

STORYTELLING CLUBS

A Guide and Introduction

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USING THIS PACK

This information pack is for anyone interested in starting or running a storytelling club for children or adults.

Where you begin will depend on what you already know and do.

If storytelling as a concept is new to you [you have of course been telling stories all your life] then look at Sections 1 and 5, where you will find general descriptions and explanations, guidelines and tips.

If you know something of storytelling already but not much about clubs, start with Section 2 for general principles and pointers about running clubs.

Then see Section 3 or 4 for more detailed practical advice and distilled experience about the kind of club that interests you.

Finally, Sources And Resources tells about the more detailed accounts of how people have planned and run clubs that are available from the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

CREDITS

The pack has been edited by Ewan McVicar.

Sections 1 and 5 are reprinted from *Telling Tales*, the Scottish Storytelling Centre's Resource Pack for Storytelling. *The Editorial Group for Telling Tales were David Campbell, Bea Ferguson, Sheila Douglas, Christine MacLeod, Ewan McVicar, Claire Mulholland and Donald Smith [Chair].*

More importantly, we have drawn on the generously shared wisdom and experience of the following storytellers, teachers and librarians around Scotland who have been involved in creating and running clubs.

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And we have quoted extensively, with permission, from the excellent *Story Clubs In Schools* by Jane Hislam, published by the Society for Storytelling.

WHAT IS STORYTELLING

Storytelling happens everywhere, all the time. Everyone tells stories. About the events of their daily lives, about the past and the future. Some stories are true, some might be true, some are unlikely to be true. Some are downright lies.

A story has probably the following in it - at least two characters, a setting, an event or change, and of course its beginning, middle and end.

Some storytellers tell the tale exactly as and how they heard it, and tell when and where they heard it.

Some storytellers take the germ or skeleton of a dry old tale and breathe into it life and action, colour and adventure, incident and detail and elements taken from other stories, and maybe a twist at the end. Some storytellers string a series of incidents, characters and comments together into an amusing or exciting narrative, then stop with a 'shaggy dog' ending, or a cliff-hanger promise to tell more next time. Some give a historical account with each detail as exact and true as they can make it, others pile outrageous detail onto implausible premise with a disregard for consistency and internal logic that is only hidden from the listener by the speed and complexity of the storyteller's invention.

There has been a tremendous increase of interest in storytelling in Scotland over the past few years, with clubs and festivals being started all around the country. Festivals can be a taking out of storytelling to the public in various venues, a concentration of events in one venue, or a celebration of storytelling by children coming from their schools to a large location to tell to other children.

SOME TYPES OF STORIES

True – stories from history or from personal experience or knowledge

Urban Myth – stories asserted to be true, but known widely in varying versions

Myth – stories about gods or demigods, about creations of life and places, natural events

Legend – stories stated to be true about historical events / places / people

Circle – stories with a circular pattern, ending as they began

Chain – stories with a series of inter-related events

Fable – stories designed to teach a moral point

Why – stories that explain something – a characteristic / a name / an event / a habit or superstition

Who was right? – stories that end with a question or debating point

Jack – stories about an apparent simpleton who is in fact the clever hero

Tall – stories with bravado and exaggeration as the main element

Shaggy dog – stories which are a series of amusing incidents or descriptions, ending with a deliberately laboured pun or other wordplay gagline

Nursery – widely known stories typically told by adults to small children

Fairy – stories that involve 'supernatural characters' – fairies, witches, giants, dwarves / dragons

Ghost and Scary – stories about supernatural apparitions and fears

Traditional – stories for which no author can be identified, they often exist in varying versions in many countries and languages

Authored – stories made by an identified person

TELLING A STORY - SHARING A STORY

WHAT IS A STORY?

A story has a beginning, a middle and an end - in that order usually - and a point the teller wants you to get. The point may be to get you to laugh, to sigh, to nod or shake your head, to educate or amuse you or remind you of a truth. Often a story has a neat ending or wrapping up of loose ends - but not always. A story can last from a minute to a week in the telling. It can be true, a modern myth, an ancient myth, a legend, a string of wondrous events and descriptions, an amusing meander that comments on modern manners, a shaggy dog tale.

WHO TELLS STORIES?

You do. Everybody tells stories. People who cannot speak still relate events and observations with sign language or talker boards. When you tell a story to friends or others you choose one that seems appropriate to the setting, the age and experience of your listeners, and you explain anything you think might not be understood. You give the story a setting, characters and shape.

WHAT IS PARTICULAR ABOUT STORYTELLING?

Storytelling is speaking to other people rather than reading aloud. You may have memorised your story or be recomposing it as you speak. Your story may be an old one you heard someone tell, or one you found in print and wanted to make live again.

Some storytellers tell the story as close as possible to the way they heard it, read it, or composed it themselves. Other tellers develop and add to the tale as they talk, perhaps incorporating spontaneous observations or wordplay. They may contextualise the Story into a different setting than the one they met it in. They may recast and relocate the tale to a major extent, and use various performance skills, effects, props or audience participation in their telling. Storytelling is a kind of performance, surely the ancestor of drama and creative writing, but it is also direct communication and interaction with the listeners, without a stage curtain or printed page intervening.

WHO LISTENS TO STORYTELLING?

Storytelling is directed at and aims to relate to an active audience - of one baby or a thousand adults. The kinds of responses sought include entertainment and thrill, amusement, education, a moral teaching point.

WHY DO PEOPLE TELL STORIES?

- * Because they have a tradition in their family - as the Traveller people of Scotland have;
- because they have an interest in tradition and folklore;
- * because they want to share a particular story they have heard with others;
- * because they want to support and spread storytelling as a communication and art form;
- * because they wish to pass on and encourage an interest in oral history;
- because they have educational targets which storytelling can help meet - promoting speech skills, reading skills, creative writing skills, general communication and artistic skills,

WHY DO PEOPLE LISTEN TO STORIES?

As a break from speaking, for entertainment and all the other things mentioned above. We seem to need stories to help us understand the world (think of how parables are used). What we as an audience do not want is gratuitous moralising, hectoring, condescension or unshaped creative writing presented as tale-telling.

HOW DO PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN STORIES?

We can range through silent attention, response through laughter or noises of appreciation, and answering questions posed by the teller as a part of the telling. We can join in in a ritual way, e.g. rhymes, memory elements, formula responses. We may be invited to select which way a part of the story may go. Audience volunteers may find themselves taking on the acting out of characters or dialogue within the tale.

STORYTELLING CLUBS IN ACTION

Storytelling clubs are places where people old or young or of mixed ages can get together on some regular basis to share the pleasure of hearing and telling stories.

Why have a club?

“To provide a supportive environment for those [adults] who wish to tell a story – be they a beginner or a more established teller wishing to try out a new story. To invite guest storytellers so that listeners can learn from the experience of seeing ‘professionals’ [and for entertainment]. We have a strong emphasis on providing a welcoming, friendly atmosphere.”

“To enable children to express their love of stories, use their imagination, have fun, It is a good way of growth, personal and educational.”

Where and when?

Storytelling groups are run in youth centres, church halls, libraries, social clubs, pubs etc. What you need is a suitable room, with a nearby opportunity for refreshments during the break. Remember that storytelling can be very quiet speaking, so outside noise which normally is not a problem may prove intrusive for storytelling. Some clubs are peripatetic - they move around a number of libraries, or meet in turn at members'houses.

School clubs can be part of the curriculum, or a lunch-time or after school club. Some clubs for children meet in libraries or arts centres. Some of them are time-limited – 7 weeks each group, a ten week lifetime, Clubs for adults nearly all meet on a weekday evening, 7.30pm till 9.30pm or 10pm, in social or arts centres, cafes, licenced premises, church halls. Some of these clubs are also attended by children. The only Scottish club specifically for families meets in a church hall. Meetings can be weekly, monthly, or for a set number of meetings with breaks at holiday times. A session typically will last 2 hours to 3 hours, with a break half way through for refreshments and socialising. What day or night of the week you meet can be crucial. Do not accept easily nice premises which are only available at unpopular hours.

Format of a club session

This will in part depend on age group and setting, but in general you will have a person or persons in charge of such matters as collecting fees, recording addresses for new members etc., while another person is welcoming new people and organising a list of who will tell when. Remember to make a provision for members to bring guests with them or to sign interested people in. There is often a temptation to wait until more audience have arrived. One good way of getting things going is for the first teller to be a regular member who has a light touch and will be able to encourage new people in without breaking the flow of the tale.

Getting the session going, and keeping it on track

The club needs an initial organising group to set it up. If necessary create a small committee. There is a crucial need for a facilitator - someone who will get the storytelling started, make sure the audience behaves well, welcome newcomers, find out who would like to tell a story during the session and keep them informed on whether and when they are likely to be called upon, introduce them fairly and helpfully, and look after any guest storyteller who comes. But that individual must not carry the whole club. You need an active and cooperative atmosphere, in which everyone there listens to the stories. The very worst set up is where the organiser and cronies stand and chat at the bar while stories are being told.

Age group of members

The club can be:

specifically for children - if so make sure you have a minimum membership age of, say, five years, and insist that children under, say, 12 years are accompanied by an adult - this will reduce the ratio of roaming nappy-clad tearaways; for families; or for adults - this does not mean that the club must meet in licensed premises!

Initial publicity

Do not rely on a story or listing in the local paper or radio station. Good leaflets and posters can be produced cheaply on computer, by one of the initial organising group rather than commercially! Get two mailing lists together of whoever might be interested in the club - one for media contacts to get the word

out, and one of people who might come along. The most important element however is word of mouth - make sure everyone involved in the start up club talks the club up and works on their friends and families to come along.

Initial session

Many club members will be nervous and hesitant about telling at their first session. So for the opening session you need to make sure you have enough guest tellers -perhaps from other clubs - on hand to set the tone and make sure the session goes well and is not monopolised by one or two voices.

Ongoing information and publicity - to members

Once you have got started, make sure you keep gathering names and addresses of people who come, and send them regular mailings to remind and inform them.

Organisational aspects - constitution

If you are going to seek financial support, or if you want to undertake a regular let of local authority premises, you will probably need to have a constitution for the club. Do not panic. Your local authority arts officer should be able to help, as can other clubs. Form a sub-group to do the boring grind of adapting other club constitutions to fit what you want to do, then have that sub-group report back to the larger group.

Financial aspects

You will want to seek funding from other bodies - your local authority will have someone, usually designated as an arts officer, who can advise you on what monetary support may be available to you locally - new group start-up grants, grants to help bring in guest tellers, local companies who have a policy of 'community involvement'. But you must generate most of your income yourselves. You may also need to undertake fundraising events of the usual kind and range.

Dependant on what premises you use, you may have a formal membership, an admission charge, or a 'suggested donation level'.

Other linked activities

As you progress and grow you will want to consider being more than just a tellers' club. A storytelling festival, training events, evening or weekend study courses, visits to other clubs or to festivals, running storytelling events as part of a community festival are all possibilities.

Clubs / groups within other organisations and activities

There are many kinds of groups who could either create a storytelling group within their group, or organise regular storytelling sessions as part of their usual activities:

- * within a youth group - cubs / brownies / guides woodcraft / scouts / boys or girls brigade, or within a youth club;
- * within a women's group or a WRI group;
- * within a folk club, a TMSA branch or other song group context;
- * within various education settings - after school care group / school lunchtime group, school drama group, school English study group / adult studies, college or university group;
- * within a church.

The group could be linked to or part of activities of one or more of the above groups, or a stand-alone group. Most of the points discussed in detail regarding stand-alone groups can be applied here also. The crucial differences will probably lie in having organisational staff or committee support, premises available, and some financial support.

KINDS OF CLUBS

ADULT CLUBS

The oldest storytelling club in Scotland has met monthly in a pub room in the heart of Edinburgh for 10 years. Each meeting has a guest teller who is paid a fee, and a host who encourages others to tell. There are clubs in Aberdeenshire, Fife, Glasgow, the Borders, and elsewhere.

CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS CLUBS

Over 3 years one worker has run a club in an Edinburgh primary school for 6-8 girls aged 10 to 11 years. Previously it was a lunchtime club, now it is after school hours.

For ten weeks three storytellers and a teacher ran a ST-UN after school club in Glasgow for twenty children nearly all from Urdu-speaking families, ending in a school-time performance with scenery and props. There are clubs in Aberdeenshire, Glasgow and Edinburgh.

CHILDREN'S LIBRARY CLUBS

In Edinburgh library staff run the Great Big Enormous Crocodile Club, seven weekly session for each group. Storytelling Unplugged [ST-UN] have run several 10 week clubs in libraries. There is of course lots of less formal storytelling in libraries, by library staff and by visiting storytellers.

CLUBS ON THE MOVE

A couple of adult clubs in non-urban areas have chosen to be peripatetic, meeting monthly in different locations. Adult clubs are more prone to problems of change of venue [by choice or enforced] and attendance level than children's clubs, and long-standing clubs go into abeyance.

FAMILIES CLUBS

The only club in Scotland specifically for families is the Even Better Crack Club, which has met in the same Glasgow church hall for six years. But clubs nominally for adults usually welcome young people as well.

STORYTELLING UNPLUGGED CLUBS

ST-UN have developed a storytelling club model in which clubs for children meet in libraries or other after-school locations. The clubs have a life of 10 weeks culminating in a performance or other event.

ADD-ON CLUBS

On occasion a storytelling club is run for a limited time as part of the activities of an ongoing group, perhaps by a visiting guest teller. Benefits include security of premises and core group, problems may include clashes between parent group's values and those of the teller.

Clubs for Children

WHAT NAME - Pragmatic or Attractive?

Even Better Crack, No Bad Crack, The Great Big Enormous Crocodile, Chit Chat, Cric Crac, Cookie Crunch, Storytellers in Craigmillar, St Francis' School Storytelling Club, Alford Academy Storytelling Club.

One club "changes name and format every year – The Barclays Storytelling Club, Butterfly Tales Club, September Storytelling Club."

WHERE AND WHEN

Most clubs run in cities, a few in towns or villages.

Clubs within schools or in libraries run weekly within term time, while community based clubs run monthly. School clubs can be part of the curriculum, a lunch-time 30 minute club, or an after school club running for 75 or 90 minutes. Some after school clubs for children meet in libraries or arts centres. Two clubs run in church halls on a Saturday morning, from 10am on. Finding suitable accommodation can be hard, and clubs often settle for what they can get.

Some clubs are time-limited. The Crocodile library project runs seven weeks for each group. St-UN clubs based in libraries or arts centres have a ten week lifetime.

Six Scottish clubs for children have been running for three years or more, the longest for seven years. "We have changed from lunchtime school club to after school club for two reasons. First, not enough time at lunchtime. Second, to enable older children to come back."

WHO AND WHAT FOR

Club age ranges include 6-8 years, 8-10 years, 9-11 years, 8-12 years, P4 to P7, families. One club has primary school participants with Secondary 5/6 students as helpers, another has Secondary S1 to S6 pupils as members. Membership numbers range from '10 to 15 members' to '25 to 30 average'.

"They have lots of different interests but love making up stories – singing – small bits of dance and action stories or songs. We have been into classes and nursery, which the children loved."

"We aim to have 12--15 youngsters in the club. We aim to encourage their participating in storymaking ... then telling and retelling short stories ... sometimes sharing bigger stories ... and over the years we have recorded a few tapes / CDs. Through each term it is good to see increase in attention span and confidence to tell. There is real enthusiasm each year for CHIT CHAT from the youngsters." CHIT CHAT

CHILDREN on storytelling clubs
 "Before the club started I didn't think I could do anything like this. Now it's fun!"
"When I start I feel scared, but I feel good afterwards."
 "I can tell a story when I've got a picture in my head!"
 JANE HISLAM

WHO RUNS THEM AND HOW THEY START

Many children's club have a single organiser, who may consider the club part of school duties, but is otherwise unpaid. Others have 'three facilitators' or 'two library officers and a Family Learning worker'.

"When starting a club keep it small – have facilitators who work well together and have different skills – i.e. storytellers, can play instruments, have good ideas for games – sufficiently self-confident to be happy with a certain amount of chaos and know when it must be re-directed. Good at craft things – models, masks, face-painting, costume – patient, calm, humorous." STORYTELLERS IN CRAIGMILLAR

"Clubs come about because a particular teacher or adult develops a passion for storytelling and can see the benefits. Most clubs generally take place in a relaxed and informal setting away from the pressure of the classroom."

"S5/6 pupils opt in to this after-school activity. Most have no previous experience of storytelling but may have been on drama or art or working with young children."

Organisers find there is a problem of 'fallout of volunteers'.

Club initiators have varying approaches to beginning.

Spontaneous:

"How do you get them started? You just do it!"

Multimedia:

The setting for one storytelling club included the creation of a big collage tree in the corner with spreading branches, and involved parents.

Carefully Structured:

"I keep a detailed log of plans and comments since the club began, at the beginning I carefully structured sessions so that I got the balance between telling myself, story activities and games and children retelling stories right."

Over time as confidence builds leaders have found they are more flexible about planning.

JANE HISLAM

Opinions vary on whether a constitution is important. A constitution or rules for the club, drawn up jointly between organisers and members, defining limits and acceptable behaviour, can be invaluable in difficult times.

Members are recruited through announcements at school assemblies, flyers, school bulletin and prospectus, letters to parents, mailing lists and email lists.

CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS USEFUL FOR STARTING A STORY CLUB

What age range of children do you want to involve?

Have you got another adult to help you?

Have you got a repertoire of story games and activities?

What room will you use?

Is it appropriately arranged?

Could it be made more attractive with suitable decorations?

How are you going to publicise the club?

When will the meeting take place?

Have you got the support of the rest of the school/your head teacher?

Are you going to put a limit on numbers?

Would you like to involve parents?

Do you hope the children will "perform" outside the club?

Have you got your first stories ready?

How would you like the club to develop?

JANE HISLAM

WHAT HAPPENS IN A CLUB MEETING?

"Opening – asking children for news etc – what has happened since last meeting. Then action songs to focus children. Usually experienced tellers lead off with a story, then others are asked if they want to tell, sing, recite etc. There is a break [with crisps included in donation]. Again song, stories, rhymes, etc. Children [and parents] are always encouraged to actively participate at every stage." EVEN BETTER CRACK CLUB

"In one well used formula, the session is started by an adult or an experienced child teller who tells a story and introduces a related activity. Children break into small groups work through the activity, then report back."

"Most of the stories are aimed at under 8s, as this is usually our target audience. Creating their own

Alford Academy school club meets at lunchtime.

"Due to short amount of time we can't do very much. Usually we use part of the time creating our own stories (using cards, pictures, questions as quick stimulus to creating short, quick tales.) Over a period of weeks each person will learn a story which they will then tell to a pre-agreed audience at the end of term (usually local nursery or infant class). Each week we try to focus on an aspect of the story they are learning (how to begin, how to interact with audience, etc) or general tips on storytelling (eye contact, voice, etc)."

stories from various stimuli is very popular."

"Children increasingly take on responsibility and initiative, asking for support when they need it. Teachers' input remains crucial in giving enthusiastic feedback, introducing children to new material, and providing ideas for improving technique."

PERFORMANCES

"A performance at the end of a session gives a focus for work, and people enjoy it."

The club can get recognition by the rest of the school by performing for other classes, for assemblies, for parents at public events, or through visits to local nursery classes or day centres.

TEACHERS on problems of Story Clubs

"Impatient listeners. It takes a while for storytellers to realise that good listening is an equal part of the process."

"Children telling long boring stories that others don't want to listen to."

"Convincing parents that it's not a waste of time."

"At first I used to keep a register but I dropped that. Now it's OK if they drop out - as my own confidence has increased I find I'm much more likely to take it as it comes."

JANE HISLAM

FINANCES

Only one club charges its members, at 70p a session.

Most school clubs have no separate budget or costs.

A few clubs get outside funding - BBC Children In Need Appeal, local authority arts funding, Book Trust sessions.

One club pays travel expenses to helpers, and some pay fees to their occasional professional guest tellers, although many clubs never have guest tellers.

WHY HAVE A CLUB?

"To enable children to express their love of stories, use their imagination, have fun. It is a good way of growth, personal and educational."

"The group must love it and want to keep coming back. No-one should feel threatened, feel a fool, feel they have little to contribute. A valuable skill it can teach is that of listening to others and being patient, even if the 'performance' is rambling."

"Recognising that wonderful moment when another person's concentration, thought, creativity and feeling galvanises a whole group and they are 'gob-smacked'. Wonderful!"

TEACHERS on best aspects of storyclubs

"Seeing the audience reaction and getting eye contact from every one of a group of enraptured listeners!

Hearing your stories retold but better, funnier, more scary!"

"When a shy child retells a story and is absolutely delighted with himself or herself."

"Seeing two 'naughty' boys workign together with total concentratiion, completely involved in the process fo storytelling. I'm glad I managed to get photographic proof of this!"

"Being personally motivated through the children's enthusiasm to go to storytelling events myself and develop my own repertoire and confidence."

"To see the confidence that storytellers take away with them. This can be especially exciting when this happens with children who are not confident in reading and writing."

"When children come and say, "I can't wait for the next Storytelling Club!"

"The best bit is when you experience children telling stories with confidence and pleasure and knowing you've had a part in that process."

JANE HISLAM

SOME ADVICE

"Plan every session in detail – it may move off the plan but have a plan always. Try and have familiar activities – almost like a ritual – a beginning or an ending – it can have variety but it gives security."

"Food is a welcoming and nurturing start. We found that a link with parents (by initial visit, then letters and phone calls) has been invaluable for this group of children."

"Having a list of games, activities, ideas to draw on is very helpful."

Planning a programme

Build up gradually, basing activity on circle games.

Other activities - stories with refrains, action songs, story games, using a box of artefacts.

Have plenty of stories (with planned progression or responsive to opportunities that emerge).

Have children increasingly control the programme by coming with their own stories.

Respond to other programmes or issues arising in the school, from themes like Elizabethan Times to issues such as bullying or the environment.

Build repertoire and use a variety of good stories to keep balance between feeding in ideas and drawing from the children themselves

This is best done by listening to other tellers at festivals, inviting in other tellers, going to local story performances or clubs. Books are also helpful, but require more resuscitating than learning 'eye to eye, ear to ear and heart to heart'.

It is also important to provide a range of different audiences for children to perform to, and tellers to inspire them.

Professional storytellers may be brilliant but they can't personalise a story as the teacher can. JANE HISLAM

Clubs for Adults

WHAT NAME

Pragmatic or Attractive?

One used include Guid Crack, Better Crack, No Bad Crack, Cric Crac, First Week Storytelling Club, The Village Storytelling Centre, Hear And Tell, GAS - First Friday Fling.

WHERE AND WHEN

Clubs for adults nearly all meet on a weekday evening, 7.30pm till 9.30pm or 10pm, in social or arts centres, cafes, licenced premises, church halls. Some of these clubs are also attended by children. The only Scottish club specifically for families meets in a church hall.

“The venue is critical.”

“Over our six years our venues have included a pub lounge, a basement club, a top floor staff room in a bookshop, and a Nepalese style tearoom.”

“We started in the school library but this wasn’t suitable as people were constantly coming and going.”

“We started in a few different pubs but they didn’t want us – didn’t spend enough. We

eventually settled for a church as it was available and free!!”

Venue is important - of course! Dry or boozy? Library, village hall or church? What kind of audience are you trying to attract, and how is the chosen venue perceived by your target group, and by the community in general? What time will you start your sessions, and when will they finish? If you're aiming for a family audience should meetings be on Friday or Saturday evenings, so there isn't school the next day? Or could they take place during the day on a Saturday or Sunday? How often will you meet? Once a week, once a month? Will the latter be frequent enough to ensure continuity, the former too much of a good thing? Do you want a break in the middle with refreshment provided, or could this happen at the end of a session? During the warmer weather it's great to have somewhere you can meet outside or go undercover if there's rain (or midges). And if there's somebody connected with your venue who's sympathetic to your cause (landlady, janny, librarian), rather than just putting up with you, it can really help. The questions go on, but, in the end, you have to make a start, and learn as you go along. BOB PEGG

WHO AND WHAT FOR

“A mixture of working storytellers and people interested in storytelling.”

“We had a range of members from doctors to magazine editors to elderly crofters to children. Usually at least one member ‘told’, sometimes several.”

“Children are from a few months old to ten years old. Many have been coming for years. Active participation is encouraged – either telling, singing, acting out stories individually or in groups. If audience members wish to tell, then they do.”

“We aim for the values of the traditional Ceilidh house – welcome, recognition, respect, participation, celebration – within a clear structure of hospitality.”

On one memorable occasion the majority of people in a gathering of well over thirty people told a story, sang a song, asked a riddle, played a tune. And it's extremely important to us - and always has been - that this kind of mix of music and story is maintained.” BOB PEGG

“Those who attend are mainly local people in their 50s, 60s and 70s (someone in their 90s as well!), but a few younger people, and sometimes children, come. We expect about 50 to attend, and they are mainly people who were not familiar with oral storytelling until The Village came into being. Most have developed a passion for hearing stories now. We usually have a guest who will tell stories, but our MC now tells stories, and some of those who contribute songs begin them by way of a ‘tale’.” RACHEL SMILLIE

WHO RUNS THEM AND HOW THEY START

Of course clubs are started by enthusiasts for storytelling. Usually one or two key individuals with support, sometimes a wider group are involved, or drawn in during the initial stage.

“The club has run for six years, started by two professional tellers in its present venue. The format has not really changed in that time – if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!”

“A couple of years ago we started the *First Week Storytelling Club* in Ross-shire, with a grant from the Scottish Storytelling Centre. Its aim was to meet during the first week of every month. As this is the Highlands, where a small population is spread out over a wide territory, we had the option of trying to set up a club which moved from place to place with each meeting, or of establishing ourselves in one location to which people might travel. We chose the latter option - specifically Cromarty, where response to previous storytelling events had been enthusiastic -having decided that the mechanics of moving each month would make the organisation of a successful peripatetic club too onerous.” BOB PEGG

Try and make sure that you have a handful of like-minded souls who are willing to share the work involved: someone with a PC who knows enough about DTP to make posters and fliers; someone who doesn't mind tramping the streets stuffing fliers through letter boxes; someone who can chat up local newspaper editors; someone who can host an evening successfully; someone with the time and space to put up guest storytellers - and so on. If all these functions are to be fulfilled by one or two people, the club can easily become a burden rather than a pleasure. I'm not sure whether you should be responding to local demand in setting up your club (why are the people who are asking for the club not starting it up themselves?), but, if your club (gathering, or whatever) is happening somewhere other than your immediate community, it really helps to have one enthusiastic individual on the ground in that community. They can supply all kinds of information you might never know: where is a good place to hold your club (for instance, in a community with a strong Free Church element, many folk who could make a great contribution to an evening probably wouldn't come along if your venue is a pub); what nights of the week to avoid (e.g. quiz night in the pub); who to invite to perform from among the locals, and who might need a special invitation to come along; deadlines for the local newsletter, often the best way to make sure everyone knows your gathering is happening - and so on. And if this person is well thought of and gregarious they will also make sure that news gets round by word of mouth. BOB PEGG

WHAT HAPPENS IN A CLUB MEETING?

“Committee member welcomes everyone, and invites guest storyteller (if there is one) to start. First half (one hour) is guest teller. Then tea / coffee and chat. Second half is more open and ‘audience’ are encouraged to tell a tale. Guest teller ends the evening. We alternate – one month with guest, one month without. On night when we have no guest it is open house, and anyone who wants to tell is free to do so. So far no-one has had to be turned away due to lack of time. In future we are going to appoint two committee members on a rota to host these evenings – formalize it a wee bit. They will also start us off with a tale and finish the evening. All kinds of stories are told, occasional song, some poetry – especially Doric. Tea / coffee and chat at ‘break time’. The focus is on welcoming people and encouraging anyone who wants to tell a story.” GAS – FIRST FRIDAY FLING

“The host takes a strong role – welcoming people, inviting them to contribute, ‘structuring’ the evening.

“Experienced member is invited to host for the evening. If possible evening starts with music or song. The meetings are informal, usually an open circle with a culture of participation, where everyone is encouraged to do so. Not only formal storytelling, but can include songs, music, jokes, riddles, etc.”

NIGHTLY FEES

Clubs in Scotland usually ask for a nightly

“In our meetings we've always tried to bring together storytelling with other forms of popular entertainment, particularly music and song, because we feel they naturally belong together and complement each. Our primary aim has been to entertain and be entertained, with no particular agenda, except possibly an emphasis on Traveller culture - but only because, in our opinion, some of the best storytellers and traditional singers we know are also from Traveller backgrounds. We welcome families, and encourage them to attend and try not to let this fact produce an atmosphere of political correctness and censorship (though it's easier said than done).” BOB PEGG

fee of £1 to £3, to cover the costs of rental of premises, mailing and advertising, and fees to guest tellers. Most clubs suggest a donation rather than charging a fee at the door. “The paying is part of the ritual structure – the hat goes round, ideally 2/3rds of the way through the first half.”

WHY HAVE A CLUB?

“To provide a supportive environment for those [adults] who wish to tell a story – be they a beginner or a more established teller wishing to try out a new story. To invite guest storytellers so that listeners can learn from the experience of seeing ‘professionals’ [and for entertainment]. We have a strong emphasis on providing a welcoming, friendly atmosphere.”

“We aim to preserve by telling all types of stories, especially traditional ones in both English and Gaelic, together with songs, rhymes, and incantations connected with the stories.”

MORE GOOD ADVICE FROM PEOPLE WHO HAVE RUN CLUBS

“Apply to Book Trust for sessions, to help defray costs.”

“Decide what the club’s purpose is [i.e. adult / family, arena for beginners / showcase for more established tellers] before you start. Have access to some sort of refreshment.”

“One of the most successful aspects of the project has been the mix of stories, rhymes, songs and crafts which break the sessions up and keep the children's attention focussed.

“Because we don't have a large budget to employ guest storytellers, we have plundered our connections ... discovering in the process that many people who would not have considered themselves as storytellers can actually tell a story well, and have found that they have enjoyed participating. We find candlelight lends a lot of atmosphere. The environment needs to be as cosy and intimate as possible. People should feel comfortable, and not under threat of having to tell a story, whilst knowing at the same time a contribution would be welcome.”

THE VILLAGE

“The other factor that really seems to have helped us is the way the project has developed and changed over the years, partly with the introduction of different personnel at different stages.”

“Unless people have a lot of resources / finances, thinking small is best as it fosters an atmosphere of social development by being intimate and close. It also encourages the development of storytelling skills in a warm, friendly supportive environment.”

Noel Cochrane suggests Community Education activities could be a good framework for regular storytelling groups or clubs. Noel has run an evening course at Drummond Community High School for the past few years.

WHY DID WE QUIT?

Many small, slightly dispiriting things, but one event put the tin lid on it. Having made posters for one particular evening and ensured that they were up in

the appropriate places, I was walking round Cromarty putting fliers through letterboxes - my usual circuit to publicise an event - and chatting to individuals about what was coming up, when I saw a man on the other side of the road who was also putting fliers through letterboxes. We met in the middle of the street and joked about our common plight, and discovered that we were publicising different events for the same evening. The storytelling club was vying for its audience with the local historical society. I couldn't for political reasons apart from anything else, continue to publicise our event. When the evening arrived we had an audience, but not much of one.

The message seemed to be that, in an area like Ross-shire, our energies, time, and financial resources would be better used organising individual events and series of events which took place at specific times and in specific places, based upon factors like school breaks (English as well as Scottish), local school participation, previous response to a particular kind of event in a particular location, enthusiasm of locally-based individuals who will help with promotion and turn up to perform etc. Following this course has led to a situation where local audiences tend to show up in reasonable numbers (15-60+ in an evening) but a smaller number of particularly enthusiastic individuals will follow events round the district. Some of these individuals have also acquired a taste for storytelling and a couple of them have recently set up their own regular monthly gatherings in Munloch. The first meeting was well-attended, with around fifteen people, almost all of whom were willing to contribute a song or a story.

BOB PEGG

MORE EXCELLENT ADVICE FROM BOB PEGG

Get the ear of sympathetic people in the library and the arts section of the local council. They can help you find out where you might go to apply for subsidy, but may also be able to assist in other ways: including information about your club on a website, or in weekly e-mail newsletters; putting your fliers in one of their postal mailings; helping out with the production of publicity.

A link-up with the local school(s) can be very valuable. If you have a guest storyteller, for example, try and get them a gig in the school earlier in the day. If they went down well you will be guaranteed an audience which includes some of the children and, with luck, their parents too. Or just talk to the head about the possibility of you going along to tell a couple of stories, say to one class, if you don't feel up to going in front of the whole school. If you're an agoniser, you'll eventually ask yourself what the point of your club is. Once the question raises its head, it never goes away. Don't be too demanding of yourself. For example, do you really want dozens of folk turning up? Aren't atmosphere, communication and enjoyment more important to storytelling than numbers? Questions like these can be sidelined, especially if you have to write reports for funding bodies justifying your existence. If, for instance, you have a small core of attenders, the majority of whom make a contribution, maybe you should be looking at holding regular meetings in each other houses, taking it in turn to play host, and making sure that you're open to opportunities for more public events too.

A lot of publicity can be got without payment (it's not free, because you'll need to put in your time). Local papers will often print a press release verbatim. Community newsletters, mentioned above, are generally delighted to include information about upcoming events. In rural areas at least, newspapers often employ photographers on a

What is Storytelling?

WRITTEN STORIES - ORAL STORIES

THE DIFFERENCES

When stories are written down they acquire a literary quality, a careful polish, which is not usually appropriate in an oral re-telling.

Reading stories limits the reader to the words on the page, severely restricting eye contact with the audience and thus the immediacy and intimacy of the telling.

Oral narrative is a unique form of communication with an audience where the structure of a story remains fixed but the detail can be improvised at each telling to reflect the interplay of storyteller, audience and story. Oral stories are alive and vibrant and come, not off a page, but from within the teller. Some books of stories reflect the characteristics of oral narrative which, though difficult to define precisely, has a strong structure and visual imagery; appeals directly to the senses and might frequently contain rhyme, repetition or song.

CHOOSING A STORY

In the past, the only stories told were ones which the teller would himself have heard told. This is still the easiest and most effective way to retell, but it is not always possible to tap directly into the oral tradition and we may sometimes need to rely on printed or taped sources. This opens up a huge variety of cultural traditions, but different stories appeal to different tellers and it will be necessary to read many stories before finding one which you like and really want to tell. You must also consider whether it will suit your audience, or who would it suit and could it be adapted? Not all traditions allow for adaptation of the story though and you should be sensitive to this.

MEMORISING THE STORY

- * The trick is not to even try to memorise the words -learn the structure of the story.
- * If you heard it orally, jot down notes of the main points.
- * If you heard the story on tape, listen to it several times or read a printed version through two or three times until you become familiar with the basic construction.
- * Decide on the quality of the story - humour, pathos, magic.
- * Look for the points where the tension builds and resolves.
- * Write down any runs, repeated phrases, rhymes or word patterns within the story - you will need to learn these.

TIPS FOR LEARNING

- * Visualise it as a scene in a film.
- * Draw a 'map' of the story and plot the action.
- * Create a storyboard.
- * Write it down in simple outline.
- * Record yourself on tape and listen to it several times.
- You may want to use a variety of these methods -or devise your own.

ADDING THE FLESH

- * Appeal to the senses of the listener.
- * Learn the beginning - it must draw in the audience -and the ending - a weak ending is like forgetting the punch line to a joke.
- Use your voice - consider pitch, pace, tone and volume - don't be afraid of pauses.
- * Tell the story to yourself anywhere and everywhere - the bath, the bus stop, out walking - ignore the funny looks.
- * Tell it to anyone who will listen and ignore those who won't.
- * When you feel confident about it - tell it to an audience.

STORYTELLING SESSION

A good storytelling session should be broken up with songs, rhymes and riddles. This is especially necessary when telling to children and is always a good way to begin a session and warm up the audience.

Also look for occasions when you can include audience participation within the story when working with children.

Have several stories to hand and be prepared to be flexible, depending on your audience.

Enjoy it!

CONFIDENCE IN STORYTELLING

COMMUNITY VOICES

The voices of the storytellers have had serious competition in this century, in every community, with their place being taken by books, television and all the latest technological innovations. Ceilidhing as a form of entertainment is no longer the only way to pass an evening yet wherever people meet together, stories, jokes and anecdotes are exchanged and continue to educate and entertain as they have always done.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Within every community there are groups of people who identify with each other because of a shared language, ethnic origin or similar culture. Each group has its traditions, history, humour and its philosophy of life, which need to be shared and passed on in order for the group to maintain its identity and make sense of the future.

ROLE OF COMMUNITY STORYTELLER

Within every community there will always be the natural storytellers who will entertain family and friends. There may also be those who have a strong interest in developing their skills as storytellers. Those who tell stories within each group have the role of entertaining their audience as they pass on the tales, legends and myths of the past or stories which relate to present experiences.

PERSONAL VOICE

It is important to encourage those members of the community who are storytellers so that they have confidence in their own personal voice and in their ability to relate to their audience in the language or dialect that they are most comfortable with. Emerging storytellers, whether adults or children, will need safe situations to practise the stories they are familiar with, before they will have the confidence to emerge as storytellers before a wider audience.

PERSONAL STYLE

The personal style of the storyteller will depend on a number of factors, eg. the type of story being told or the age of the audience. Most people will adopt a persona to fit the situation they are in or the stories they are telling, eg. a dramatic style may be appropriate for some tales but the extent to which the style is developed will depend on the type of audience.

STORY SOURCES

STORY SOURCES

How can I get involved in storytelling if I don't know any stories?

That is a common starting point, but all of us have our own memories, and most of us also have access to other peoples' memories. These are good places to begin since they show that we all live in an environment rich in spoken and unspoken narratives.

PEOPLE AND PLACE

In every community there are stories attached to place names, buildings and natural features. Often these involve famous or not -so-famous people who have played some part in the life of that area. Sometimes they involve particular events. Either way they are stories or the raw material of stories.

WAYS OF LIFE

Sometimes life in a particular area has clustered around a particular organisation or way of life. This might be fishing, farming or crofting. It might be a pit, factory or church. It might be something to do with a

shared language or country of origin. Often it may be a mixture of these factors. In any case a set of community experiences and therefore stories will have built up. By asking people about their memories and experiences you can tap into a living source of stories unique to that area.

FAMILY MEMORIES

Everything that has been said so far also applies to your own family and to your personal experience of life. This is a rich source of story because you know these stories from the inside. That however is also a danger since if you personalise or individualise a story too much you may reduce its possible interest to other people. Stories are not the same as autobiography: they have to embody a situation, person or theme which is of universal human interest.

OTHER STORYTELLERS

Many good stories can be gathered by listening to other storytellers. If a story particularly appeals to you and lingers in your mind then it may be a story you would like to tell, though not necessarily in the same way. The advantage of learning about a story this way is that it is already suitable for oral telling. There are copyright courtesies which should be observed in this situation and these are set out below in the section on good practice.

BOOKS AND NEWSPAPERS

Storybooks, folktale collections, histories and local histories, newspapers, magazines and the media provide a mass of material for storytelling. The key thing is to gather what appeals to you, and then rework it to suit your telling. You can be an owl searching out themes and topics which already interest you. You can be a squirrel storing away useful items for future use, or you can be a magpie picking out what catches your attention! In any case you need a storybag or storyfile for your notes, photocopies and cuttings.

THE NATURAL WORLD

Nature, ecology and the world of science are rich sources of story. The human interest in these stories comes from conflict and cooperation between plants, animals and humans.

COPYRIGHT GUIDELINES

COPYRIGHT

If you make up an original story the copyright belongs to you. If you substantially rework and change a story from another source the copyright of the reworked version belongs to you.

Traditional stories remain accessible to everyone because behind all the different versions is a core story structure from which every storyteller can work.

GOOD PRACTICE

If you originally gathered your story from another storyteller, you should acknowledge your source when you tell the story.

If your telling remains heavily dependent on the original teller's version, you should not publish, record or broadcast the story without the written permission of the storyteller from whom you heard the story. This is also true of stories which you have taken from a written version.

If your telling remains heavily dependent on the written version you should not publish, record or broadcast the story without the written permission of the copyright holder which is normally cited in the original publication.

COURTESY AND RESPECT

Most storytellers are pleased to have their versions of traditional stories, and where applicable their original stories, retold orally. This informal process is at the heart of storytelling as a living tradition.

However some storytellers belong to traditions which expect stories to be retold in the form in which they were passed on. Other storytellers expect their stories to be reworked by each new teller.

As a matter of courtesy and good practice it is important to respect the spirit and intention with which the story was told to you. If in doubt speak to the storyteller in order to learn more about the origins, context and significance of the story and the way in which it was told.

TEN TIPS FOR BEGINNING STORYTELLING TO CHILDREN

- 1) Choose a story you enjoy, and want or need to share. Avoid dry 'myths', go for surprise or excitement.
- 2) Identify and learn the 'bones' of the story, not the exact text.
- 3) Remember a story in the mouth works differently from a story on the page. Simplify language and description, and keep to the action of the main tale.
- 4) Tell the story to yourself – a few times. Then check the book text, then put the book away again.
- 5) Make the tale into your version of the story, not the voice of the author where you found it. They found it and changed it before you did!
- 6) Do not start telling till all the children are settled and ready. Start off with something they can join in with - a song or a rhyme. It will gather them in and focus them.
- 7) Decide in advance how and where you will begin. Use a formula – 'Once upon a time' or 'Did you hear about the' – if you want.
- 8) Remember to recap a couple of times, especially after interruptions.
- 9) Do not use puppets, illustrations or other physical aids the first time you tell a story, just get through it - barebones if need be - and never apologise for the quality of what you did or identify omissions.
- 10) Have fun! If you do not enjoy it, how can they?

Membership and a Membership Fee?

Many clubs in Scotland do not have any formal membership or annual fee.

Some do so because of the demands of the premises they use, to encourage more active involvement in the organising and running of the club, or so they can maintain an up-to-date mailing list of their most interested people.

Setting an annual membership fee is tricky - high enough to cover costs, low enough not to discourage new people. One model is to set your annual membership fee to cover the cost of a year's regular mailings, and your admission or recommended contribution level to cover the cost of the session - less whatever level of financial support you have been able to get your hands on.

FUNDING

A Reminder about funding

We said the following in Section One.

"You will want to seek funding from other bodies - your local authority will have someone, usually designated as an arts officer, who can advise you on what monetary support may be available to you locally - new group start-up grants, grants to help bring in guest tellers, local companies who have a policy of 'community involvement'. But you must generate most of your income yourselves. You may also need to undertake fundraising events of the usual kind and range."

POSSIBLE SOURCES OF FUNDING

Contact your local arts officer, for information of applying for a direct grant from your local authority, and / or as a source of advice, information and support.

Ask Scottish Book Trust for some Live Literature Scotland sessions [formerly called Writers In Scotland Scheme] to pay half the cost of bringing in guest tellers.

If your club develops projects which take it into storytelling work with specific groups within the community there are many other sources of funding.

Sources which clubs have used include:

BBC Children In Need,

project funding administered through the Scottish Arts Council,

various charitable organisations that support work with particular groups,

and the Scottish Executive's Rural Challenge scheme.

Sources and resources

A number of more detailed accounts of starting and running specific storytelling clubs are available as photocopied sets, as email attachments or as website downloads from the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

Donside Storytelling Club – four pages of planning notes for school-based clubs in Aberdeenshire.

Storytellers In Craigmillar – six pages charting two years of a community-based children's club in an urban housing scheme.

Cookie Crunch – Aims for Children's Group – a page of eleven aims for a group within a school.

The Great Big Enormous Crocodile – two pages about an Edinburgh Library Service project which has been running for six years.

There are many books of and about stories, a few about storytelling as a performance art, and hardly any that talk about clubs.

Jane Hislam's *Story Clubs In Schools*, ARTISAN SERIES No.1, ISBN 1 898878 03 X, was published in 1996 by the Society for Storytelling, P. O. Box 2344, Reading, RG6 7FG, tel. 0118935 1381. Of the five reference books she lists, three were published in Canada.

The Society for Storytelling also offers Factsheets on organising storytelling events and other topics.

Traditional Storytelling in the Primary Classroom by Teresa Grainger, ISBN 0-590-53686-9, published in 1997 by Scholastic, Leamington Spa, in their Professional Bookshelf series, "shows teachers how to help children (and themselves!) become storytellers, as well as story readers and writers." This book is strongly recommended.

The Storytellers project run by the Scottish Storytelling Centre offers support throughout Scotland for the development of work with children as storytellers.

The Scottish Storytelling Centre is at 43/45 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1SR, tel. 0131 557 5224. *[[website address here]]

* [[Other Scottish Storytelling Centre publications here]]

Live Literature Scotland, Scottish Book Trust, Sandeman House, Trunk's Close, 55 High Street, Edinburgh EH1 1SR, tel: 0131 228 4293

Model Club Constitution

CONSTITUTION FOR CLUB

NAME

The name of the club shall be the Club.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

In general,

to promote and support the craft and practice of storytelling in the area/s of Scotland.

In particular,

to organise and run storytelling clubs and performance events, for [adults / families / children],

to organise and run workshop sessions, courses and projects through which the storytelling skills of individuals and groups can be developed and enhanced,

to organise and run mentoring schemes through which experienced storytellers can support and develop the skills of emerging tellers.

FINANCIAL POWERS

In pursuance of the aims and objectives outlined above the Club may

- seek funding from any governmental, quasi-governmental, charitable, commercial or other source,
- borrow funds from banks or other sources,
- undertake and organise such regular events, performances, courses, workshops, sessions and other

activities as deemed appropriate by the committee.

However, when the committee consider that some activity to be undertaken by the club is a significant addition to and development of the club's work and responsibilities, they shall inform and consult with the club's membership at a regular meeting, AGM or EGM, to seek and be guided by the views of the club's members on such developments.

MEMBERSHIP

The membership of the club shall be those persons who have paid the annual membership fee at a level decided by the club, and such honorary members as shall be decided on by an annual general meeting of the club.

COMMITTEE

The club's members shall at each AGM elect its committee members and a chairperson, treasurer, and such other officials as are deemed necessary by the club. There shall be a minimum of four and a maximum of nine committee members including officebearers, and in the event of any vote at a committee meeting being tied the person chairing that meeting shall have an additional tie-breaking vote.

Members of the committee may be paid by the club on a fee basis to undertake workshops, performances, and organisational or administrative and other such work as it relates to specific delivery of programmes of storytelling events and other such work. However, the members of the committee may not be paid (other than for reimbursement of out-of-pocket travel expenses) for the normal and ongoing committee work and usual responsibilities of a committee member or office bearer.

ANNUAL AND EMERGENCY GENERAL MEETINGS

There will be a general meeting of the club's members held within a period of fifteen calendar months from the date of the previous annual general meeting.

An emergency general meeting shall be held at the written request of twenty percent of the club's then current membership, within thirty days of receipt by the committee of such written request.

FUNDS OF CLUB

The club may open and operate such bank accounts in its name as the committee deem necessary. Cheques may be issued on and withdrawals made from such accounts of and under on the sole signature of either the Chairperson or the Treasurer, and cheques issued and withdrawals made of amounts

over on two signatures of committee members of whom one must be either Chairperson or Treasurer, and the other a person agreed at an AGM of the club to be an authorised cosignatory of cheques.

WINDING UP OF CLUB

Should a majority of two thirds of those present and eligible as current club members to vote at an AGM or EGM decide to wind up the affairs of the club, any unspent funds held by the club at that time shall be donated to a body or organisation with similar aim and objectives to that of the club.

Ewan McVicar
June 2004