

FAMILY STORYTELLING

Since ancient times, storytelling has fired the imaginations of listeners of all ages in every corner of the world. Generation after generation, families have told stories to entertain, instill values, pass on traditions and express their hopes and dreams.

Storytelling is highly regarded as an important step toward developing children's literacy. When you tell your children stories, you are building their vocabularies, giving them a sense of how stories work and exercising their imaginations as they visualize the story.

A family rich in stories has a true legacy to pass along. Here are some suggested storytelling ideas from Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), a national nonprofit organization that inspires children to read.

- Choose an appropriate story for the audience. Make sure young listeners will be able to follow the plot, and that the story can be told within the limits of their attention span. Folk and fairy tales, family history and joyous, silly or painful moments from your own childhood all are good sources.
- Read or rehearse the story until you know it well.
- Tell stories you like. If you are not enthused about a story, your voice will give away your lack of interest. Remember that enthusiasm is contagious.
- Use colorful words. Rich, descriptive language will help your children visualize the story as it unfolds.
- Change your voice. Distinguish among the different voices of your characters by changing your own voice. Speeding up and slowing down or raising and lowering your voice can dramatize story action and mood also.
- Have your children participate. They can say the magic words at your cue, chant lines that repeat, or add sound effects. If you are making the story up as you go along, ask them to contribute.
- Use props. Simple household props can liven up a story and encourage children to retell it themselves. Children can also make their own stick or paper bag puppets or play with felt cutouts on a felt covered board.
- Tell it again! Like a favorite book, a good story can be retold over and over. In time, your children may want to tell the story themselves.

