## **Strategies**

Strategies for working through this unit will be comprised of a series of listening, speaking, writing, and evaluating. It is vital for students to believe in their own abilities. To this end, a variety of activities serving as the Anticipatory Set will be introduced to bolster their confidence and enthusiasm. The Anticipatory Set is a warm-up activity that directly relates to the day's lesson and serves to prime the pump, so to speak. Through these activities, the teacher should be able to gauge students' strengths and weaknesses. These activities will include learning through the multiple intelligences (see Howard Gardner's book *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* to read about his theories of intelligence measurement that reach beyond the verbal and mathematical to intelligences that include spatial, musical, and artistic intelligences) and will be structured to highlight specific talents such as drawing or musical ability to enhance the confidence of those students whose forte lies in these areas rather than in the traditional classroom activities such as reading and writing. These activities will be mixed up and approached in a variety of ways, interspersed with the study of the novel as laid out in the curriculum plan. Students will be introduced to the concept that they can retrain their brains to comprehend old things in new ways. Through examples and experiments, students will discover the strategies that work best for them and those who have experienced failure or just mediocrity in their past writing will discover new competence and accomplishment as writers.

## **Research**

My goal is to examine why this is and to discover ways to connect the verbal ability to the written ability. When we write we are not *talking* but making marks on the page that reflect what we are thinking. There is no "verbal" process, no mechanical production of words utilizing the lips, tongue, teeth, palate, nasal cavities, breath, diaphragm, vocal cords, or glottis. The meaning flows directly from *Wernicke's area* onto the page.

The impetus to my study stems from the question of why students can tell a story so easily and yet have so much difficulty in writing down a story. One of the obvious reasons is that humans learn to speak gradually and spontaneously without laborious instruction. Reading and writing must be taught and practiced. A person can get through the day without writing anything but would find it much more difficult to get through the day without speaking.

Another reason for the reluctance or fear of writing vs. speaking is that writing is so permanent; once it's written down it becomes evidence for scrutiny, criticism, and review. In Neil Simon's *Biloxi Blues* Eugene has an eye-opening experience; when one of his bunkmates reads aloud his diary he realizes his speculations are being perceived as truths. In reflection, Eugene is awed to think that his wonderings are immediately accepted as truths simply because they were written down.

So if the human brain, which is in charge of everything, processes verbal language so easily, what's the problem with the writing? Part of the answer may be in which areas of the brain are used for each of these functions. The part of the brain called *Broca's area* is responsible for speech production while *Wernicke's area* processes incoming speech, allowing the listener to decode what others have said.

Students are probably unaware of all of this and burdening them with it will not serve any purpose in the classroom, but teachers can play to students' strengths and try to coax them into stimulating their weaker areas. Students who are not accustomed to writing are made to do more of it everyday, but the crucial point here is that must be meaningful writing, not just copying from the board or writing what the teacher says. Their processes must be primed and tapped regularly in a way that associates what they think with what they say and then to what they write.

To prepare to teach students with different talents and abilities through a variety of methods, the teacher must be acquainted with numerous learning styles, pedagogy addressing these styles, examples of different successful strategies for reaching students, and a wealth of stories, both fictional and real, from which to draw. No matter how well prepared the teacher is before tackling this venture, s/he must realize at the onset that students will probably come up with situations and problems s/he didn't encounter while setting up the unit. This is the exciting part: the teacher gets an opportunity to learn from the student.

First and foremost, the teacher must read. Everything. Constantly. A good place to start would be all the PTI units from Karen Goldman's *Introduction to Folktales* which contains fifteen units from PTI fellows covering a wide variety of fairy tales, folktales from around the world, and legends. A second suggestion is to read biographies, memoirs, and autobiographical fiction. Check the **Bibliography** in my 2007 unit from Elizabeth Claytor's *Through a Lens Darkly* seminar which contains a description of several of these.

One of the obstacles teachers encounter when trying to engage students is the lament, "Why do we have to know this?" I was guilty of this in high school and I am still puzzling over why I had to be tortured with algebra for so long in order to teach English. Of course, we all know the answer when it comes to English: literature teaches us about people, the world, and how to get along with others. The more one reads, the more one understands this interconnectedness with the rest of the human race. Teenagers, however, have a much smaller scope, and their ability to understand how the rest of the world relates to them is often quite limited.

Being a teenager is largely about how to make one's mark on the world. Ever notice how they like to write their names everywhere? *Look at me, I'm special. I'm going to leave my mark on the world.* It takes years to realize that everyone leaves a mark on the world; we just don't know each one's name. This stage of teenage development is necessary for asserting one's place in the world, building self-esteem, and generally centering oneself. Beyond our little ego-

driven worlds, though, is everything else. Literature is one way of learning to understand this.

Before really getting what it means to read and vicariously experience someone else's life, it's important to understand why people feel compelled to write. Before tackling literature, let's look at autobiographical works and their lessons. A big part of writing about oneself is the discovery of self; the mental stepping back and looking at who you are and what you are doing and what makes you *you*. Rereading what you write about yourself is a self-affirming activity. As young children, we self-affirm everyday activities to set them into stone in our memories. Agatha Christie wrote about watching her grandson learning to walk down stairs and listening to him repeat to himself that he was going downstairs, using his own name to say that Mathew was going downstairs. I remember being about eight years old and returning from a friend's house at dusk. I was standing at the bottom of the steps at our back door and my mother was unlocking the door when I thought to myself that this moment would never be again and that I would remember it forever.

People bookmark important and trivial events in their lives to serve as threads back to their younger selves. Once when I was angry with my parents for something I don't remember now I vowed that when I grew up I would never forget what it felt like to be a kid. Although I know it is impossible to do so I try as well as I can to remember that when dealing with my own children as well as with my students. Sometimes we try to hold on to something from the past in an effort to anchor ourselves and other times we push aside such memories until it's the right time to get them out. Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about farm life for local papers but didn't embark on her Little House books until she was in her sixties. It wasn't until her parents and older sister had passed away that she felt the need to record what they couldn't. Agatha Christie started jotting down whatever came to mind when she began her autobiography and it has become a perennial favorite of mine. Her storytelling is captivating in a way that she magnifies some of the smallest incidents in her life, but nevertheless, moments of some import. Maxine Hong Kingston defines *talk-story* at the beginning of her autobiographical *The Woman Warrior*, telling the reader that her mother always told a story that was meant to serve as a cautionary tale when she wanted her daughter to learn something. Ironically, the lesson she tried to teach her daughter

was lost on the girl who, instead, became more interested in the disgraced aunt and what had happened to her than in her mother's warning to protect her own virtue.

While our teenage students are just on the cusp of maturity, they may be able to identify a defining moment. What if it were vital or mandatory to do so? In Hirokazu Koreeda's film *After Life*, people have five days following their deaths to determine one moment to be recorded for them to take with them as the only memory into their afterlife. A fascinating idea and too monumental for our students to tackle, but perhaps a defining moment of their maturity; an epiphany that shaped the end of childhood or the emergence of a direction for their lives. In our previous curriculum students read a story by Eugenia Collier called "Marigolds." The study materials at the end of the unit asked students to write about a time or an activity that was fun for them when they were younger but that now seems silly. This activity is much less threatening than the defining moment of one's life. Several years ago one of my tenth graders told about running around the neighborhood with her friends when she was much younger, pointing a remote control through open windows, and changing their neighbors' television channels. Pinpointing a specific memory, particularly a funny one, can be a great way for a teacher get the process rolling.

What is left now is to puzzle out how to get the students from the verbal ease they already possess to a similar ease in recording their thoughts and feelings while preserving their individual voices. After reading various studies on the subject (see **Bibliography**) it seems that the most effective way to jumpstart this ability is to utilize parts of the brain that are not traditionally considered in the English classroom. Jill Bolte Taylor's *My Stroke of Insight* reveals information about how the human brain works in a new, hitherto unknown way; the author, a neuroanatomist, experienced a stroke and was able to analyze what was happening to her throughout the episode and the subsequent recovery. First experienced as a lecture (see **Bibliography** web sources) and later as a book that non-scientific minds can comprehend, Taylor's experience makes one reflect on the nature of how people think and how they can train themselves to think differently. Her detailed analysis of how she functioned (or didn't) gives the reader important clues about the intricacies of our brains' abilities. One thing that

particularly snagged my interest was her recollection of her inability at handwriting:

Although I failed miserably at reading and writing with a pen (left hemisphere/right hand) I could sit at my computer and type a simple letter (both hemispheres/both hands) that followed my stream of thought. It took me a very long time as I hunt-and-pecked at the keyboard but somehow my body/mind connection made it happen. The most interesting thing about this experience was that after I finished typing the letter I was not capable of reading what I had just written (left hemisphere)!<sup>1</sup>

Students often report that they can write better at the computer. Sometimes teachers think that the student who complains about this is just lazy, but Taylor's revelation suggests that those students who feel that way may have a valid issue. Another point Taylor makes is that some stroke victims have been unable to speak what they want to say but can *sing* it. Memory patterns and the access to parts of the brain are affected in ways that scientists are still working to understand. When it comes to storytelling, Taylor succinctly outlines the left brain's dominance:

This storyteller portion of our left mind's language center is specifically designed to make sense of the world outside of us, based upon minimal amounts of information.<sup>2</sup>

This side of the brain takes available details, weaves them unto a story, and makes up stuff to fill in gaps from missing data. How this is done and how students can achieve this are still to be explored. Teachers must freely experiment with different activities to enable students to discover their strengths. One way to help students to discover success is to tap into their most talented areas. Asking a

student to draw what s/he perceives when listening to a story or to mime the emotion in a particular passage, or even to come up with a song that feels like the scene that was read or heard can jog a reluctant student into participating in reading and writing. Playing to their own experiences is vital as well. As educators we must often ask students to relate what we are reading to what is happening today in their lives or in the world around us. When teaching *Julius Caesar* I liken the opening celebration of the feast of Lupercal to what downtown Pittsburgh looks like on the Saturday of the St. Patrick's Day parade. This gives students a visual reference to tie to their reading. Making students forge this link rather than just showing them a movie provides a crucial step in their ability to summon visuals when they are reading.

A brief search on the internet will turn up a wealth of games, puzzles, and quizzes that will reveal how students process information. While classroom teachers are not trained psychologists it will be evident in which areas students achieve easy or hard-fought successes and will give teachers insight as to how to encourage students' further success in learning.

Once students have experienced such success and their interests are sparked, the hope is that they will be willing to translate their abilities to writing about them. English teachers' biggest challenge is in getting the lagging students to buy into what we are selling. Reluctant writers often say that writing is stupid or boring; often this is a cover-up meaning that writing is too difficult and when the student does write it sounds stupid or boring to the teacher and it is embarrassing, so why bother?

Where does one go from here? Here are the possibilities: a teacher might simply follow the lessons below for Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*; teachers teaching different novels or grade levels could adapt the lessons to their own novels; or teachers who wish to get a comprehensive idea of what all this entails could read the books and articles in the bibliography and/or conduct further research of their own. All of these things could work but must be determined individually because *all of our brains function differently*. The point here is that there is no one-size-fits-all curriculum, method, or plan. There are

some methods or plans that fit a large percentage of the population (think of the basic bell curve), but it is important to try to lasso in those students at either end of the curve and provide different options for them.

## **Classroom Activities**

### **Day One**

Teacher introduction will include the history of storytelling, why people like to hear stories, and will then invite the students to share their memories of hearing and telling stories. Prior to beginning the novel, teachers will explain storytelling, the set-up of the novel, point of view (POV), and how this POV is used to create the stance from which the reader will experience the book. Grant Wiggins tells the story about Jefferson but is really telling his own story as well. Ask students to think of a story they would like to tell the class tomorrow. Distribute the assignment (see **Appendix B**) and discuss each item.

### **Day Two**

Students will volunteer (or be assigned) to tell stories using notes from their handouts. The rest of the class will listen to one story at a time, noting their reactions on the **Worksheet for Notes on Listening to Stories** (see **Appendix C**). Teachers should take notes for any absentees today. With permission, record the stories.

### **Day Three**

Students will write one of the stories that they heard the previous day. The handout from yesterday can be used to facilitate this. This will be followed by an oral reading of the story and class discussion of how their memories recorded

specific facts and compared with other students' versions

### **Day Four**

Introduce the concept of Cultural Literacy. *Dictionary.com* defines *cultural literacy* as “knowledge of history, contributions, and perspectives of different cultural groups, including one's own group, necessary for understanding of reading, writing, and other media.” For example, if someone asks “Is it raining hard?” and the answer is “I’m about to build an ark,” one knows that it is indeed raining hard because we all know the story of Noah’s ark. My classes have never failed this one. To illustrate this further, ask one or more students to tell the Nativity story. Explain the importance of being aware of cultural practices; here in Western society, many references in literature are made to national, Christian, and Jewish holidays. Citizens are expected to know a little bit about all of them. Ask a non-Jewish student to explain Hannukah, then ask a Jewish student to explain Christmas, for example. If applicable, also describe Ramadan. There is a growing awareness of this holiday in my school as many students fast from sunup to sundown for an entire month.

### **Day Five**

Explain how the Christmas pageant held great importance in the novel and reread that chapter. Discuss the point of view (POV) of the chapter. Then watch the scene from the film and do a comparison for both content and POV.

### **Day Six**

Discuss the value of telling and retelling. Refer to the Hannukah story and repetition and why the story is told and retold. Review the four reasons (entertainment, education, commemoration, and religion) for artistic expression (storytelling, writing, dancing, art, and musical performance) and decide where these fit.

### **Day Seven**

Examine Jefferson's diary through teacher read-aloud if possible, or have an actor do it. If done well, and students listen first then read it they will understand it better. Even with a class of scholars, the students had difficulty with the dialect. Phrasing and dialectic pronunciation define how POV is created through Jefferson's voice and syntax. Ask students how his journal is different from when he just speaks? Discuss whether they have different voices when they speak and write.

### **Day Eight**

Have students (including the storytellers themselves) write the story from DAY 2. Transcribe the storytellers' written versions and make copies for the class to look at when you play the recording tomorrow.

### **Day Nine**

Listen to recordings and compare/weigh the differences between speaking and writing. Use both the class example, and Gaines' choice of having his readers listen to Jefferson speak and then read his journal. Ask students to conclude whether or not writing is important, and whether may be more or less important than speaking.

### **Day Ten**

Students will write a Reflective Essay. Distribute the handout with the guidelines (see **Appendix D**). Students will write the first draft of their essays in class and will be allowed to finish them at home to turn in at a later date.

## **Annotated Bibliography/Books and Articles**

Armstrong, Thomas. *The Multiple Intelligences of Reading and Writing: Making the Words Come Alive*. Alexandria: ASCD, 2003.

This article explores various methods of making reading and writing more interesting to students through different approaches to teaching.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf,

1976. The ultimate text in examining the psychology of the fairy tale and its effect on child development.

Bloom, Floyd E, M.D., Beal, M. Flint, M.D., Kupfer, David J., M.D.. *The Dana Guide to Brain Health: A Practical Family Reference from Medical Experts*. New York: Dana Press, 2006.

This medical text explains in easy-to-understand language all the workings of the brain.

Gaines, Ernest J. *A Lesson Before Dying*. New York: Vintage, 1993.

This novel concerns a poor African-American quarter in post WWII Louisiana where a young black man is wrongly accused, jailed, convicted, sentenced, and ultimately hanged for the shooting and killing a white storekeeper. His former teacher, while wrestling with his own conscience, beliefs, and questions about the meaning of life, is coerced into trying to reach the condemned man and help him create his own meaning so that he can die a man.

Gardner, Howard,. *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. New York: Basic Books, 1993. Gardner offers a detailed explanation of the various intelligences that can be measured beyond the traditional reading and mathematical aptitudes.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior*. New York: Vintage, 1989.

Kingston's memoir of growing up Chinese American in Stockton, California provides Western readers with a glimpse of what it was like for a second generation Chinese daughter to grow up in 20<sup>th</sup> century America.

MacDonald, Marjorie Read. *The Storytellers Start-Up Book*. Little Rock: August House, 1993. This how-to book is a practical guide to the aspiring storyteller.

Pinker, Steven. *Words and Rules*. New York: Basic Books, 1990. Pinker neatly dissects words in the English language and volubly analyzes their individual phonemes in every possible way.

Restak, Richard, M.D., *The Naked Brain*. New York: Harmony, 2006.

Restak again delves into the study of the brain and its workings (see *Mozart's Brain and the Fighter Pilot*). This time he takes a more medical stance in his study.

Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*. New York: Twayne, 1995.

A more formal guide than MacDonald's book, Ritchie outlines the vital importance of keeping meticulous records when recording memoirs and interviews.

Simon, Neil. *Biloxi Blues*. New York: Samuel French, 1985.

This is the second play in Simon's trilogy about Eugene Jerome, a Jewish boy he first introduced in *Brighton Beach Memoirs* as a fifteen-year-old boy in 1937. In this play, Eugene is now in the military and is alarmed to discover that others take what he writes in his diary to be the gospel truth.

Taylor, Jill Bolte, Ph.D. New York: *My Stroke of Insight*, Viking, 2006.

Taylor's book expands her awe-inspiring TEDtalks lecture with diagrams, websites, and advice for dealing with stroke patients. She recounts in detail her own experiences in dealing with her stroke and her eight-year recovery.

White-Beck, Elouise E. *How to Fashion a Healthy Adult: Weaving Our Future Selves from the Threads of Fairy Tales*. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Teachers Institute, 2004

This unit on fairy tales includes an update of Snow White written for children and a simplified chart (reduction) of Bettelheim's 31-step process.

Willingham, Daniel T. "Why Don't Students Like School?" *American Educator*. Vol. 33, No. 1, Spring 2009

This article speculates on why students dislike school so much and offers suggestions for making it more palatable to them.

### **Filmography**

HBO Home Video. *A Lesson Before Dying*. DVD released 1 January 2000.

In this film, Don Cheadle portrays the conflicted teacher while the brilliant Cicely Tyson fulfills the supportive role of his aunt, Tante Lou. The look, feel, and sounds of the era are aptly recreated to allow students a clear picture of the time and place. The Christmas pageant is nicely realized.

### **Web Sources**

The British Library Board. 2 May 2009. "Language and the written word."

<<http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/changlang/writtenword/writtenwordtimeline.html>>. Examples of earlier forms of English writing and spelling are shown as well as the history of the English language and how it has changed and evolved.

Dictionary.com. The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. 24 February 2009.

<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/storytelling>>.

This handy way to look up words online has become indispensable.

EBSCO Publishing. “The difference between the spoken vs. the written word.” “Language.” “Stimulating the brain.” “Speech Insights Sound Off in the Brain.”

“Speaking and listening.” 24 February 2009. <<http://web.ebscohost.com>>.

This series of articles provides valuable information on the workings of the brain.

EnglishClub.com “Six Pedagogical Reasons for Writing.” 19 March 2009.

<<http://www.englishclub.com/esl-articles/200108.htm>>. Chart with explanations of the six reasons. Discussion of speaking happening spontaneously but needing to be taught written communication by Josef Essberger.

ERIC: Educational Resources Information Center. 10 March 2009.

<[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfp](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfp)>.

This site provides a wealth of information on many subjects. Numerous articles pop up for any keyword search.

Guardian.co.uk. “Too much TV Hinders Learning.” 19 March 2009.

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2003/mar/11/schools.uk7>>.

This short article cites evidence showing how preschoolers' readiness correlates to their television habits.

Hank Stuever's Little House Page. <[www.hankstuever.com/littlehouse.html](http://www.hankstuever.com/littlehouse.html)>. 4 April 2009.

This site is maintained by a "Little House" re-enactor and tells of his experiences.

History's Women: The Unsung Heroines. 4 April 2009.  
<[www.historyswomen.com/thearts/lauraingallswilder.html](http://www.historyswomen.com/thearts/lauraingallswilder.html) >.

This site is devoted to women in American history, their lives, works, and legacies. There is a page on Laura Ingalls Wilder.

The Internet Classics Archive. Aristotle. *Poetics* 2 May 2009  
<<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html>>.

This is the definitive work on which the study of drama has been based. Written in a scholarly manner, this philosophical treatise analyzes every element of drama and the study and production of theater and life.

Midwest Weekends: A Traveler's Guide to the Upper Midwest.

<[www.midwestweekends.com/plan\\_a\\_trip/history\\_heritage/ingalls\\_wilder/](http://www.midwestweekends.com/plan_a_trip/history_heritage/ingalls_wilder/)> 4 April 2009.

This site is devoted to Laura Ingalls Wilder and her family and provides tourist information as well as information on her life.

Oral History in the mid-Atlantic Region. "Oral History Bibliography."

<<http://www.ohmar.org/biblio.html>>. 3 March 2009.

This site provides much information on oral history, particularly this page which is a basic bibliography of oral history books.

Oracle Thinkquest. <<http://library.thinkquest.org>>. 5 May 2009. Definitions of Broca's and Wernicke's areas of the brain, their functions, and the aphasias which afflict them are all explored on this site.

Scholastic. "Inner Space: The Brain." 4 April 2009  
<<http://content.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4817>>.

Kid-friendly article by George Liles explaining the areas of the brain and their functions.

The School of Storytelling. <<http://www.schoolofstorytelling.com>>. 5 May 2009.

This webpage advertises a storytelling school at Emerson College in England. Its mission is to use storytelling to promote healing.

Science Daily. <[www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/08/080827002719.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/08/080827002719.htm)>. 4 April 2009. "How The Brain Compensates For Vision Loss Shows Much More Versatility Than Previously Recognized." This article discusses how the brain will reroute and retrain other areas to take over jobs as needed.

TED: Ideas Worth Spreading. "Jill Bolte Taylor's Stroke of Insight." 30 March 2008 <<http://www.ted.com>>.

Taylor's lecture on her stroke is riveting and has been voted an all-time favorite on the TED site.

University of Richmond. "Speaking vs. Writing." 19 March 2009..  
<<http://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~terry/Middlebury/speak.htm>>.

A chart showing psychological, linguistic, and cognitive factors of speech is clearly displayed and explained.

University of Richmond. "Why do we write?" 19 March 2009.  
<<http://facultystaff.richmond.edu/~terry/Middlebury/speak.htm>>.

This site provides a chart listing purposes of writing.

Intelegen. "Right brain left brain characteristics." <[http://www.web-us.com/brain/right\\_left\\_brain\\_characteristics.htm](http://www.web-us.com/brain/right_left_brain_characteristics.htm)>. 10 March 2009.

Among many articles available on the Intelegen site, this page offers a 2-column chart with bulleted lists of left brain and right brain characteristics.

Yahoo ! Education. *The Woman Warrior*. 19 March 2009.

<[http://www.education.yahoo.com/homework\\_help/cliffsnotes/the\\_woman\\_warrior/](http://www.education.yahoo.com/homework_help/cliffsnotes/the_woman_warrior/)>. This site provides notes and criticism on many authors' works, in this case, a lengthy article on Maxine Hong Kingston and talk-story in the novel.

Your Amazing Brain.

<http://www.youramazingbrain.org.uk/teachers/brainbenders.htm>>. 7 April 2009.

This site offers memory games and explanations of how the brain works.

## Appendices/Standards

### Appendix A

#### Well-Made Play Chart (Aristotle)

The structure of the story begins with the *Exposition*, where the reader reads or views who the characters are, when and where they are, and their situation. Sometimes students will want to fill in the why and how because they learned who-where-when-why-how in an earlier class; this is a good time to point out that the why and how come later. The second step of the chart is called *Rising Action/Complications* and all of the problems and obstacles are presented in this section. Next is the *Climax*, or the point at which the reader can tell where the chips will fall. This is caused by a *Crisis Decision* made by a major character which determines the *Climax*. *The Falling Action* describes the result of the *Climax*, and the *Resolution/Conclusion* (also called the *Denouement*) tells the reader how the characters' lives have changed for the future. A better representation of this may be found online or in various books.

		<p style="text-align: right;">-- CLI</p> <p><b>MAX</b></p> <p><b>Crisis      The big</b></p> <p><b>moment</b></p> <p><b>Decision</b></p>	<p>--</p> <p>--</p> <p>--</p>	
	<p>--</p> <p>--</p> <p>--</p>	<p><b>Major character</b></p> <p><b>makes a decision</b></p> <p><b>that determines the</b></p> <p><b>CLIMAX</b></p>	<p><b>FALLI</b></p> <p><b>NG</b></p> <p>--</p> <p><b>ACTIO</b></p> <p><b>N</b></p> <p><b>Results</b></p> <p><b>of the</b></p>	<p>--</p> <p>--</p> <p>--</p>

	--		<b>CLIMAX</b>	-
--  --  --	<b>RISING ACTION/ COMPLICATIONS</b>  Current and possible future problems			<b>CONCLUSION/ -- RESOLUTION</b>  The new status--how it all ends up
--  --				
<b>EXPOSITION</b>  Who, where, when, what				

## Appendix B

### Assignment Sheet for Storytelling

*DIRECTIONS: Decide on a story you will tell to the class tomorrow and fill in the items below to help you organize your thoughts. Be sure to tell the story out loud to someone or even just by yourself so that you can time it. Your story should be between 2 minutes and 8 minutes long. Your story can be funny, happy, or sad.*

Title \_\_\_\_\_

True Story or Made Up? \_\_\_\_\_ (Or you can choose not to tell the audience whether or not it's true).

Point of the Story--Make sure you know what your point is even if you don't state it and

expect your audience to just "get it."

\_\_\_\_\_

Background of the Story--Tell your audience what they need to know in relation to where

the story takes place, what the people in it are like, and what the situation is at the

beginning of the story.

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Is there a punch line to your story? If so, make sure you set it up and build up to it for

maximum effect.

---

## **Appendix C**

### **Worksheet for Notes on Listening to Stories**

Your name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_  
Period \_\_\_\_

Storyteller's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Title of story or subject \_\_\_\_\_

Keywords or phrases \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

Themes or goals

---

---

---

Storyteller's craft:

	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT	FAIR	GOOD
EXCELLENT			
Volume	_____	_____	_____
Eye contact	_____	_____	_____
Logical sequencing of events	_____	_____	_____
Audience engagement	_____	_____	_____

OPTIONAL COMMENTS

---

---

---

---

## Appendix D

### **Reflective Essay on Storytelling concerning Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying***

*DIRECTIONS: You will write a Reflective Essay on what you heard, reported on, spoke, and read throughout this unit on A Lesson Before Dying. Using all of your notes on other students' stories and on the book, write a five-paragraph essay describing your learning experience. In addition to a clear introduction and conclusion, be sure to use examples to discuss how you listened to others' stories, how you told yours, and what you learned about storytelling from the novel.*

### **Standards**

Pennsylvania Content Standards for Communications: Reading, Writing, Listening, And Speaking

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.

3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including narrate, inform, and persuade, in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify the purpose, structure and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.
9. All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.

### **End notes**

<sup>1</sup>Taylor, p. 106

<sup>2</sup>Taylor, p. 143