

RUNNING HEAD: Athabaskan Literature

Traditional Oral Storytelling in the Classroom

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Abstract

Although traditional Indigenous stories are widely recognized for their artistic merits and their role in the linguistic and culturally continuity of Indigenous peoples, they are seldom used in schools. This project promoted the instructional use of Athabaskan oral stories in a story telling curriculum along with the creation of transitional readers (picture books) for younger children in a small rural school in Alaska.

This project was an exploration of the concept that culturally responsive instruction could bring students in a small rural school in Alaska to higher levels of literacy by promoting engagement in oral stories told by Elders in the community, that reflected the values, knowledge and some of the traditions of the community. Inviting Elders into the classroom to share their oral stories created an opportunity for Junior high students to listen to oral stories that later in the project were transformed into transitional readers (picture books) for younger readers in the school.

Introduction and Rationale

Athabaskans have had a strong traditional way of educating their children about the lessons of life. In order for students to experience these events and also to make links between stories of the world, they had to listen to these stories and interpret their own truths and arrive at their own conclusions. Usually a number of truths (possibilities) would be presented to indicate that one way was not the only way. Wells (1986) sees it this way:

Constructing stories in the mind –or- storying as it has been called—is one of the most fundamental means of making meaning, as such, it is an activity that pervades all aspects of learning. When storying becomes overt and is given expression in word, the resulting stories are one of the most effective ways of making one’s own interpretation of events and ideas available to others (p.194).

Remember when you were a child? How did you spend most of your free time? Perhaps you played outdoors. You rode your bicycle; climbed trees, built forts, played catch, drew and followed maps, and made up lots of new outdoor games. Indoors, you played card games, listened to stories told by your grandparents or parents, played jacks, and built things with tinker toys. You didn’t know it then, but all those activities gave you the skills you needed to be able to read.

Today, many children spend lots of time indoors—watching T.V., spending countless hours on the computer, and playing video games. According to a survey by Child Wise (Clark, 2009), children as young as five are turning their bedrooms into multi-media “hubs” with TVs, computers, games consoles, MP3 players and mobile phones. These youngsters are shunning books and outdoor games to spend up to six hours a day in front of a screen. This report

concluded that many youngsters were “leaving traditional books behind” (§12). Rosemary Duff, research director of Child Wise, said, “They are a generation abandoning print and paper.” (§15)

Parents are a child’s first and most significant teachers (Smith, 1988); their attitude toward reading is a crucial influence on the future literacy development of their children. When given the opportunity to choose their own pathways to literacy, young children are motivated by personal interest. My personal journey with traditional oral storytelling began as a very young child, growing up in the small Athabaskan village of Nulato, located in the interior of Alaska. Storytelling was an honored practice in my culture. As we huddled around our parents and grandparents, listening to stories, our view of the world was expanded and a sense of belonging was fostered. Some stories I heard were told for pure entertainment; others were used to teach lessons and transmit our cultural values and beliefs. It was through these stories that I understood my place in the universe and how the world was made. However, oral storytelling is not only a social experience, it also acts as an effective building block easing the journey from oral language to literacy (Phillips, 1999).

Even in today’s technological world, we have not changed to such a degree that the archetypes presented in traditional oral literature are no longer applicable (Livo and Rietz, 1986). A creative alternative to print-based literacy development is oral storytelling that is shared between parents and young children. Storytelling is clearly a social experience, incorporating linguistic features that display a “sophistication that goes beyond level of conversation” (Mallan, 1991, p. 4). Children who are privileged to hear these traditional oral stories, internalize each story’s structure. According to Barclay, Benelli, & Curtis (1995),

Listening to stories builds vocabulary; enhances memory, imagination, and listening skills; helps children to think in more complex, abstract, and creative ways; broadens children’s

range of experience; and helps children develop phonemic awareness through rhythm and rhyme. Sharing stories with very young children...lays the foundation for a lifelong love of reading. This love of traditional oral storytelling led me into a world of books and a rich indigenous history (p. 13).

As an Athabaskan educator, I have heard so many times how the students in this particular school are disrespectful, have no listening skills, no imagination, poor comprehension, no critical thinking skills, and are reading two to three years below grade level. I have felt comfortable with my ability to help students succeed. Through careful presentation of my subjects and use of scaffolding strategies, I have observed my students experience academic success within the classroom. During my earliest teaching years in this particular school, Elders played a large part in the curriculum. It was through their words of wisdom that I watched my students' literacy skills blossom. Throughout my teaching career, I've watched most of my previous students receive their high school diploma.

Teaching children to read and providing them with something worthwhile to read is critical work. As Paterson (2009) states, "Too many people in this world spend their lives doing work that doesn't really matter in the great scheme of things, but bringing children and books together does matter. And we get to do it (p. 1).

Years ago, a colleague and I were sitting and conversing about the importance of building a solid foundation for literacy learning. She posed this question: *Wouldn't it be nice if someone would create picture books for our students, using the stories our Elders are sharing with us?* With this question in mind, I carefully assessed our students' reading abilities and noticed gaps in their reading development. This gave me the boost that I needed to conduct a project to bring traditional oral stories back into the classroom by creating picture books to help our transitional

readers. In her book *On Solid Ground*, Sharon Taberski (2000) defines transitional readers as children who:

- can recognize many words, even those considered “difficult” or content related;
- integrate meaning, syntax, and phonics fairly consistently;
- have a variety of ways to figure out unfamiliar words;
- can generally read independent-level text with fluency, expression, and proper phrasing;
- are beginning to handle longer, more complex text with short chapters and more interesting characters;
- can summarize texts they’ve read
- are growing more aware of story and text structures. (p. 5-6)

In this creation of transitional readers for younger students, and also for students who are having problems reading, I promoted my passion by demonstrating to the teachers in this small rural school in Alaska, how culturally relevant materials could enhance their students’ literacy experiences in their classrooms and provide an important home-school link. A valuable part of this is introducing literature that students can relate to and that helps them to make connections to the environment in which they live, and that can also help connect the culture of the school to that of the child’s home. I wanted my students to become storytellers by retelling the stories they heard to their peers or families. I also wanted them to take ownership of the stories as they created transitional readers for the younger students in this school who were just developing their reading skills.

The act of guiding an individual’s learning is a term that Vgotsky (1978) coined as scaffolding. Scaffolding instruction, as a teaching strategy, originates from Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and his concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Lev Vygotsky

was a Soviet psychologist whose works were suppressed after his death in the 1930s and were not discovered by the West until the late 1950s (“Lev Vygotsky’s archive,” n.d.). His sociocultural theory proposes that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. (“Social Development Theory,” n.d.). Vygotsky “...theorized that learning occurs through participation in social or culturally embedded experiences.” (Raymond, 2000, p. 176).

In Vygotsky’s (1978) view, the learner does not learn in isolation. Instead, learning is strongly influenced by social interactions, which take place in meaningful contexts. Children’s social interactions with “more knowledgeable peers or capable others” and their environment significantly impacts their ways of thinking and interpreting situations (p. 86). The communication that occurs in this setting with more knowledgeable or capable others (parents, teachers, peers, others) helps the child construct an understanding of the concept (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000).

According to Abt-Perkins and Rosen (2000), “Research on culturally relevant, place-based instruction clearly show that knowledge of students’ families, communities, and socioethnic cultures –their language and literacy practices and values –can help teachers address the interests and build on the skills of students” (p. 254).

Traditional oral storytelling need not be supplemental in an already crowded curriculum; rather, it can be used as part of the core curriculum and help students meet many of the standards for English Language Arts, which are included below (National Council of Teachers of English & the International Reading Association, 1996):

Standard 1: build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of cultures,

Standard 3: apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.

Standard 4: adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences.

Standard 5: employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different elements of the writing process to communicate for a variety of purposes (p. 11).

Oral story telling is also a vehicle for passing on factual information. Historical figures and events can come alive in an oral narrative. Facts about how plants and animals develop, how numbers work, and many other topics can be presented, understood and remembered in story form. Children of all ages and grades, who may not be fluent in reading or writing can often tell stories successfully. They can develop further understandings and insights into stories through retellings and discussion with their teachers and peers. Visualization while listening to or telling a story also contributes to children's overall literacy. Hibbling and Rankin-Erickson (2003) note that:

Visualizing strengthens our inferential thinking. When we visualize, we are in fact inferring, but with mental images rather than words and thoughts. When children are taught to generate mental images as they read or listen to a story, they experience greater recall and enhanced abilities to draw inferences and make predictions. Furthermore, prompting students to use imagery and verbal elaboration has a powerful effect on learning and remembering (p. 758).

Vygotsky's (1978) theory provides further justification for the approach taken in the analyses of stories that can help guide the development of Indigenous stories. These are tools which then can help Athabaskan students become the agents of their own culture and be better able to interpret and transmit cultural values to the next generation. The goal here is to enable my students to promote and exchange cultural traditions through storytelling, encouraging both

explorations of their own cultural identities formed by urbanization and cross-cultural influences, as well as traditional practices. Promoting storytelling can also provide the motivation for students' learning and communicating through new ways.

In the professional development piece of this project, my intention was to introduce to the teachers at Andrew K. Demoski, a school in rural Alaska, the nature of traditional oral storytelling and how it can easily be implemented in the classroom. When teachers come from the same culture as their students, they can be aware of their students' learning styles. Using traditional oral structures simply offers a framework that can be understood by both the native and non-native teachers. Using traditional oral storytelling can help non-native rural teachers become involved in community education and cultural programs which could influence their decisions to remain instead of leaving after just a year or two. An orientation to the culture and traditions of a community and school, such as storytelling, can help new rural teachers overcome feelings of isolation, acquire a sense of community security, develop professional and cultural competence, and benefits both the students and the non-Native teacher.

An issue that needs to be addressed, however, is that although the importance of storytelling as a learning tool is unquestioned, the fact remains that most schools in YKSD district pay attention only to Western forms of storytelling and ignore Alaska Native oral traditions of storytelling. This issue led me to the idea of creating transitional readers (picture books) for younger students in my school. I began this project by considering the importance of bringing traditional oral stories back into the classrooms which could provide culturally relevant materials for developing students' reading comprehension, critical thinking skills, and writing. Then I worked to plan a curriculum that could be presented in a professional development workshop and used by both Native and non-Native teachers in my village. My colleague's question

guided me to envision the importance of traditional oral storytelling and how it can be an enhancement to the curriculum presented in today's classroom.

Theory and Literature Related to Traditional Oral Storytelling

The truth is that each of us is a storyteller already. . . . Most of us have felt that no one would listen because what we've lived, or what we know, is neither interesting nor important. But just the opposite is true (Farrell, 1991, p. 17).

Everyday communication involves telling, listening, and responding to stories.

Storytelling has evolved throughout history. The first stories were told through pictures on walls. Then, stories were passed down orally from generation to generation. Maguire (1985) describes how Native American storytellers retold ancient legends about creation, supernatural forces, and forms of life.

Nessel (1985) states there is nothing quite like hearing a captivating story, told simply and effectively, without a book in evidence. Stories capture the imagination, engaging the emotions and opening the minds of learners. Consequently, any point that is made in a story or any teaching that is done afterwards is likely to be much more effective. Smith (1988) notes that the human brain is essentially a narrative device. The knowledge stored in the brain is largely in the form of stories. Stories are far more easily remembered and recalled than a sequence of unrelated facts. The U. S. Department of Education (1986) noted that students with low motivation and weak academic skills are more likely to listen, read, write and put forth greater effort academically in the context of storytelling.

This literature review seeks to support my inquiry into how bringing Athabaskan stories into the classroom can enhance literacy skills and provide an important home-school link. The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section explains my belief in the

constructivist theory, using the research of Lev Vygotsky (1978). The second section supports the use of traditional oral stories in the classroom and explores the benefits of storytelling for teachers and students and the creation of transitional readers (picture books), based on the stories. The third and final section outlines reasons why utilizing professional development workshops with teachers is an effective means of introducing new teaching techniques and also provides the necessary steps in planning a professional development workshop.

Lev Vygotsky

The traditional storytelling approach has allegiances with Vygotskyian perspectives because I view learning as a social and collaborative process that values students' prior knowledge and experience. Vygotsky (1978) offered an important pathway to successfully engaging students in literacy. He believed that knowledge is open to many interpretations. He also proposed that self discovery is an integral part of learning and that students must make decisions based on personal values and a sense of individual identity. Vygotsky's learning theory focuses on how culture, that is, the values, beliefs, customs, and skills of a social group, is transmitted to the next generation (Berk, 1999).

Literacy learning happens in formal and informal settings, through collaboration and interaction with others like in the Athabaskan culture through the use of traditional oral storytelling. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) distinguish between the "inside-out" and "outside-in" skills of literacy. In the western academic classroom setting, inside-out skills facilitate children's ability to decode information within a sentence. In contrast, Athabaskans' use outside-in skills that are concerned with children's ability to use context clues to determine meaning as they listen to the traditional oral stories causing them to bring in their knowledge about the world

and apply that to the story. Athabaskan children need both inside-out and outside-in skills for successful literacy learning.

Successful storytelling not only requires children to use decontextualized language, the language that is not bound to the concrete here and now (Snow, 1983), but it also requires them to “recontextualize” (Cameron & Wang, 1999). In Cameron and Wang’s terms, children must be able to hold the audience’s perspective in mind in order to reconstruct the context of a story in a way that is understandable for the audience. This ability to adopt an audience’s perspective in recounting an event is crucial to literacy (Snow, 1983; Cameron & Wang, 1999). Storytelling then, offers a perfect place for children to practice such outside-in skills of literacy. Children learn these skills through interaction with adults and peers. It is through dialogue with others in peer collaboration that children come to realize the unique functional potential of the various symbol systems in their society, including reading and writing (Vygotsky, 1978). In Vygotsky’s terms, children learn through their participation in activities that are slightly beyond their competence, with the assistance of adults or more skilled children. Thus, by interacting with an Elder or peer who tells stories in a developmentally more advanced form than the child’s he/she may enter his/her zone of proximal development. The Vygotskian approach to storytelling would encourage teachers, in their capacity to engage children, to offer questions and comments, and act as a source of support and collaboration.

Defining Storytelling

We are lonesome animals. We spend all of our lives trying to be less lonesome.

One of our ancient methods is to tell a story begging the listener to say---and to

feel—“Yes that is the way it is, or at least that is the way I feel it. You’re not as alone as you thought. John Steinbeck (Simmons, 2001, p. 181)

Storytelling is defined in many ways. Gere (2002) defines storytelling as “the act of using language and gesture in colorful ways to create scenes in a sequence” (p. 2). Yet another definition states, “Storytelling is a compelling method of sharing experiences in order to make sense of our world right here and now. Stories build kinship, allow a glimpse into other people’s lives and perhaps let us see ourselves in a story” (Kozlovich, 2002, p. 9). According to McDrury and Alterio (2003),

Storytelling is uniquely a human experience that enables us to convey, through the language of words, aspects of ourselves and others, and the worlds, real or imagined, that we inhabit. Stories enable us to come to know these worlds and our place in them given that we are all, to some degree, constituted by stories: Stories about our families, friends, colleagues and our communities, ourselves our cultures, and our place in history. (p. 31)

Athabaskan children begin hearing and telling stories before they enter school or learn to read and write. Children learn about narrative through the oral stories they hear in the world around them. When they witness one parent telling another, “You’ll never believe what happened to me on the way to the store,” they begin to learn the magic, fun, and purpose of stories (Burns et al., 1999, p. 37). Athabaskan stories are shared by prestigious Elders who have had the experiences first hand and are willing to share their events, feelings, and lessons learned.

When junior high students explore Athabaskan oral narratives it gives them the opportunity to not only open up to their own stories but the history, politics, or Native beliefs that they’ve soaked up over the years. Their inside-out literacy skills can be challenged with a

newspaper, article or a book but the effect often resides more deeply within them when it comes from a personal connection through the opening up of Athabaskan oral stories. This personal effect allows the junior high students to create their own transitional readers.

Many cultures throughout history told stories in a variety of ways, but they all used stories as a form of communicating meaning and were a means for teaching and learning (Meyer & Bogdan, 2001). Life lessons about courage, family values, and survival skills are taught in Athabaskan oral stories. The stories may change from one storyteller to the next, but the meaning stays intact.

Oral language experience such as storytelling is a valuable key in addressing students' academic needs (Snowden, 1995). This is evident using the transitional readers throughout the K-12 classrooms. The integration of classroom storytelling has been linked to reading improvement by increasing children's comprehension and vocabulary development (Trostle & Hicks, 1998). Athabaskan students are required to listen attentively during an oral storytelling session. After they have heard the story, then their comprehension is evident as they create their own picture books. Also, by orally retelling their story, they continue to develop their vocabulary.

While storytelling can potentially be very valuable in fostering Athabaskan children's learning, Athabaskan oral storytelling is used sparingly by many teachers. Prospective teachers, while they indicate that they have been exposed to storytelling in and out of school, express apprehension and reluctance to use storytelling themselves (Mottley & Telfer, 1997). With the development of this curriculum for this small rural school, I'm hoping that veteran and non-veteran teachers will utilize it and began to incorporate traditional Athabaskan oral storytelling in to their classrooms. Storytelling is a creative art form that has entertained and informed across

centuries and cultures (Fisher, 1985), and its instructional potential continues to serve teachers.

Benefits of Using Traditional Oral Stories in the Classroom

The answer is always in the entire story, not a piece of it.

Jim Harrison (Simmons, 2001, p. 83)

The U. S. Department of Education (1986) recognizes storytelling as a valuable teaching and learning tool, “Storytelling can ignite the imagination of children, giving them a taste for where books can take them. The excitement of storytelling can make reading and learning fun and can instill a sense of wonder about life and learning” (Bendt & Bowe, 2000, p. 1).

Storytelling is a process where students personalize what they learn and construct their own meaning and knowledge from the stories they hear and tell. Schank (1990) states,

We do not easily remember what other people have said if they do not tell it in the form of a story. We can learn from the stories of others, but only if what we hear relates strongly to something we already know. We can learn from these stories to the extent that they have caused us to rethink our own stories. (p. 83)

Storytelling is not only used for communication purposes, but storytelling has been used to teach literacy skills, cooperative learning skills, critical thinking, and to build knowledge of different contexts (Mello, 2001). In the Athabaskan culture, traditional oral stories were used by storytellers to teach the community the importance of how to work together, develop critical thinking skills for survival purposes, and indirectly be taught a moral lesson.

In support of Nessel’s (1985) findings, during Athabaskan oral storytelling, students are more attentive and relaxed, yet highly focused by eye contact that is constant when there is no

text to read. Athabaskan oral storytellers focus on keeping their listeners actively involved through the tone of voice. The oral storyteller and students together bring the story to life. Students' imaginations are stimulated through the storytellers gesturing and facial expressions since no illustrations are incorporated. By creating a good listening environment, commanding attention, and stimulating the imagination, storytelling gives the students many opportunities to develop their listening comprehension skills that are the foundation to recall the traditional oral stories that will help in the creation of their own picture books.

Hamilton and Weiss (1990) note that when students have the opportunity to retell stories they have heard, and eventually search for their own stories to tell, they begin to develop a better understanding of themselves and their world. They also internalize a sense of story form causing their comprehension to improve substantially. Sebesta (2000) states "...storytelling, by lifting the (retelling) experience to the level of transaction, gives comprehension a motive and significance" (p. 248).

Athabaskan Storytelling

The Athabaskan culture shares a rich oral tradition of how stories were used as basic ways of sharing knowledge, making sense of their life experiences, and of seeing the connection of oneself in relation to others.

As the Junior high students listen to and read Athabaskan oral stories, they see multifaceted aspects of literacy applied and they are able to use the oral story elements in a meaningful context in a way that is familiar to them. When students create their own stories, they demonstrate what they know about these story elements and apply what they have learned using the writing process. It provides the teacher with a means to document and evaluate students'

understanding of the story elements and their knowledge about stories (Tompkins, 2002).

Athabaskan oral storytelling is a unique method of communication through which students learn to express their thoughts and ideas in their own unique ways.

According to Mello (2001), storytelling is an effective educational classroom tool, through which an art of colorful language and gesture is used to create a sequenced series of scenes. An Athabaskan oral storyteller's cultural background demonstrates the unique personal attitudes and experiences that shine through in words and gestures.

Bloome, Katz and Champion (2003) discuss narrative development as the ability to become increasingly able and sophisticated in creating and communicating a "good story" (p. 2006). In the Athabaskan culture, before media, traditional oral stories were the modes for academic success because the narratives were developed throughout a week, teaching narrative development. As the media has become a part of the Athabaskan culture, these traditional oral stories continue to be a literacy tool. Egan (1997) asserts that stories, both in format and presentation, are essential pedagogical tools for teaching and learning in all cultures.

Isbell, Sobol, Lindaur & Lowrance (2004) note that storytelling and story reading are similar in content, but they diverge in crucial ways in their processes. They state that when a story is read, the primary referent of the communication event is the text. In an Athabaskan storytelling event, the words are not memorized, but are recreated through spontaneous, energetic performance, assisted by audience participation and interaction.

Father Jules Jette (as cited in Renner, 1975), a Catholic missionary, who spent most of his life from 1898 till he died in 1927 among the Koyukon people of Alaska, made this observation about storytelling among the "Ten'a," as he called the Indians of the area.

Story-telling among the Ten'a is quite an enviable accomplishment, and those who can do it well are highly valued for it. At night, when all are in bed, the lights put out, heavy curtains fastened on the outside of the windows, everything perfectly dark, someone suggests, *rorloih*-let us have a story. And then someone who does not feel too sleepy starts with one of those fantastical tales such as were told to us when we were very young children. After the first short sentence, he is interrupted by an *anni*, an expression of laudative approbation. He proceeds slowly, in a sort of half-loud, half-suppressed tone, with long pauses, receiving occasionally an *anni* of approbation. When he comes to the very interesting points, the exclamations and expressions of wonder come from all quarters, so as to interrupt the narrative for one or two minutes. Conjectures are ventured about what is going to happen, explanations are suggested of the wonderful feats related, the liveliest interest being exhibited by all present. Then all hold their peace and the speaker proceeds in the same mysterious way. Towards the end it commonly happens that some fall asleep, especially if the story is long and the speaker is slow. But in this case the speaker was so interesting that sleep was out of the question. (p. 298)

Currently, American education is very textbook dominated. It has been argued that education for all students should be less textbook dominated. Veteran and non-veteran teachers need to learn about Native literature suitable for classroom use (both oral and written) and how to integrate Native history into literacy curriculum in an attempt to be less textbook oriented. For this reason, I decided to create an Athabaskan oral storytelling curriculum.

Environment and Story Context

Athabaskan traditional oral stories were told predominantly towards the evening, after a very productive day. The Athabaskan oral storytellers included extended family, neighbors, friends, and visitors. Children were encouraged to be attentive because while many stories were told for enjoyment, others were told with lessons to learn.

Western formal education has taken the place of traditional oral storytelling. Unless some corrective initiatives are implemented, it is likely that Athabaskan traditional oral storytelling will continue to take a backseat to television, video games and other digital media in the agenda of family life and in classrooms the foreseeable future.

Connecting Home and School Culture

Shirley Brice Heath (1998) showed that home and school culture are the two most important influences in the young child's life, and that, where there are discontinuities, difficulties result for children. When the home and school cultures share values, even though they operate in different ways, learning can be more natural and positive for children. As Armstrong (2003) said, "If you have no shared canon of stories (with the children), then your separate expectations of stories will be different, and you lack the cultural context which supports the stories and vice versa". Teachers need to value stories from all kinds of home cultures, and to help children to understand that school and home are not separate worlds. However, for storytelling to be adopted as an educational strategy which is central to the curriculum, more guidance for teachers, and ways to help them guide children in this practice are both necessary.

Using Picture Books to Promote Traditional Oral Stories

The major goal of this project was to have junior high students listen to Athabaskan traditional oral stories shared by our Elders, and then create transitional readers for younger students. The creation of these picture books offered readers a part of their cultural heritage. My main objective with my students was to convey to them that traditional oral stories contain knowledge and ideas that can be included in a picture book that all readers could enjoy and learn from.

Picture books are a source of educational pleasure and satisfaction for all ages. The Athabaskan Elders enjoy seeing their oral stories developed into literacy text. The educational values of Athabaskan oral story picture books go beyond their content. Hearing and reading picture books, thinking about and working with them, can help younger Athabaskan children become better readers and writers. Athabaskan picture books have provided strong support for older readers as they continue in their literacy development. Athabaskan picture books offer opportunities to explore and learn the conventions by which illustrations communicate meaning. Another value of these student-created Athabaskan picture books allows the opportunity for both younger and older students to examine form and structure.

These Athabaskan oral storytelling student-created picture books entertain, teach about the world they represent and bring personal satisfaction to the reader. They also teach about form, about literature and language, and the ways Athabaskan oral stories can be told.

Vygotskian theory supports the notion that through interaction with text (written by other authors or themselves), "children transfer the understandings and skills they have gleaned from dialogues with others to their own literacy-related discourse ... they converse not just with

themselves but also with the text narrative" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 115). Students take what they've heard from the oral stories and transcribe into transitional readers using the writing process that they've learned. Creating opportunities for junior high students to explore literature, individually and in small groups, helps this discourse to flourish.

Junior high students can expand their minds as well as their ideas of moral conduct in this world as they orally listen to Athabaskan stories. I believe that Athabaskan oral storytelling holds an amazing key to unlocking one's mind and children should not be denied that treasure as they create their own picture books with the traditional oral stories that they heard. Athabaskan traditional oral storytelling is the basis for creativity; it is the pre-reader for students, before they are able to read short stories, and novels on their own. Thus, the goal of this project (meshing of picture books/oral stories) has been to integrate Athabaskan traditional oral storytelling into the reading/language arts curriculum, to find ways to make this infrequent enrichment activity a regular part of the schedule and so take full advantage of Athabaskan traditional oral storytelling benefits.

Professional Development Framework for Using Traditional Oral Stories

Oral storytelling has long been a part of the Athabaskan culture, and teachers should recognize its value as a pedagogical tool. Athabaskan students have a diverse set of learning styles, thus creating a need for culturally relevant professional development workshops for teachers. These workshops have been the driving force behind this curriculum. Culturally relevant pedagogy has been described by a number of researchers as an effective means of meeting the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Shade, Kelly, & Oberg, 1997). Gay (2000) asserts that culturally relevant

pedagogy uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for students” (p. 29).

According to Little (1997), staff development in the most successful schools is no longer the domain of a district-level curriculum supervisor. Instead, it is organized to give teachers both the authority and resources necessary to take charge of their own learning. In this small, rural school where this qualitative project took place, the most effective way to share this curriculum and insights was to hold a professional development workshop at a school-wide level as opposed to district wide. In addition, teachers grew because they were provided insight into their students’ world through their Athabaskan oral stories.

Abrahamson (1998) offers the argument that perhaps storytelling should be utilized in the classroom to reverse the devastating educational failures of racially and economically marginalized students. Storytelling, in a diversified society, helps identify common threads among community members. In the Athabaskan community, these cultural roots are the common threads. The commonalities that surface in an Athabaskan community create a sense of togetherness which is found to be an essential component in the Athabaskan learning and educational processes. Children involved in classrooms where storytelling is utilized exhibit increased attention spans, improved listening skills, accuracy of recall, and a better sense of sequencing, predicting and fluency in writing (Mello, 2001).

This traditional oral storytelling curriculum supports the researcher Fox (2000), who asserts that storytelling with children is the single most important activity that teachers can utilize to help their students in school.

In summary, much has been written about how schools could respond to the needs of diverse learners and how teachers could alter curricula and teaching practices to accommodate them. Through this review I have attempted to show that storytelling provides both teachers and students with educational tools to enhance literacy skills and cultural self-knowledge, create bridges between the community and school, and provide the framework for junior high students to create transitional readers for younger students. This review also provides supporting evidence that storytelling is an effective educational tool, and the need for a curriculum which could be utilized more in this small school in rural Alaska.

Methodology

This section describes the process of gathering information and background for the story telling curriculum and the transitional readers (picture books).

Background

As a middle school teacher in a small rural Alaskan school in the interior of Alaska, I encounter students with very low reading abilities. Each week at our staff meetings I also hear concerns that teachers pose regarding the reading level and abilities of students at this particular school. The majority of these concerns revolve around students being inattentive and uninterested in the daily reading and writing activities, as well as the need for effective strategies to engage and motivate students. After a long, lengthy conversation with a colleague, the idea that came to mind as a possible solution in addressing inattentive readers was for teachers to bring back traditional oral storytelling into the classroom. Upon further investigation through conversation with faculty relating to the strategy of using storytelling in the classroom, it was obvious that oral storytelling was a foreign concept to teachers and not integrated into the classroom. When prompted with questions relating to collecting traditional oral stories and creating transitional readers (picture books), teachers gave me tired looks indicating that they have enough tasks on their plates and they can't accept another responsibility.

The purpose of this project was to create a curriculum that demonstrates ways of using oral Athabaskan stories and creating culturally relevant reading materials. In addition, this project aimed to provide a framework for both Native and non-Native teachers to use traditional oral storytelling in their classrooms to enhance students' literacy skills.

The journey towards this project began many years ago, and reflects my experiences as a student, teacher and person who is familiar with the home/school contrast. My graduate studies introduced me to new perspectives on literacy and literacy learning. My understandings of sociocultural perspectives of literacy, critical literacy, multicultural literacy, and of culturally responsive instruction developed as I read the works of Vygotsky (1978), Morrow (1986), Heath (1998), Ladson-Billings (1994), whose work provided the framework for this project.

Haberman and Post (1998) note the importance of teachers having cultural self-knowledge and self-acceptance. They define self-knowledge as “a thorough understanding of one’s own cultural roots and group affiliation,” and self-acceptance as “a high level of self-esteem derived from knowing one’s roots” (p. 98). Ayers (1989) has stated, “...teachers, whatever else they teach, teach themselves. Of all the knowledge teachers draw on, self-knowledge is most important” (p. 129). Reflecting back to my earlier years of teaching elementary students and conversations with my colleagues, it was clear that Athabaskan storytelling played a major part in our elementary curriculum, but not in our classes for older students. Teachers were afraid that the older students would be inattentive and disrespectful towards the storytellers. After careful prompting with questions relating to older students displaying disrespect, it appeared that older students were never given the privilege to actually participate in a storytelling event. My colleagues’ concerns were that older students had no patience or motivation to sit and listen to what the Elders had to say.

Interviews with Elders

The first steps in my journey to effectively collecting traditional Athabaskan stories was to converse with chosen Elders and explain my project to them. I didn’t want to abuse the

knowledge that they volunteered to share. The goal of my interview process was to become reacquainted with my culture and again grasp the connection between our traditional stories and their educational value for the Athabaskan children.

The participants interviewed consisted of four respectable Elders, two gentlemen and two honorary women. Their ages ranged from 70-85 years old. My first interviewees were my Elderly aunties, both who came to the school twice a week to teach our Athabaskan Native language and share traditional oral stories with students that were willing to listen. They both spoke in a dialect termed today as Village English. They spoke of how they did not have much education, because of the nomadic lifestyles they lived as young children, but they stressed the importance of how our traditional oral stories fulfilled all the functions of written literature. As I listened to my aunties and the stories they shared, I was able to relate to the essential elements of traditional oral storytelling.

The second interview participants were two respectable male Elders, who were my uncles. I felt it was necessary to explore the historical context of storytelling and to see if a different gender still focused on coming to an understanding of themselves, the world around them, and their relationship to everything in the world. Spending time with these two Elderly men was very intense. Although they shared important information, I felt like I wasn't supposed to ask any questions, but just listen to what they had to share.

The Elders said that Athabaskan traditional oral storytelling built morals, entertained, strengthened family unity, and in the past used to be like a school for children. The traditional stories were used for informal education to teach children listening skills and patience, to prepare them for role as adults, to teach them to be brave, and to help them learn about the past, customs and traditions. One of the men who appeared very authoritative said,

We really enjoyed ourselves when we were young, I pity children nowadays they think they're smart because they go to school and learn big words and read books, but what they don't know is their own stories.

Another Elder said,

Our children will not remember the same kind of a past that we do. Think about it: A child knows all about the abusive usage of drugs and alcohol, Ipods, and speak to each other using abusive language. But most of all they have all lost their self-identity and respect for one another and the Elder.

The comments made by these respectable Elders gave me the encouragement to continue with this project.

For the interviews I formulated a topic that I wanted to discuss, typically generated by previous conversations, and then I would let the Elder's responses direct my next questions. Eisner (1998) advises that interviews should not be "formal, questionnaire oriented encounters" (p. 183). Fontana and Frey (2005) refer to the unstructured interview as the "open-ended ethnographic (in-depth) interview (p. 10)." My attempt was to make the interview as natural as possible, as though two friends were talking. I also didn't want this to be a burden and I wanted to become as close to their storied lives as possible. To do so, I would often propose that we revisit stories that they began that they didn't quite finish because they either got tired of speaking in their second language (English), or they needed longer time for reflection. As Gubrium & Holstein (1998) have noted, "The interview has become a means of contemporary storytelling whereby persons divulge life accounts in response to the interviewer's inquiries" (p. 120).

Twice a week, for six to eight weeks, depending on the availability of the Elders, and their energy level the interviews normally lasted around 30-60 minutes. Following each interview, I would transcribe the tapes and prepare for the next interview. Merriam (1998) discussed this method as the “interview log” from which data could later be used for analysis.

On my visits to the Elders’ homes, I often had the opportunity to talk with family and other community members. Most of these were informal conversations, although I did tape one interview with a former teacher who had a long educational history of working at Andrew K. Demoski School. After a moment of just catching up on personal issues, I asked her a question: “Now that you have the time to actually participate in the community events, how do you see storytelling as being part of our school curriculum?” She responded with a serious expression on her face,

These kids today, have totally no respect for anyone, not even themselves. It is really sad when you see young boys and girls walking the street in broad daylight intoxicated, cussing and fighting with each other. When I go to visit my mom, (who is an Elderly lady), I often become very upset, because my nephews and nieces are sitting in front of the T.V, watching a program about the Simpsons. My blood pressure began to boil when my mom (their grandma) try to talk to them about how bad it is to watch too much television and they just look at her and smile. Totally no respect!

I probed further and asked her if she thought that this was the reason our students have such low literacy skills. She responded,

They only don’t know how to read, they also don’t know how to speak, and every word that comes out their mouth is the F word. I think they’re trying to imitate the

people they see on T.V. I remember when this village had such close unity. Everyone had Native pride. Socializing was such a factor. I remember when I use to bring my young children out in the evenings to watch the men play baseball and how we use to have so much fun playing marbles. I don't see this happening anymore. These teenagers today are only interested in getting drunk and doing drugs. That is so sad.

From the views of the participants it emerged that the potential for the utilization of traditional oral stories, as it was in the past, is still in high demand, and there is definitely a need for it in the school curriculum. The interviewing of the Elders strengthened my premise, which is that traditional oral storytelling can serve as a vehicle for building knowledge about the Athabaskan culture and hopefully awaken the younger generation in this village. And that by listening to Elders tell stories our youth can learn about their culture, experiences and relationships and regain their self-identity and respect for one another.

Emergent Themes

The key themes that emerged from these interviews complimented what teachers felt about older students listening to traditional oral storytelling. The first was “No Respect!” along with how the present-day community members lack the knowledge of the culture to pass down to younger generations. Traditional Athabaskan oral stories teach us to listen, obey our Elders, respect one another, and most of all to observe what others are doing. The philosophy behind this is that people should become self-sufficient and think for themselves (Berk, 1995). It is through the Athabaskan oral stories that we developed skills necessary to survive if caught in a bind. The survival of any culture must rely on knowledge being passed from generation to generation. My

students created transitional readers (picture books) to preserve some of our Athabaskan oral stories. Thompson (1984) stated that “If the youngest generation does not know the cultural traditions or the language, this indicates that the culture and language is not being passed on in the way it has traditionally been during its entire past history, as all cultures are passed on, from parent to child, assuring the continuity of the culture” (p. 234).

A second theme that arose was the fact that the Elders were afraid of our Native language (Athabaskan) dying out. According to C. A. Barnhardt (personal communication, April, 19, 2010), in the first era from 1889 to 1969, the BIA contracted with the Catholic Church to open a school. The Catholic Church managed this school until 1895 when politics between the church and the state forced the two to separate. However, the Catholic Church maintained its own separate school called Our Lady of the Snows until 1969. In the second era starting in 1976, the Nulato School became a part of the Yukon-Koyukuk REAA. In both eras, the schools followed a strict English only policy, forbidding the use of the Native tongue. One of the men said,

When I was a lot younger and my friends and me use to go school, the nuns would slap us right across our face if we spoke in Native. I remember my parents telling me not to speak in Native when I go to school. I never did, but I watch some of my friends getting punish because they spoke in our Native language. Today, I hear that they want us to teach our grandchildren to speak in Native.

All this negativism toward the Athabaskan language in the late 19th century (1899 and on) by the missionaries caused our Native tongue to be lost except by the older generation. Although our Elders were punished for speaking their Native tongue, the pride for our culture was never dampened. Although most of our lifestyle in Nulato has been westernized, Elders are still coming to the schools for a small stipend to teach the younger children and interested youth

Native arts and crafts, such as beading, sewing, and trapping. Today, the schools are doing everything in their power to replenish the Native language by having immersion programs and Native language classes being taught for one-to-two hours a day.

Taking Action

The interviews showed the similar experiences the Elders all shared during their school years when their language was no longer used and the effect this has had on younger people with regard to the importance of their cultural self-knowledge. I began to see why our Elders became very defensive when anyone displayed a lack of respect toward them while in the process of storytelling. I can comment on how our Elders in this small community have graciously overcome these barriers. Now, it was my job, with the help of the Elders, to complete this project by creating culturally relevant materials that would engage my students in becoming culturally competent, successful and critical learners. As part of this move, I integrated learning experiences for my students within their story collecting from the Elders into lesson plans that led to the creation of transitional readers (picture books).

Elders were invited into the junior high classroom for 45-60 minutes twice a week, to share oral stories with a group of junior high students. Each story told took a few days because the Elders would leave the students in suspense at the end of a “chapter” to pick up the next day. Before the Elders began the unfinished story, they would ask the students to tell them back in their own words what they remembered from the day before. Each story told had a moral and a lesson that was tied up at the end of the story. These lessons in the stories were important to the Elders and ones that were always instilled in the listeners. The Elders continually repeated that

they were grateful and very thankful that the students were going to create picture books to share with other students and keeping the story format the way it was being shared by the Elders. Depending on the length of the stories, one or two stories were shared in a week, sometimes it took two weeks to complete a story because the Elder would have to leave the village for medical appointments. It was during this time that I was made aware of my students' increased comprehension. The recall of the story events displayed by my students when the Elder arrived back in the classroom was beyond words.

Once the stories were shared, the students had the task of transcribing the recordings onto paper, making it understandable for the reader while maintaining the word choice and the way it was told by the Elders. This process took two to three weeks because the students wanted to keep the text similar to the way it was spoken. Once the transcriptions were completed in a format similar to the way it had originally been told, the students spent another week proofreading the stories. This was a difficult task because the students were not used to the language of the story in the sense of grammar and structure. They wanted to make it pleasing to the reader while following the requests of the Elders to keep the stories the way they were told. Numerous revisions were necessary, finding a balance of structure the students were used to using in writing in the educational setting compared with traditional oral story language used by the Elders.

Students began adding illustrations to their stories, which took another two weeks. The Elders had asked that the artwork be in the students' own hand to make it a more accurate representation of the story and the mental pictures the students got from the stories. Once the illustrations and revisions were completed, the books were sent off to the publishing company for publication. The whole process, from the oral storytelling by the Elders to the final

publication, took six to eight weeks. The finished product was a short story in the words of the Elders, sharing a life lesson, complete with visuals from the pictures painted in the students' minds from the story. At the end of our school year picnic the books were put on display so that the Elders could see the finished product and hopefully encourage more Elders to come to the classroom to share stories with the students. The Elders were very pleased with the finished products.

During this time my journey to incorporate storytelling into the school led me to spend endless hours and weekends searching the Internet for research regarding the use of storytelling in the Athabaskan Culture. Information that addressed current practices of Athabaskan oral storytelling was sparse. The other information that I collected was very lengthy and not transformative. I found myself printing numerous pages of storytelling resources that offered storytelling tools and strategies. This must be the reason why teachers today are not implementing oral storytelling into their daily curriculum. As educators today, in such a demanding profession, we have no time to surf the Internet for ideas or strategies to improve literacy in our classroom. The endless hours searching the web and the frustration I felt only encouraged me more to create this curriculum.

After three months, I returned back to this project with a strong commitment to complete it, so that I could provide a guide for other teachers who were interested in nourishing the literacy roots of the Athabaskan students in our school through the usage of traditional oral storytelling. The framework for this Athabaskan oral storytelling curriculum is adaptable for all grades levels but was designed especially for junior high students. I titled my curriculum *Through the Eyes of the Elders*, referring to a selection of classroom resources for teachers

seeking to enhance the literacy skills in junior high students through Athabaskan oral storytelling.

Through the Eyes of the Elders: A Story Telling Curriculum

This curriculum was developed to introduce junior high teachers and students to the Athabaskan art of oral storytelling. Intermediate grade teachers can easily adapt the lessons to meet the needs of older students. The curriculum consists of five lessons that teachers can use to introduce Athabaskan storytelling into their classroom.

- Lesson One is an introduction to the elements of storytelling.
- Lesson Two asks students to create a story by using long-recognized, basic elements that make a storyline coherent and interesting.
- Lesson Three explains the cultural role of storytelling and asks students to compare and contrast two different stories.
- Lesson Four prepares students to interview Elders in their families, communities or neighborhoods.
- Lesson Five prepares students to compose and tell their own stories.
- Lesson Six introduces students to the process of planning, writing, illustrating, and publishing their own children's picture book.

Storytelling has been around as long as there have been people. It has played a critical role in the development of our world cultures and civilizations. Storytelling has been used over the centuries to chronicle extraordinary people and events, to transmit information from generation to generation, to teach, and to entertain. It is universal and can be an important enhancement to the curriculum presented in today's classroom.

Lesson One **An Introduction to Storytelling**

Objectives for Students:

- To identify the parts or components of a story
- To explain why we tell stories
- To use a Story Guide to plan and tell a story

Materials:

Appendix A: Teacher Resource
Appendix B: What Makes a Good Story
Appendix C: Story Guide

Standards:

Language Arts: A4, A5, A8, C2, D8 & E 1-4
Cultural Standards: A3, B2, D4, E1, & E2

Curriculum Areas:

Language Arts
Social Studies

Activities

1. An introduction to storytelling: The teacher tells a story

Tell a two or three minute story about yourself to students. Use Appendix B (What Makes a Good Story) when choosing a story to prepare for storytelling and use Appendix C to prepare your story. Here are some ideas for stories to help you get started:

- Tell about a time you got into trouble with your parents or a teacher.
- Tell about a time that you learned something from a friend.
- Tell about a time that you felt foolish or proud.
- Tell a story about someone who did something heroic.
- Tell about a time you did something that was totally out of character or unexpected.

Q: Ask students: Why do you think I chose to tell this story? Did you think it was scary, humorous or sad? Was there a lesson that I learned?

Allow students to express their ideas.

2. Learning about the Story Guide

The Story Guide includes the parts or components of a story: characters, location or setting (when and where the story takes place), the problem, how the problem was solved and the outcome.

- Distribute two copies of the Story Guide to each of your students. You should have a copy of the Story Guide on the overhead, on chart paper, or on the board.
- Ask individual students to think about your story and respond to the question in the first box, “Why was this story a good one to tell?” Students will discuss their *responses to this question later in small groups (This is the theme of the story.)*.
- Assess students’ knowledge of the components of a story by asking them to brainstorm their ideas about each. Record their responses and clarify when necessary.
- Place students in groups of 3 or 4. Ask students to work together to fill in the information about your story in the Story Guide. Choose one student to record each group’s responses including the one they answered individually, “Why was this story a good one to tell?”
- Process with the class. The recorders will report out for their groups. Accept responses that may be slightly different from your original ideas IF they are consistent with the text. (For example, students may view your problem or solution a little differently than you planned. Allow responses that “make sense” and adhere to the text.)
- Review and clarify students’ understandings of the components of stories. Students should write definitions of each story component in their Story Guide Handout. As students are writing, you can “check for understanding” and note any students who need additional instruction. (Assessment)

3. The student plans a story using the Story Guide.

Ask students to plan a 2-3 minute story using the Story Guide. They can use the following story starters .

Story Starters

- The last time I was scared late at night was when...
- Once on my way to or home from school...
- One time when I was at my friend’s house for _____,
I was surprised when...
- When I was little I used to.....
- One time
- Never...
- It started out like any other ordinary day...

4. The student tells a story.

Ask students to work with a partner. Each student will take a turn telling his/her story to the partner. Remind students to be good listeners. After both students have had a chance to tell their stories, ask them to (individually) answer the questions on Appendix C.

- About your partner. Did your partner's story include all the story components?
- About your own story.
- Why did you choose that story to tell?
- How did your partner react to the story?
- Was it easy or hard for you to tell this story? Why?
- What would you change next time?

Lesson Two

Learning and Teaching Storytelling

Objective for Students:

- Students will be able to identify and map the element of a story
- To stimulate the imagination and learn how to create a story as a group.

Materials:

Appendix C: Story Guide

Appendix D: Benefits of Storytelling

Appendix E: Story: The Cubbyhouse

A large ball of yarn with knots tied at 3 to 5 feet intervals.

Large Chart

Curriculum Area:

Language Arts

Drama

Social Studies

Standards:

Standard 1: Students will listen to a read aloud and interpret information within the story.

Standard 2: Students will understand the elements of a story.

Standard 3: Students will rewrite a story that they heard.

Standard 4: Students will respond to the questions from the teacher and discuss ideas with each other.

Activities:

1. Why storytelling is important

Purpose: To demonstrate that many and various elements from our human experience can be made into a story even when the story is fantasy and created from random elements. And to understand that a story has a general pattern helps to make it's telling interesting.

Ask students to read Appendix D: Benefits of Storytelling

Set a purpose for students' reading by giving them a question to answer as they read,

Q: Why is storytelling important to us all?

Discuss.

1. In the discussion, ask students what they learned in their reading about the benefits of storytelling. Build on their responses.

2. Elements of a story.

Prior knowledge/Motivation: Discuss using background knowledge and refer to the classroom walls where the elements of a story are displayed. Discuss how we are going to bring the elements of a story together and map it out. Scaffold the students' knowledge and connect various lessons.

Procedures:

Open the lessons with a brief discussion about the parts of a story (beginning, middle, end, and the setting), about character traits, and how sometimes there are problems in a story. Talk about how they have been doing a great job determining the parts of a story and that helps us become better readers, writers, and helps us understand the story. Introduce how we are going to bring all these elements together in a story map. Explain that an important event can also be a problem of a story.

Practice: The students will practice their new learning by helping fill in the story map on chart paper. Check worksheets to see if they understood the elements of the story.

3. Creating and telling a story

Players should sit in a circle close to each other for easy access. The group leader will start out the story, unraveling the yarn as he tells. When he reaches the knot, the yarn is passed on and the next person continues the story, unraveling the yarn as well.

When the next knot is reached, the yarn is passed on and so forth. The players should be instructed that they are building the beginning of the story, developing the body, rising to the climax, and closing the story with an appropriate ending. Group's leaders should focus on story starters that tickle the imagination such as "I was walking along a deserted road when I saw a large house to my right. It looked empty and since no one was around, I decided to go in. Little did I know that ...

After, take the following steps:

Have each group select someone to tell their story in three to five minutes.

Beginning the story: Pre-instruct the tellers that their story must include an introduction.

That is, they must remember to say at the start: "I'm going to tell you a story about..." At the beginning of the telling the teller should also say who is in the story, and where and when it took place.

The Problem or Conflict: Pre-instruct tellers that they must include a problem or some sort of conflict in the story. The bigger the conflict, the better the story. And the more complicated the conflict grows, the better.

Resolution: Pre-instruct the tellers that at story's end the conflict must be resolved or come to rest. The story must have a conclusion whether it is happy or sad. At the end we hope to learn how the character coped.

4. Students Sharing How They Feel

After each story is told to everyone, discuss with them how they felt about the story – accepting that the stories came out of random and seemingly “nonsense” elements.

Some questions could include:

- What did you learn about the words in your group’s list as the story was being created?
- How did you feel hearing that list of location, characters and objects being used in the story?
- What feelings and ideas were expressed in your group as you discussed and created the story?
- Why is it important to have those feelings and ideas?
- Why are having various feelings and ideas a natural process of creating, telling and hearing stories?
- What else did you learn in the creation of the story and its telling?

5. Review the Activity

By prompting the answers from the students, discuss what makes a story interesting. Lead students to at least the following conclusions.

- Location or setting is important. All stories must happen some place, whether externally or in the mind.
- Characters are essentials in the story, be they people, animals, or a natural phenomenon (wind, rain, lightning, sun).
- Introduction at the beginning of the story is important. It is that “Once upon a time a time there was a very old grandma, who lived by the Yukon River in a fish camp.”
- Problem or Conflict must be present. A big storm, a battle, an argument or a plague makes the story interesting. Remember, it is how the conflict is coped with that is important.
- Resolution. Bring the story to a conclusion. After all the fussing in the story, make it come to a happy, sad, or mysterious ending.

6. Follow Up

Assign students to create and tell their stories, using the exercise above as a guide. Organize other story creation and storytelling groups. Allow students to storytelling in front of the others in the classroom as well as at home to family members or in other grouping.

Continue to use this storytelling format, and be creative by modifying this activity. Plan actively and encourage students to create and tell stories to themselves and others again and again.

Repetition makes us better at telling stories. Listen to other storytellers to learn from them. Encourage students to write and keep their stories on file.

Lesson Three Storytelling and Culture

Objective for Students:

- Explain the roles of storytelling in the Athabaskan culture.
- Compare and contrast Athabaskan stories and times.

Curriculum Areas:

Language Arts
Social Studies

Materials:

Appendix C: Story guide
Appendix E: Athabaskan Teachings in Oral Stories (Teacher Resource)
Appendix F: Athabaskan Storytelling Context and Benefits (Teacher Resource)
Appendix G: The Story of Doyon (Wolverine)
Appendix H: Raining Fish Eggs

Standards:

Language Arts: A4, A5, A8, C2, D8 & E 1-4
Cultural Standards: A3, B2, D4, E1, & E2

Activities:

1. Why do we tell stories?

Ask each student to tell a partner a brief (1-2 minutes) and extemporaneous story. The story can be one he or she has heard from a friend, relative, teacher or person on television, radio, or from a family member.

Ask students to write (in their journals, or on paper) why they chose that particular story. A prompt might be, "I told a story about I chose this story because...."

Ask several students to read what they've written. Record their responses on chart paper or the board using two columns:

The Story Was About	Why I Chose this Story
---------------------	------------------------

Once you have enough responses, ask students to identify common themes that emerge about why stories were chosen. These could include 1) stories that are entertaining, 2) stories that give news or information, 3) human interest stories, 4) stories that teach a lesson, and 5) favorite stories from my family or culture. Some stories will fall into more than one category. The goal is for students to draw on their own background knowledge and experiences to understand the role of stories in society.

2. The role of stories in society.

Ask students to read Appendix E. As they read, they should place a check in the margin next to information they already knew, and underline new information about the role of storytelling in the Athabaskan culture.

Q: What new information did you learn about the role of storytelling in our Athabaskan culture?

3. Stories from different times and cultures

Distribute Appendix G-I. Read the stories aloud.

When you've completed your reading, ask students to turn to Appendix G. Complete the handout for the two stories. You can either fill in the relevant information or simply place a check in the box (✓).

Place students in heterogeneous groups of four. They will be continuing to compare the stories from on Appendix I.

Each group will read the stories on Appendix G and H one at a time. The stories should be read orally with students taking turns or students can read in buddy pairs depending on the reading levels of individual students. After each story is read, students will complete the required information in Appendix I.

When the groups have completed the task, process/debrief it with them. You should have Appendix I on the overhead as you do this.

Ask students to write/reflect in their journals or on paper. What have they learned about the oral stories they have heard.

If you prefer, you can select other stories that are available on the web or in books Students can listen to storytellers or read these stories.

- Alaskan Native stories can be heard at:

<http://www.lksd.org/kongiganak/kongiganak/Kong/storytelling.htm>

Students can read stories by Catherine Attla.

Books by Catherine Attla

Attla, Catherine. Bakk'aatugh ts'uhuniy = Stories we live by: traditional Koyukon Athabaskan stories

Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1989.

Genre: Folklore

Language: English and Koyukon Athabaskan

Description: 408 p. :ill.; 28cm. Told by Catherine Attla; introduction by Chad Thompson with Eliza Jones; transcribed by Eliza Jones; translated by Eliza Jones and Chad Thompson ; illustrated by Cindy Davis. Published before orthographic reform.

Audience : All Ages

ISBN: 1555000258

Attla, Catherine. K'etaalkkaanee, the one who paddled among the people and animals: the story of an ancient traveler

Fairbanks, AK: University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1990.

Genre: Folklore

Language: English and Koyukon Athabaskan

Description: 149 p. : ill. ;23 cm. Told by Catherine Attla; transcribed and translated by Eliza Jones; illustrated by Cindy Davis

Audience: All Ages

ISBN: 155500038X

Attla, Catherine. Sitsiy yugh noholnik ts'in = As my grandfather told it; Traditional stories from the Koyukuk

Koyukuk, AK: Yukon-Koyukuk School District, 1983

Genre: Folklore

Language: English and Koyukon Athabaskan

Description: 256 p., {1} leaf of plates : ill., music; 28 cm. Told by Catherine Attla; transcribed by Eliza Jones; translated by Eliza Jones and Melissa Axelrod; illustrated by Cindy Davis.

Audience: All Ages

Lesson Four **Gathering Cultural Stories**

Objectives for Students:

- To develop an interview protocol
- To conduct an interview with an older person in their family, community, or neighborhood

Materials:

Handout 4A: Interview Protocol

Curriculum Areas:

Language Arts
Social Studies

Standards:

Language Arts: A4, A5, A8, C2, D8 & E 1-4
Cultural Standards: A3, B2, D4, E1, & E2

Activities:

1. Identify a person in your family, community, or neighborhood who will be the subject of a story you will develop and tell.

Ask students to brainstorm a list of older people in their family, community, or neighborhood. This can include people in school, churches, neighborhood organizations, stores in the neighborhood, etc. Remember that your student may consider an older person to be someone who is in his or her 20's or 30's. Be clear about your expectations.
How old is older?

Ask students to consider the people on their list. How will they identify the person that will give them a good story?

Questions to help them determine whom they will interview:

- Is there someone who is particularly funny or interesting?
- Is there an Elder in your community you've always wanted to meet because he tells great stories?
- Is there a story about fishing that you've heard your grandfather tell over and over at family gatherings?
- Are you curious about what your town was like many years ago? Are there Elders you could interview?
 - Your grandparents tell stories about hunting trips all the time. Would you like to hear one of those stories?
- Your parents moved to town from the village before you were born. What was life like for them

when they were growing up in the village?

Ask students to identify the person they will interview.

2. Choosing and creating interview questions:

The next step is for students to identify or generate appropriate questions for their interview.

3. Developing an Interview Protocol

Do a “Think-Pair-Share.” Ask students to work with a partner. Each partner will tell:

- The person to be interviewed
- Why that person was chosen
- The questions they’ve developed for the Interview Protocol

Lesson Five **Composing and Telling Your Story**

Objectives for Students:

To Develop a Story

Materials:

Appendix I: A Storytelling Rubric
Appendix J: Telling Your Story with a Storyboard
Appendix K: The Interview Protocol
Appendix C: The Story Guide
Appendix O: Comparing stories

Standards:

Language Arts: A4, A5, A8, C2, D8 & E 1-4
Cultural Standards: A3, B2, D4, E1, & E2

Curriculum Area:

Language Arts
Social Studies

Activities:

1. Characteristics of an effective story

Ask students to brainstorm what they have learned about the components of a story (Appendix C). They should write in their journals or on paper. As students write, you should check for understanding. Identify those students who need additional instruction on the components.

Place a copy of Appendix C on the overhead. Process and review where necessary.

Q: Ask, "What stories can you think of that you consider great stories?"

Q: Ask, "What made them "great?" Brainstorm on the board or chart paper.

Ask students to read the information in Handout 5A: Effective Stories. As they read, they should place a check \checkmark in the margin when and if they are reminded of a story they already know. Ask them to tell a partner about the story and why they remember it (2 minutes each).

Distribute Appendix C: A Storytelling Rubric with students. The rubric describes the characteristics of a good story. Students will be familiar with much of the information on the rubric. The new information is about the language used by storytellers (see Notes for Teachers). Storytellers "show" they don't "tell." They use dialogue and vivid language that paints verbal pictures. For additional information, see the Story Arts Website by Heather Forest:

<http://www.storyarts.org/classroom/usestories/storyrubric.html#composition>

2. Developing your story

Students will now develop their own stories using the information they gathered in their interviews.

Tell students that they are not to write out every word of the story. Rather, they are to plan their stories and practice telling them, using notes and a storyboard to help them remember the story.

Step One: Students begin by putting notes about their story in each of the boxes in the Story Guide (Appendix C). Students can work in their interview teams and help each other, or they can work independently.

Step Two: Students should create a storyboard to help them develop their stories. The three or four events they include in the Story Guide can be written in the Storyboard Appendix J. Students can do actual sketches that depict the events of the plot or use symbols that help them remember the events of their stories (for example, a book and stick figure to represent school).

Step Three: Students can “talk out their stories” as they plan them. You’ll probably want to remind them to use a “three inch voice.” They can practice talking to each other until they know how loudly they should speak. This is well worth the time and effort it takes.

Step Four: Circulate among students. When they’ve begun to have a story to tell, place them in pairs and let them tell each other their stories. This is a very informal activity and should just be fun for students; however, they should be helping each other to include all the items in the Storytelling Rubric.

Step Five: Give students the opportunity to perform. Hold your own Storytelling Festival or videotape students telling their stories and make the videos available for viewing.

Lesson Six
Publish Children's Picture Book

Objectives:

- Students will plan, write, illustrate and publish their own children's picture books.
- Analyze and evaluate a work of Athabaskan oral literature.
- Use literary devices in an original work of fiction.

Materials:**Standards:**

Standard: Reading Performance Standards: The student analyzes and evaluates literary elements and devices by: [4.6.3 Analyzing and evaluating the importance to the story of plot, setting, character, point of view, theme, and tone.

Standard: Writing Performance Standards: The student writes for a variety of purposes and audiences by: 4.2.1 Writing a narrative using elements of fiction to advance the plot.

Curriculum Area;

Language Arts
Social Studies

Activities:

Session one: Favorite Book Presentations

1. Arrange students into groups of three members each.
2. Have group members take turns reading their favorite picture books out loud to the other two group members.
3. After reading the book, each reader should share three reasons why the book is their favorite from childhood.
4. After the reading of each book ask group members to share concrete examples of how the book was or was not effective in each of the following three areas: plot, characterization, and illustrations.
5. Encourage students to develop their own guidelines for the characteristics of effective plots, characterization, and illustrations.
6. Gather the class and review students' findings, noting the details on chart paper or the board. Save this information for later reference, as students compose their own books.

Session Two: "I Remember" Journal Entry

1. Explain the writing project that students will complete: composing the text and illustrations for their own children's picture books.
2. Share the Grading Rubric and discuss the expectations for the activity. Answer any questions that students have.
3. Ask students to brainstorm themes that they noticed in several of the books.
4. To get students started, share one or more of the following themes and ask students to suggest how some of the stories they have heard fit these themes:
 - Acceptance of others
 - Concern of family dynamics
 - Fear of the unknown
5. Once the class has compiled a list of several themes, review the list and make any additions or revisions.
6. Ask students to hypothesize why these themes resonate with young listeners, encouraging students to share any connections that they recall to the texts or to their own experiences.
 - Read through the Tips for Writing a Children's Picture Storybook handout and compare the observations to the books that students have read. Add or revise the guidelines as appropriate based on students' experiences with picture books. Have students complete the Brainstorming the Conflict chart to test out potential conflicts by identifying the complications that would or could result from attempting to solve them. Encourage students to discuss their findings with one another as they work.

Session Three: Developing a "Plot Pitch"

1. Allow time for volunteers to share their work from the previous session with the class. Make connections to the class list of characteristics of effective plots, characterization, and illustrations as appropriate.
2. Distribute the Plot Pitch Template, and have students follow the information on the sheet to develop the basic layout and details of their stories.
3. Encourage collaboration and sharing as students develop their ideas. Circulate through the room, providing support and feedback during this work time.

4. Once the basic templates are complete, have students graph their plots using the Plot Diagram.

4. If time allows, have students draw a sketch of their main character and the setting in which the story takes place. Encourage students to use colors in their sketches as well as labels that identify certain characteristics or details that might be revealed through the text of the story.

Session Four: Pitching the Plot

1. Review the activities that the class has completed so far and the expectations for the project. Answer any questions.
2. Arrange the class in pairs and have partners present their "plot pitch" to each other.
3. Ask students to answer the questions included on the Plot Pitch Template to provide written feedback to their partners.
4. If time allows, students can exchange their work with more than one partner.
5. Have students review the responses and add details or revisions to their work so far in the time remaining. Alternately, have students continue their work for homework.

Session Five: Storyboards

1. Have students prepare storyboard pages by dividing several 8.5 x 11 sheets of paper into four to six boxes. Suggest folding the sheets to create the lines easily. There should be enough boxes to represent each page of the book as well as the cover.
2. Ask students to use only one side of the paper so that all thumbnails on the storyboard can be seen at once.
3. Have students sketch the illustrations and text for each page and the cover in a
4. Remind students that these are rough sketches, not their final illustrations. Getting the idea across is the goal.
5. Encourage students to experiment with the location, size, and amount of text and illustrations on each page.
6. Once students have completed their storyboards, arrange the class in pairs or threes to discuss the planned layout for the books.

Session Six: Producing the Book

1. Review the expectations for the assignment using the Grading Rubric.

2. Provide an overview of the publishing techniques that are available, using the information on the Publishing Tips handout and the Websites listed in the Resources section.
3. Allow students to continue their work on their pages, writing and illustrating during this session.
4. Station yourself near the materials for binding the books. Provide help with the bookbinding process as students reach this stage.
5. As the books are completed, encourage students to read their stories to one another as a whole class or in small groups.
6. Allow more than one session for this final publication work if appropriate.

Extensions:

Arrange to visit a Pre-K, Kindergarten, 1st grade and 2nd grade class, and have your students read their books to the students. Select the best 4-5 books submitted. Divide students into groups of three and assign the following tasks to be completed during the visit: reader, page-turner, and master of ceremonies. Each group can also develop short skits, costumes, or other visual props to enhance the quality of their presentations.

Discussion

This was a qualitative study that took place over the course of one school year and provided me the background and resources to develop the curriculum, focusing on students' listening to Athabaskan oral stories told aloud by four prestigious Elders. Stories told by the Elders included characters that portrayed vanity, foolishness, courage, and caretaking. My passion to bring traditional oral storytelling into the classroom challenged me to create this curriculum. It can help veteran and non-veteran and Native and non-Native teachers in using culturally relevant materials to enhance their students' literacy skills in their classrooms. This curriculum can provide an important home-school link in this small school located in rural Alaska.

The purpose of this curriculum came to light when a colleague and I were visiting and discussing our junior high students' inattentiveness and low reading levels. My colleague reflected back to a time when our school wasn't so test oriented and Elders played a big part in our curriculum. This is when I realized that traditional oral storytelling was lacking in the upper grades' literacy curriculum. I researched and gathered support for the curriculum and the need for it. I interviewed and brought Elders in and had them work with the junior high students over the course of the year. Throughout the duration of this project, students were asked to participate in twice-monthly storytelling sessions with the Elders who visited the classroom. Storytelling time was usually scheduled for the latter part of the afternoon, after literacy and math instruction and before physical education. During the presentations, chairs and desk were moved back so that the Elders felt like they were in their own home environment and so that the students could lounge comfortable during the listening and telling.

In every storytelling session, the students participated actively and with a high degree of interest, often requesting that a particular story be retold over and over again. After the storytelling, checking for comprehension took place through questioning. Prior to the start or ending of each story, the Elders asked the students visualization questions about the setting or characters of the story while the students envisioned the characteristics of the main characters in the story.

Through the interview process I learned the importance of the oral tradition and how it played a large role in the education of the Elders. I also learned that I had to establish a baseline of understanding before the students were able to listen to a story. I discovered the commonalities and themes in the presentations of the Elders' oral stories. The transitional readers (picture books) were created directly from the oral stories that were told. Part of the beauty of creating these picture books with my students was watching my students creative processes come to light. Each of these students had a unique response to the picture books that they created. Their imaginations and creativity were greatly challenged as they processed through the development of their book.

Once the books were finished, the students' eyes were filled with wonder and pride over the work they had done. At the end of the year school picnic our picture books were displayed for the community to read and enjoy. The authors stood by their published books to answer any questions. The responses they received were overwhelmingly positive. The Elders that participated in this project were excited to see their stories created into books. At the end of this celebration I voiced that anyone in the community that would like to share a story was welcome in my classroom.

Presently, teachers at this small rural school are using these picture books as resources for teaching reading and also as references for retelling the stories orally. The power of the oral stories is clearly evident and definitely needed in our curriculum to enhance junior high students' literacy skills.

The students enjoyed storytelling sessions because of their entertainment value, "it was exciting," and because storytelling was "time to relax," "cool," and "really awesome having the Elders visit our classroom." According to the students, the most powerful part of the listening to the oral stories was the special relationship that developed between them and the Elders. As the students participated in these storytelling sessions they began to identify cultural norms and standards and were able to explore their own lives through the lens of these stories. These oral stories also helped the students increase their knowledge of themselves and others. They did this by reflecting on images and conditions in stories and linking them to known cultural concepts and paradigms. For instance, now the students are more eager to learn their own language, and participate in their own cultural songs and dances. They are more culturally aware of their heritage and are proud to be Athabaskans. Therefore, traditional oral storytelling needs to be understood as a way of knowing, and as such, we need to recognize it for the valuable educative tool that it is.

Throughout my research findings indicated that traditional oral storytelling enhanced the students' abilities to reflect and develop relationships between texts, teller, and themselves. This made the process of creating picture books a lot easier. Watching my students' motivation and enthusiasm in the creation of their picture books brings me to the final word from Berk & Winsler (1995):

Vygotskian theory supports the notion that through interaction with text (written by other

authors or themselves) children transfer the understandings and skills they have gleaned from dialogues with others to their own literacy-related discourse...they converse not just with themselves but also with the text narrative (p.115).

Final Reflection

Once upon a time—a long time ago before the art of reading and writing was introduced into the Athabaskan culture, we were dependent on our oral narratives for the passing on of Indigenous knowledge from generation to generation. The Elders simply shared their knowledge through stories. Sitting and listening to a story with others, we experienced a sense of sharing the unifying magic of the story world. It was through these oral stories that helped us as children strengthen our identity, self-esteem and our sense of belonging. We also shared a feeling of togetherness and intimacy. It was this personal experience and passion that guided my path in creating this Athabaskan story telling curriculum.

The students who participated in this project developed a stronger desire towards reading because at the time the oral storytelling activities had started, students appeared motivated in listening to the oral stories, participating and expressing their comprehension through the activities that came along with this project. Socializing and visiting with the Elders after each storytelling session informed me that the Elders were pleased with the way the students presented good behavior, participation, motivation, and especially their attitudes during the storytelling time.

During the development of the picture books the students learned a lot from one another. Students were engaged in individual and small groups which allowed them to extend their skills in writing narratives, develop their oral skills by communicating effectively with each other, staff and younger children and strengthening their reading comprehension by developing the sense of a story.

The atmosphere during our writing time was chaotic, but most often productive. By the time students finished their picture books, they had practiced closed textual analysis, learned

about making a book process, found a variety of artistic interpretations of a single character or event and learned from each other. Observing my students structuring a story and sequencing events according to the dictates of their interest and drama of a story they just heard was an experience in action. The story would not be as effective or meaningful without a deep understanding of the content the meaning could become lost (McDrury & Alterio, 2002).

Participating in traditional oral storytelling is a hands-on process for junior high students as they personalize what they are learning and construct their own meaning from the stories they hear and how they choose to retell in the creation of picture books. As Armstrong (2003) declares, "Helping children tell their stories, through a variety of means and media, to a variety of audiences, is the most important thing teachers do" (p.15). The students developed remarkable picture books and a stronger appreciation to reading.

Some even improved their concentration, attentiveness and sustained active listening skills. During the storytelling sessions I was often surprised at the length of time that the students held a state of attentive listening. The Elders who participated in this project often told me that for traditional oral storytelling to have a positive impact on student learning, it is important to teach students how to effectively listen and tell a meaningful story. Involving my students in the act of telling stories orally presented them with an opportunity to excel without the hindrance of the written word. Watching my students storytelling techniques changing from a skeletal listening of a sequence of events to a skillful, structured, appropriately embellished, knowing performance, is beyond words.

By doing this project I found out that using traditional oral stories in the junior high classroom was a surefire way to enhance the literacy arts in education and definitely a way to

motivate students even the most reluctant to connect with their culture and learning. Also my students became more aware of the listener or reader's role in creating a story.

My hope is that other teachers will envision and embrace this desire to implement oral storytelling into the classroom and researchers continue to study the benefits of this pedagogical strategy on developing their students' literacy skills.

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Appendix A

BASIC OVERVIEW

All students can benefit from inter-generational contacts. In the Athabaskan culture, grandparents are held in high regard as they contributed to the community by passing on cultural knowledge and skills. As children we practiced and learned our traditional skills by listening to stories and watching our Elders. What was so great about this style of learning was that we didn't realize that we were in training. Bringing grandparents into the classroom to share personal knowledge when studying subjects like nutrition, customs, plants, biology, and history can benefit the entire class.

To get started, first look to your class members. Send home a note or survey expressing your desire to include parents, grandparents, and Elders in your lessons. The way to ask Athabaskan Elders for help is different from Western customs. Initial and subsequent contact should be subtle. Elders in my community love to be visited with. During your conversations, allow extended pauses, giving the Elders time to think and decide what they're going to say next. If their hearing is poor, sit on the side of their better ear and make sure your lips can be seen. Direct eye contact should be limited. Standing or sitting at an angle can increase an Elder's comfort level. Keep your questions basic and specific.

Begin the request by telling a little about your class and how the Elder could help. If you are not sure if the Elder is interested, hint strongly that you would like to have his or her help and ask if she or he knows of someone who might be willing to participate. Custom teaches that it is rude to give someone a frank "no" to a request for help, so you need to recognize that a noncommittal response might mean "no," or it might mean that the request is being considered. If at some point the Elder changes the subject more than once while you are explaining your request, you should be aware that she or he might be trying to say "no." Don't force a response; if it is clearly not a "yes," let it go, or suggest they can contact you after they've thought about it.

It is important to ask before a meeting for permission to make audio or video recordings. Don't show up with the equipment; you may force consent and cause bad feelings. Permission to listen to or tape a story or lecture does not give you any right to rebroadcast or write the story with you as an author. Before my students collected their stories from their grandparents, my class had an Elder luncheon inviting our Elders in our community. It was during this time, that I explained that my students would be creating culturally relevant picture books, using traditional stories that will be shared with younger students. At this luncheon meeting, our Elders were very cooperative to telling their grandchildren stories, but voiced these concerns: Will I be respected and appreciated by the students that will come to my home? Will I be able to hear the students' questions? Will they understand what I'm trying to tell them? Should my stories be long or short? If I wanted to come to the school, how can I find the room and will I have transportation? I took these questions very seriously and explained to the Elders that my students will not participate in the storytelling event if they displayed any signs of disrespect.

If an Elder has agreed to participate in a classroom, suggest an activity or topic outline so they know what you are expecting. Provide them with optional dates and logistics. It is helpful to explain the routine, consequences for students' misbehavior, and possible options if problems come up during the storytelling session. It is your responsibility to ensure discipline is maintained. Be aware, however, that Elders generally do not support strict discipline in a public setting. Discuss how to make a smooth transition to help the Elder leave the class.

When the Elder arrives, properly introduce her or him so the Elder understands your respect for them. The teacher should be alert for visual cues from the Elder during the visit and be prepared to give unspoken signals back. The teacher should stay in the room. Give the Elder a chance to use traditional discipline. In the Athabaskan culture, this stern discipline is usually a

nonverbal direct stern look on the face pointing to the child who is misbehaving. Be prepared to move a child to sit by an adult who can role model how to listen respectfully. If you continue to have problems with students degrading or ignoring an Elder, have a teacher aide or adult native quietly intervene.

Most traditional stories are like a round, crocheted potholder. The storyteller goes round and round the subject until it all comes together and finally comes to the lesson or point. Be patient; allow the Elders to share their culture in their own way. Your students are learning how to listen. Students should refrain from interrupting to ask questions. There will be a proper time to ask questions.

As a thank-you, Elders usually appreciate student and teacher letters, pictures and story booklets, which are treasured and shown to friends and relatives. This may also encourage other Elders to participate in classroom projects. Sometimes you will find a resource person who is available for a wide variety of subjects and projects. If you use an Elder more than once, the school should provide some type of stipend in appreciation of the energy and knowledge the Elder is contributing. Be careful not to burn out your Elders. Whenever you make a request, be sure the Elder understands she is not obligated.

Keep your lessons flexible in case the Elders can't come at the last minute. Once an Elder has agreed on a time to come into your classroom, avoid changing or postponing the visit.

Appendix B

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STORY

Name _____

Date _____

When choosing a story to prepare for storytelling, consider the following:

1. Is the story short enough?

Ideally your story should be under 5 minutes. If your story is longer than that, you may start to lose the interest of your audience. It takes a skilled storyteller to hold attention for long stories. Also, since it takes a lot longer to tell a story than to read it, be sure to time your story when you practice it.

2. Do you like this story?

Is it interesting, funny, or scary to you? Chances are, if you find it interesting, you can make it fun and exciting for your audience, too.

3. Does it have a simple plot?

It is easy to lose your place in your storytelling if the story is not simple to follow. Your audience might get confused too.

4. Does this story have colorful characters with unique characteristics that distinguish them from each other?

Too many characters or similar characters will confuse your audience! Make sure to clearly define your characters within the story.

5. Is there action and suspense that will keep your listeners wanting more?

Will your audience want to know what happens next? Examine your plot to make sure it is interesting and entertaining.

6. Is the introduction interesting?

Keep your introduction short and intriguing! Use inflection and tone to build excitement for the coming story.

7. Does the wording of the story create visual images for the listener?

Use adjectives and adverbs to draw interest to your story.

8. Does your story suit the audience you're going to tell it to?

What do they want to hear? Are you telling your story to 4-year-olds, or 14-year-olds? *Gear your story to the age and interests of your audience.*

Appendix C**Story Guide**

Audience (Who is it for?)
Type of Story Why was this story a good one to tell?
Who are the characters in your story?
What is the location of your story? When does your story take place? Time⊗Day/Night)
What's the problem?
What are the big events in the story?
How was the problem solved?
What was the outcome or result?

Appendix D

Teacher Notes for Lesson One

“Stories are the threads which bind nations, cultures, and families together. Just as there is no culture without stories, no childhood or education is complete without the magic of shared stories. Stories allow all children, regardless of age, culture, or ability, instant access to a larger world, in terms of time and space, that the one in which they live.” (Cabral and Manduca, 1997)

- Follow this link to great storytellers: <http://www.epfl.net/kids/estories/>

- The National Council of Teachers of English offers the following definition of storytelling (<http://www.ncte.org/about/over/positions/category/curr/107637.htm>):

“Storytelling is relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture. It is not the same as reading a story aloud or reciting a piece from memory or acting out a drama—though it shares common characteristics with these arts. The storyteller looks into the eyes of the audience and together they compose the tale. The storyteller begins to see and re-create, through voice and gesture, a series of mental images; the audience, from the first moment of listening, squints, stares, smiles, leans forward or falls asleep, letting the teller know whether to slow down, speed up, elaborate, or just finish. Each listener, as well as each teller, actually composes a unique set of story images derived from meanings associated with words, gestures, and sounds. The experience can be profound, exercising the thinking and touching the emotions of both teller and listener.”

- Background Information on Storytelling

- Storytelling is an ancient art. Before there was the written word, early societies used stories to teach, to pass down beliefs and traditions, to teach, to entertain, and to keep oral records of historical events.

- In some societies, the central role of storytelling diminished over time with the emergence of the written word. In other cultures, storytelling has consistently played a central role in passing on cultural knowledge, factual information, morals, themes, and understandings about life.

- There is a renewed interest in storytelling as an educational tool for 1) learning about the past and present of other cultures, 2) exploring values, 3) teaching listening, 4) supporting the language development of English Language Learners, 5) helping students make sense of events in their lives (Cabral and Manduca, 1997).

- Hamilton and Weiss, in *Children Tell Stories*, suggest that storytelling promotes

students' love of language and listening skills, enhances their vocabulary, comprehension, recall, kindles their imaginations, and advances their writing skills.

*The following website offers a wide range of information about storytelling. It includes a FAQ (frequently asked questions) section that will answer many of your questions. There are also links to several very informative websites: <http://www.timsheppard.co.uk/story>

Appendix E

“THE CUBBY HOUSE”

Told by Dee Stickman

Retold by Charles Stickman

My fondest memories are those of a young child living in our winter camp. Each evening after my mother had put my youngest sister to sleep, she would tell us a story before we, my brother and I, and I also got ready for bed. We would quietly snuggle down beside her on the thick feather mattress and she'd began...

A long, long time ago there were 2 brothers who lived in the Kaiyuh Flats. They lived in a little log cabin along one of the many winding sloughs. Their camp was located in a stand of spruce trees. One day they both went to set traps for marten. They each had their own trap line.

The older brother made his cubbyhouses with dried twigs and old twigs and old cottonwood, as they had been taught to do. The younger brother made a cubbyhouse with wood he had cleaned and hewn smooth with his knife. The next day the young men went out to check their traps. The older brother came home with several martens. The younger brother checked each house, NOTHING! He hadn't caught anything!

He came home and saw the packsack full of marten that his older brother had brought them home.

The older brother skinned and stretched marten till almost morning.

The next day, they once again set out to check the traps. The older brother came home with more marten. Once again the younger had none.

The older brother, again, skinned and stretched out. That same night when the full moon was shining brightly, the younger brother went out. He walked along his cubbyhouse there he heard singing and laughing. He crept closer to see what was going on. There in front of his cubby house was a marten he was singing and dancing. This is what he was singing and dancing about “What a beautiful house, should I go in, should I go in? Growl, growl.” Then he reached in and grabbed the bait.

The younger brother was very angry as he took the sticks that were the cubby house parts and flung them away. Then he gathered dry twigs and old cottonwood and made another house. He went to each house and threw away the nice, dry, clean sticks and replaced them with cottonwood and dry twigs.

He returned home and fell asleep.

The next day each of the brothers went out, as usual, to check their traps. The older brother caught several marten as usual. The younger brother checked the first trap. There was a marten in it! He was so excited as he ran from trap to trap. He had marten in every trap. He was elated as he carried his big bag of martens back. That night they were all happy skinning and stretching marten skin.

The end.

Appendix F

“FISH EGGS”

Told by Rita Esmailka

Retold by Christopher Demoski

Prologue: This story was retold to me, Christopher Demoski, on March 16th, 2006 in my classroom at Andrew K. Demoski School in Nulato, AK. This is an Athabaskan Indian story about a Grandma who ate too many fish eggs.

Once upon a time, there was a very old grandma, who lived by the Yukon River in a fish camp. She lived all alone.

This grandma survived very well along the river. She hauled her own wood, cut, chopped and piled it up near her house. She carried her own water from the river for her washing and cooking. She took very good care of herself.

As time passed Grandma grew older and feeble. She was becoming so old that she was unable to do anything for herself. She just sat by the Yukon River watching it flow by.

One day, Grandma had nothing to eat, nothing at all. She cried often because she had nothing to eat. Her stomach was beginning to hurt with hunger pangs. She could not get any food to make the hunger pangs go away.

Every day Grandma sat down on the riverbank and cried. She cried and cried. One day she looked out her door and it was raining fish eggs.

Grandma quickly went to her cache and gathered all of her baskets. She went outside and filled each one of them. Each basket was filled to the top with fish eggs. She had stacks of baskets filled with fish eggs in her house.

Grandma's house was so filled with baskets of fish eggs. She began to eat. She ate so much fish eggs stomach bursted. She floated out of her house in one of the baskets and was never seen again.

Appendix G

ATHABASKAN TEACHINGS IN ORAL STORIES

Athabaskan teachings in Oral Stories	Inference Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Children should respect people's property and secrets. ❖ Boys should be strong to protect their sisters and family, when the dad leaves the family. ❖ A wife should obey the husband. ❖ Girls should have respect for themselves. 	<p>Fear of darkness, strength by boys to protect family, respecting people's property and secrets, trust and obedience.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Children should not be greedy. ❖ Where somebody does something wrong, punishment follows. ❖ Children should not trust strangers but stick to family members. 	<p>Discouraging greed, punishment for wrongdoing and trust.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Good behavior ❖ Discipline by children. ❖ Hard work. ❖ Care for others. 	<p>Discipline, hard work, care and respect of others, patience, and problem solving.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Respect of others. ❖ Taught children to be patient. ❖ Children learning how to listen. ❖ It taught them problem-solving skills. 	<p>Discipline, hard work, care and respect of others, patience, and problem solving.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Language skills ❖ Good manners. ❖ Respect for Elders. ❖ Love of nature and respect for their subsistence way of living. 	<p>Language skills, respect for Elders and love of nature and respect for their subsistence way of living.</p>

Appendix G2

CONTEXT, UNDERLYING ISSUES, BENEFITS

Context	Underlying issues	Benefits
❖ Athabaskan oral storytelling was mostly during the night.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ No time during day. ❖ Day is time for work. ❖ Night is time for leisure. ❖ There was no T.V. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Relaxation ❖ Leisure ❖ Informal education.
❖ Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Visitors tell new stories. ❖ Parents told stories to family gathering. ❖ Long stories were shared among members. ❖ Neighbors would join. ❖ Grandparents would tell the stories. ❖ Children tell stories learned at school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Communication skills. ❖ Universal participation. ❖ Expansion of ideas. ❖ Family get-together. ❖ Acquaintance with neighbors. ❖ Learning about the past. ❖ Learning about other places.
❖ Content—Forms and Themes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ ❖ Animals ❖ Discipline ❖ Obeying parents and Elders. ❖ Distant-time stories ❖ Not killing harmless animals. ❖ Ghosts ❖ Songs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ ❖ Cultural beliefs and practices. ❖ Relationships ❖ Obedience ❖ Encouraging sharing ❖ Trust ❖ Honoring the deceased. ❖ Hunting certain animals.
❖ Present Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Few parents telling stories. ❖ Children busy with schoolwork. ❖ Indigenous stories not embedded in school curricula. ❖ Nuclear families as opposed to extended. ❖ Parents come back home late and tired. ❖ Indigenous stories not documented. ❖ Lower school level, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Helping parents. ❖ Diversification of activities. ❖ Knowledge acquisition.

	<p>children learn stories at school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ No respect for Elders. ❖ Community division. ❖ Community more toward western lifestyle. ❖ Abuse of alcohol and drugs. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Usefulness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Respecting parents, Elders, and neighbors. ❖ Listening to advice. ❖ History of tribal origins. ❖ Preservation of the animals and environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Preservation of culture. ❖ Acting in line with community norms. ❖ Environmental protection.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Strategy for reviving Storytelling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Inviting Elders to the classroom. ❖ Parents should start storytelling. ❖ Videotaping of Elders sharing stories. ❖ Audiotape stories. ❖ Retired teachers teach storytelling. ❖ Have a storytelling festival. ❖ Radios especially local FM's be used to preserve culture. ❖ Children retelling stories to siblings. ❖ Introduce indigenous stories on local radio station 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Exposure of indigenous stories. ❖ Pedagogical ways of teaching followed. ❖ Culture documented.

Appendix H**THE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Name of the Interviewee _____

Relation to You _____ Age _____

1. What is one memory you have about growing up?

2. _____

3. _____

4. Is there a lesson you've learned about life that you think I should know?

*When you're listening to the story, be sure to learn where the story took place, the people who were present, and the outcome.

Questions adapted from Dylan Pritchett, Storyteller.

Appendix I

A STORYTELLING RUBRIC

(Adapted from Heather Forest at <http://www.storyarts.org/>)

Story Structure: Your story should have:	Describe how your story addresses each of the items in the rubric.	Check
A clear and engaging opening that grabs the reader.		
Strong characters.		
Setting: Time and place.		
A problem		
A sequence of events that is easy to follow.		
A solution and sense of closure.		
A lesson or moral or meaning to the story.		
The language of your story should:		
Be descriptive and clear		
Describe what is happening (show, don't tell)		
Include the words of the person you interviewed.		

Appendix J
STORYBOARD

Drawing: Event 1	Drawing: Event 2
Text: Event 1	Text: Event 2
Drawing: Event 3	Drawing: Event 4
Text: Event 3	Text: Event 4a

Appendix K

TIPS FOR WRITING A CHILDREN'S PICTURE STORYBOOK

Definition

Children's Picture Storybook—A work written for children that uses both text and illustrations to present a simple plot.

Format

Most picture books average 30 pages, consisting of 14 to 16 two-page spreads. A spread is the two pages of an open book.

Text •

The text of a children's book should be organized into simple sentences and short paragraphs.

The use of active verbs will keep the story vivid in the reader's mind.

Children's book authors employ literary tools to help make the story more vivid in the reader's mind. Rhythm, alliteration, repetition, refrains, onomatopoeia, simile, personification, rhyme, and imagery are commonly used devices.

Consider ending each page with a question or other method that sparks the reader's curiosity for what will happen next.

Repeating a phrase throughout the story will help hold your reader's attention.

Use a question at the end of the page to help move your reader to the next page.

Illustrations •

Some picture books have an illustration on the front cover that presents the main conflict or point of the story.

The illustrations are usually created after the text has been written.

Illustrations serve as a partner to the text.

Characterization •

The main character should have one or two easily identifiable dominant traits. •

Present the traits of your characters through both the illustrations and text. •

Young children should be able to easily identify with the

dominant traits. •

Avoid using text to present detailed descriptions of what the characters look like. Let the illustrations present the physical details of the character.

Conflict •

Limit your story to just one conflict that the main character must overcome. •

The main character should be able to deal with the main conflict in concrete terms. •

The main character should resolve the conflict him- or herself. •

Four of the most common types of conflict are individual vs. individual, individual vs. society, individual vs. nature, and individual vs. self. •

Some of the most common concerns of children include acceptance by others, family dynamics, physical growth (especially size and looks), and fear of the unknown (e.g., learning something new, participating in a new activity, going to a new place, getting lost).

Plot •

A solid, well-developed plot is essential to creating a good children's book. •

The resolution of the conflict should teach a lesson.

However, the lesson should not be told in a didactic way but instead be presented indirectly through the plot. •

Jump right into the main conflict of the story. •

Flashbacks should be used with great caution. They can confuse younger children.

Appendix L

BRAINSTORMING THE CONFLICT

1. What is the conflict? In one sentence, describe the conflict the main character will face in your story.
2. How will it be dealt with? In the left column, list actions that the main character will take to deal with the main conflict. In the right column, list complications that would or could result from the action listed in the left column.
3. What is the moral being taught in the story?

Action Complication

Appendix M

PLOT PITCH TEMPLATE

Use the template below as a guide for organizing the text of your story.

- This template is a suggestion of how the text of a 14-page children’s picture storybook could be organized. It does not include the illustrations.
- Boxes 1 and 8 are one-page spreads.
- Boxes 2 through 7 represent two-page spreads.

Plot Pitch Peer Questions

Use the following questions to help develop feedback during the plot pitch.

Peer Session Activity

1. Does the main character have one or more identifiable traits that appeal to children?	2. Is the conflict something that a child will understand?	3. Does the main character attempt at least three different actions in an endeavor to solve the conflict?
4. Is the conflict resolved through the main character’s self-reliance?	5. Overall, does the plot have “turnability” potential? Will the reader be drawn in by the plot and want to turn each page to find out what happens next?	6. Will the reader care about what happens to the main character?
6. Will the reader care about what happens to the main character?	7. Where are the more exciting places?	8. Where are the places that need more “zip” added to them?

Appendix N

BENEFITS OF STORYTELLING

- ❖ **Supporting the curriculum and preserving cultural heritage.**
Baker & Greene (1977).
- ❖ **Formative and essential to literary education.**
Chambers (1984).
- ❖ **Help students develop key skills for communication and cultural identity.**
Grugeon & Cardner (2000).
- ❖ **Encourages active listening and allows the participant to extend and explore narrative in a unique and personal way.**
Grugeon & Cardner (2000).
- ❖ **Fulfills the auditory, visual and kinesthetic approach favored by many today.**
Smith (2001).
- ❖ **Helps develop visualization skills to aid memory and enhance understanding.**
Grainger (1998).
- ❖ **Students learn about the structure of narrative, the complexity of characterization and the development of traditions and cultural differences.**
Smyth (1988).
- ❖ **Encourages creative and imaginative thought as well as talk and problem solving.**
Harrison (1996).
- ❖ **Encourages confidence in oral literacy, creativity and also emphasizes the central part of oral storytelling in the drafting and redrafting of stories before the writing phases.**
Jones (1988).
- ❖ **Provides an opportunity for students to listen and develop an appreciation of the range, beauty, and rhythm of language.**
Collins and Cooper (1997).
- ❖ **Provides an opportunity for students to interact with adults on a personal level.**
Collins and Cooper (1997).

- ❖ **Helps students develop reading skills and sparks an interest in reading. It encourages students to look at various literacy materials to find a story they want to share or to find stories that have been told to them.**
Collins and Cooper (1997).
- ❖ **Allows students to share feelings.**
Collins and Cooper (1997).
- ❖ **Helps students see literature as a reflection of human experiences.**
Collins and Cooper (1997).

Appendix O**COMPARING STORIES**

Story Title	Characters	Problem	Setting	Solution	Moral Learned	Explain things in life.
The Cubby House						
Elliot And Ellsie						
Fish Eggs						
How the Pinky Got Small						
Doyon						