

## **2008 NCTE Presentation**

### **TRANSFORMING STORYTELLING IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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*We cannot understand how children find their way into print unless we understand the principles of their meaning making (Kress, 1997, p. xvii).*

*Children have many representational resources available to them. In fact, long before they begin school, and throughout the primary grades, they are uncannily adept at interpreting the world through all of their senses (Berghoff et. al, 1998)*

#### **Educational Goals:**

- To offer accessible and immediate strategies related to employing digital technologies, spoken word and improvisation in the classroom in order that students develop highly personal and engaging relationships with text.
- To demonstrate how educators can layer representations of meaning making in their Language Arts classrooms.
- To practice designing and crafting writing through the pictorial, linguistic, theatrical and musical modes.

#### **Designing Writing Through Theatrical, Pictorial and Musical Modes:**

##### **-Thinking in multimodal ways about performance poetry**

- Read or play with a piece of performance poetry then reflect on what made it interesting (e.g. Introduce inflection, emotion, pause, intent, eye contact, gesture pace, rhyme, audience participation, mood and tone).

##### **-Ba-Da-Ga**

#### **Crafting Writing Through Theatrical, Pictorial and Musical Modes:**

##### **-Pick an image. Write all the things you notice about the setting.**

- Introduce Text or Photo: Text can be from any piece of literature or history. (We used a segment from “Pier 21 Gateway of Hope” by Linda Granfield.)

- What does the setting tell you about your character or story?

### Sound Round:

- Create soundscapes that capture the mood and atmosphere of Pier 21.
- Assign people to create sounds and rhythms that are high, low, fast and slow. Practice and share.

### Creating a Chorus:

- Assign to each group a character: the immigration officer, an immigrant child, an immigrant father or mother.
- In groups create a chorus of words reflecting the point of view of the assigned character that complements and works with the rhythm created in the Sound Round. Practice and share.

### Write in Role:

- As individuals, do a timed writing in role for 3-5 minutes. Exchange it with another individual from your group.

### -Writing through a mask

- try on a costume piece that one of your characters might wear or carry a prop that one of your characters might carry.
- Write a scene incorporating that costume or prop piece.

### -Gestured language:

- As you write, think about a character's bodily adjustments such as: tensed vs. relaxed muscles, space consumption (e.g. small/tall, closed/openness), and pace (quick movements/slow movements).
- Remember that good gestured language shows both emotion and characterization.

### -Hot seating

Discover deeper character meanings.

- Choose a story character.
- Takes on the persona of this character.
- Allow other students to question this character, as though he/she is on a talk show.

## **Editing Writing Through Theatrical, Pictorial and Musical Modes:**

### - Slash mental processes and weak verbs.

- The best verbs create a mental action in your mind— someone doing something or acting on something (e.g. jumping, stretching, tottering).
- Eliminate un-actable descriptions (e.g. good, nice, home, trusted, hoped).

### -Explore subtext:

- Dialogue is the tip of the iceberg (what is the subtext?)

### -Remember That Dialogue is Not Written-Down Conversation.

- The job of a writer, especially in fiction, is to take the meat of the conversation and make it more interesting than it would have been in real life. Don't ever fall so in love with your own words that you can't bear to get rid of some of them. In non-fiction, the writer chooses the most interesting, revealing pieces of dialogue.
- Good dialogue reveals character, moves the plot forward, skips the clumsiness of uhs and uums.

### -Examine active voice/passive voice

- Active voice is always more interesting than passive voice (e.g. the captain was shoved off the plank or the pirate shoved the captain off the plank) or (the old paint vs. the paint peeled)

### -Pinwheel Poetry:

- With striking lines in hand, stand back to back with the other people in your character group. Listen to the voices in your group and speak your selected lines when you have the intuition to do so.

### -Playback theatre

- Ask someone to tell a brief story.
- Now ask another person to re-tell that same story with exaggeration (using voice and gesture).
- Ask the first storyteller what he/she could add to the story to make it more engaging.

## **Disseminating Writing Through Theatrical, Pictorial, Musical, and Digital Modes:**

### -Finale

- Share

The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate that writing is multimodal. If we begin to teach the tools of multimodality in education systems, we may develop stronger, more confident writers.