DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 098 CS 010 872

AUTHOR Wason-Ellam, Linda
TITLE When Students Become Story-Tellers. Monograph No. 1.
INSTITUTION Saskatchewan Univ., Saskatoon. Coll. of Education.
PUB DATE Aug 91
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Classroom Communication; Elementary Education; Foreign Countries; Language Arts; Reading Instruction; *Story Telling; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Story Telling by Children

ABSTRACT

Story-telling is a language-learning activity providing many opportunities for students to use language spontaneously and imaginatively. As an open-ended activity, story-telling helps students to expand literate behaviors, to explore and to spontaneously stretch composing strategies into meaningful contexts before they set their pencils to paper. The "rehearsal" stage of the story-telling cycle includes pre-reading and pre-writing. Many times students role-play their characters, practicing dialogue and gesture, "living the experience" before they actually write about it. In the "extension" stage, story-telling can be a part of the reflecting and refining process, and it includes post-reading and post-writing. Examples of story-telling activities are: group story-telling, add-on cumulative stories, dramatizing stories, participation stories, individual story-telling, family stories, and improvising literary dialogue. (Forty-nine references are attached.) (RS)

Abstract

Story-telling invites students to embark on a "language journey." It is a continuous process, inter-weaving the rhythmic patterns of story from tales heard before. Like an artisan at a loom, story-tellers borrow threads from both personal and literary experiences remolding, adding, altering, and re-telling, always exploring fresh possibilities. The art of story is the heart of making meaning, and it is experiencing a revival in today's classrooms.

The monograph expands upon the storytelling cycle, describing the rehearsal and extension stages in the process of reading and writing. Storytelling activities such as group story-telling, dramatizing stories, participation stories, picture reading, family stories, and improvising literacy dialogue are described. Although there are many references for younger children, examples and sources for older students are included.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR.....

Linda Wason-Ellam is a member of faculty, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. She has authored textbooks and numerous articles in the Language Arts. Dr. Wason-Ellam formally taught in the University of Calgary demonstration school.

Story-telling: A Language Learning Activity

Story-telling is the oldest form of communication. Our early ancestors kept alive our history and brave deeds through the spoken word which transmitted to all who listened and learned about our perceptions, beliefs, and values of human existence.

With the development of printing, the importance of story-telling slowly diminished, replaced by the ability to read and write. The craft of story-telling survived only through the efforts of dedicated librarians, folklorists, and camp counsellors, who breathed life into stories as they educated and entertained listeners--both young and old.

Recently, language theorists have revived the notion of "storying," lauding its merit as an important way of initiating students into the magic world of books. As students listen to stories brought to life through story-telling, they connect to books and want to read them on their own. But story-telling is more than a path to reading. Its merits as a learning tool in today's classrooms should be considered. Beyond its ability to enchant listeners, story-telling has value as an instructional strategy for helping learners create both oral and written texts. Readers and writers need a fluent oral language base, yet the skills involved in formal speech are taught rarely, if at all. Story-telling is a language-learning activity providing many opportunities for students to use language spontaneously and imaginatively.

Students As Story-Tellers

When students become story-tellers, they have a number of options: weaving stories from their imagination, re-telling personal experiences, or re-shaping events from a story they have read or heard. Story-telling is a process approach to learning. It represents a creative interpretation of a story rather than a word-for-word reconstruction. From the moment students commence a tale with

"Long ago and far away to the enchanted land in the west . . . ," they are involved with meaning-making strategies -- organizing ideas, syntax, and vocabulary. Emphasis is on the process of interaction, as students work collaboratively creating and journeying to far-off worlds. As an open-ended activity, it helps students to expand literate behaviors, to explore and to spontaneously stretch composing strategies into meaningful contexts before they set their pencils to paper.

Uses For Story-Telling

When students participate as story-tellers, they are exploring, extending, and practising literary vocabulary and language patterns in a variety of contexts: folktales, fantasy and fiction. Story-telling can be used for "moving in and out of text," as students enter the worlds created by reading and writing. Making story-telling a part of the classroom will enable students to become more articulate speakers, to make meaning as readers, and to lay a necessary foundation for composing and refining stories as writers.

Students Can Use Story-Telling:

- to **share** a book or personal experience
- to **plan** or **rehearse** a story
- to **respond** to a story
- to **refine** a story-in-progress

The Story-Telling Cycle

Story-Telling is an integrated process that uses all language strands successfully through classroom activities (Figure 1).

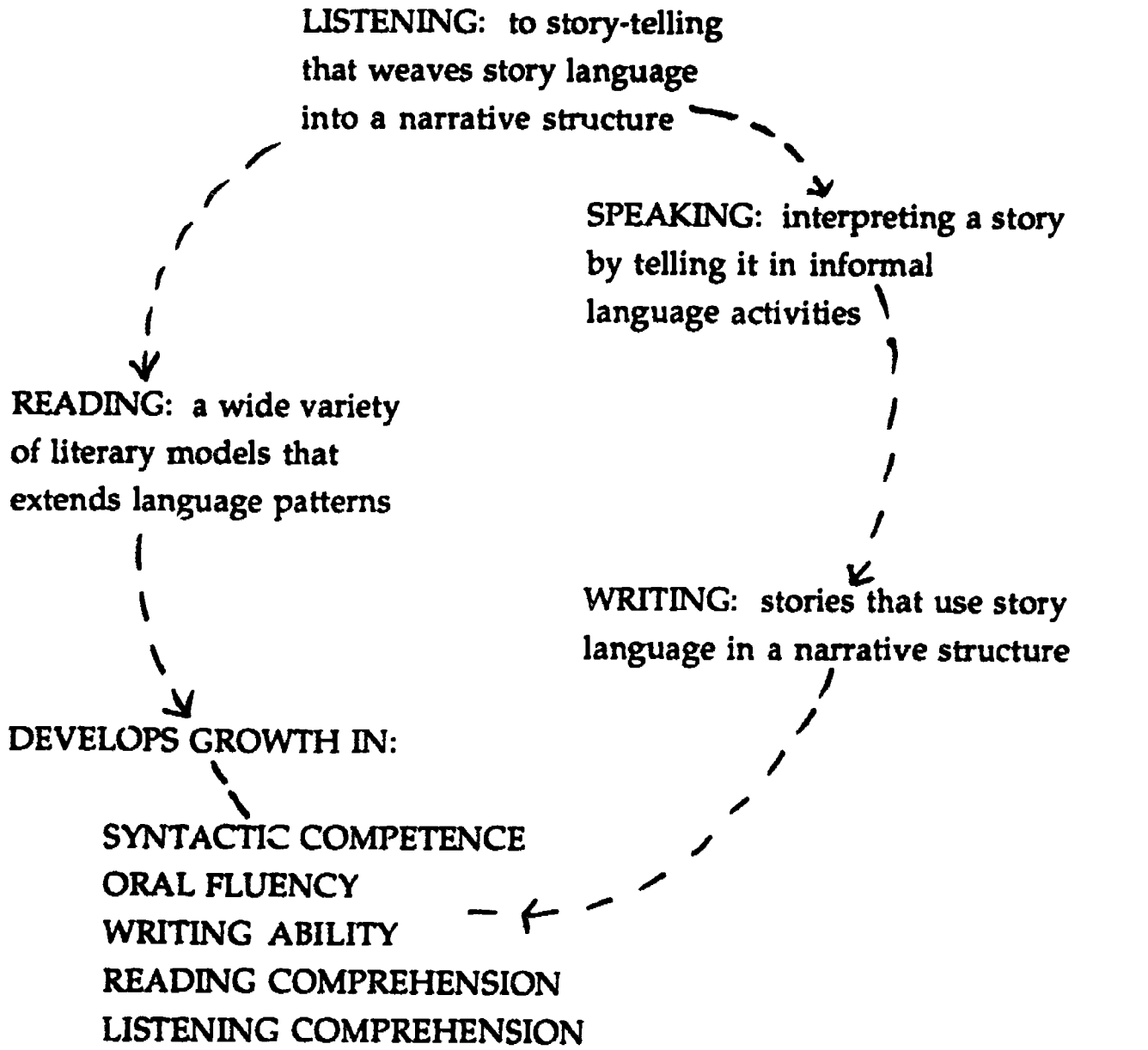


Figure 1

Rehearsal For Reading and Writing

Story-telling can contribute to reading and writing, as students move through the "rehearsal" and "extension" stages of the process. To demonstrate how to add story-telling to classroom programs, we will highlight the the rehearsal stage which includes pre-reading and pre-writing.

Pre-reading

Success in reading requires that students acquire literary behaviours, a concept of **story** (structure), and a familiarity with **story language** (vocabulary and syntax). The cumulative impact of participating in story-telling leads students to develop a knowledge of how stories unfold and the language used to tell them. Concepts about the organization of setting, character and plot are formed as students narrate stories.

Many students coming to school may be **linguistically different** and are at a disadvantage in reading activities until they develop an awareness of story language. Story-telling builds a bridge between the spoken language of a student's home community and that of the story. Story language is similar but not identical to verbal language. It is more descriptive and fanciful, as in this familiar refrain from **The Three Little Pigs: "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in!"** Through participation, students not only become aware of the variety and complexity of literary language but develop an understanding of its decontextualized, abstract forms that describe make-believe worlds beyond their own as **"In the distant hills of China there once stood a temple."** In story-telling, students create their own mental images, while attempting to make the story meaningful for others.

Pre-Writing

Story-telling provides students with a forum for ideas that can be presented later in writing. Unfortunately, in many school settings, students read or listen to

stories and then are expected to leap into writing on their own without any time to orally rehearse new ideas. Story language is more formal than what is used at home; however, students have little opportunity to initiate and practise it in school. Speaking activities such as brainstorming, show and tell, oral reports, debating, and class conversation all have merit; however, these activities engage the participant in language that is very different from the imaginative type found in a story. Each telling of a story is unique and encourages students to explore ways to express and format their ideas. Many times students role-play their characters practising dialogue and gesture, "living the experience" before they actually write about it.

Reading and Writing Extensions

In the extension stage, story-telling can be a part of the reflecting and refining process, and it includes post-reading and post-writing.

Post-Reading

Story-telling is a "window" on the way a student interacts with an author -- an imaginative and affective response. Teachers who allow their students to become story-tellers are encouraging them to reshape stories according to their interpre.ation, which can be used as an informal assessment of story comprehension. One way to assess understanding is to have students share the stories they have read.

This approach has many advantages over responding to questions, as it is difficult for students to display the same depth of understanding that is possible through story-telling. Questions draw attention to smaller portions of what is read, such as the main ideas or inferences about details, fragmenting the story rather than considering it as a whole. In story-telling, readers must view the entire story, consider the interrelation of characters and events, and interpret the characters' actions. They reveal their hypothesis about what they encountered in the original

story and often their personal reactions to it. Story-telling is also filled with creative possibilities, such as role playing, dialoguing, and interpreting for a peer audience.

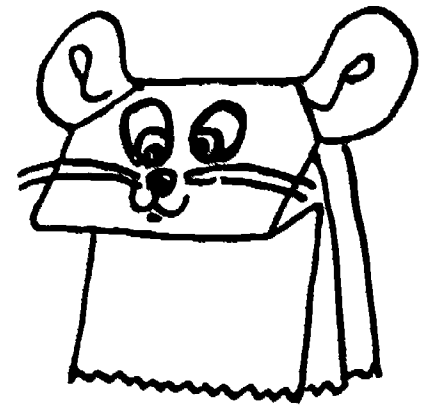
Post-Writing

Story-telling can be used to enhance writing that is in progress and for sharing compositions with others. It provides a strong incentive to keep revising until ideas become clear. If students are encountering problems with particular aspects of their writing, story-telling can help them develop possible solutions. As they polish their stories, they can create or reorder events, rethink setting and characters, or add dialogue. Since each telling is a new experience, the work is constantly changing, and the author must continually weigh the option of rethinking the story.

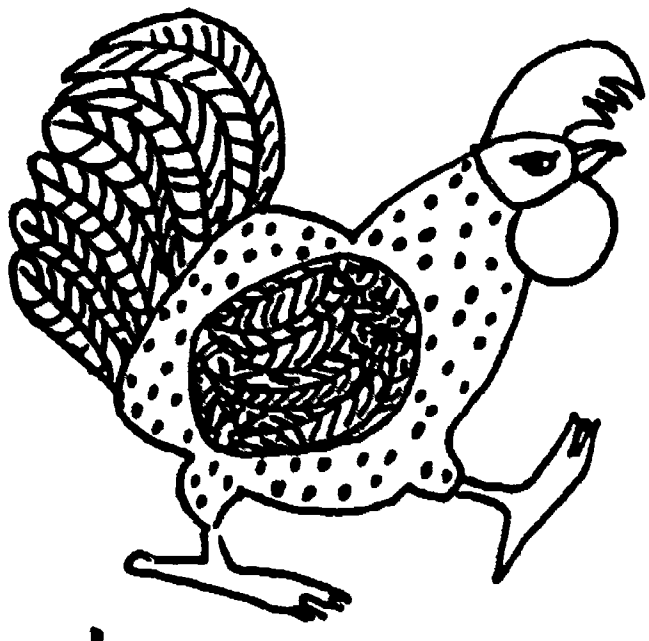
Writing is also for sharing and celebrating. When writers exchange stories with classmates or a larger audience, they begin to see themselves as real authors.

TEACHING TIP FOR WRITERS: When developing characters the addition of props, such as puppets, can permit access to inner feelings and their expression in gestures. This activity gives the struggling writer a concrete way to rehearse or refine some ideas that may be still tentative. Puppets are concrete, visual reminders which allow the story character to come alive. The possibilities for role playing are endless.

One way to introduce story-telling is with group activities. Later, as students gain more confidence and independence, they can tell stories to partners or in smaller groups.



STORY-TELLING ACTIVITIES



Group Story-Telling

You will find there are many ways to introduce story-telling to students. Selecting favorite tales is one suggestion. The best stories may be selected from picture books with shorter texts, which makes them easier to tell. Older students may find junior novels too long to narrate but may use story-telling to summarize a story, a chapter, or an exciting event.

To begin, you may want to model story-telling for your students, remembering that you are composing oral stories, rather than adhering to a text.

Add-on Cumulative Stories

These small-group, round-robin stories are co-operative compositions Initially, a narrator begins the tale. Each student listens to the previous sequence and responds appropriately by composing the next event. For a story like *Little Red Riding Hood*, the narrator would begin:

"Once upon a time there was a little girl who always wore a red cape and hood. Because of this she was called...?"

The first student contributes a sentence about the following occurence. In turn, each student participates by adding to the sequence until the story is complete. As students gain familiarity with this activity it would not be unusual for someone to step into the role of an author by giving an unexpected twist to the story. This may alter an event or character in some way or change the story organization entirely. For example:

Text: She lived with her mother in a little cottage on the opposite side of a very big
woods.

Storyteller: She lived with her mother on the 23rd floor of a Toronto highrise!

Considering the most likely alternatives, the next student needs to decide whether to respond by continuing in the new direction or returning to the original structure. The add-on cumulative story can either be a reweaving of a known story or an original narrative.

Dramatizing Stories

Dramatizing stories is another way to stimulate students to more spontaneous and imaginative use of language. Children choose familiar stories and act them out by improvising speech and gesture. While the plot remains constant, the dialogue changes with each re-telling.

A well-written story with some kind of conflict and a fair amount of action provides appropriate material for dramatization. Good dialogue is important, as some students are not adept at improvising their own. Paul Galdone's, *What's in Fox's Sack?* is an excellent beginning story to try.

Beginning storytellers.

Folktales are a rich source of dramatizations as they are short, have lots of action, a quick plot, and interesting characters with lots of opportunities for dialogue. Students can dramatize Verna Aardema's *Princess Gorilla and a New Kind of Water: A Mpongwe Tale*, Anita Lobel's *The Straw Maid*, Ruby Dee's *Two Ways to Count to Ten: A Liberian Folktale*, Jennifer Westwood's *Going to Squintum's: A Foxy Folktale*, Diane Snyder's *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap* and Yoshiko Uchida's *The Two Foolish Cats*. Somewhat longer but equally worthwhile picture storybooks are Jaqueline Shacter Weiss's *Young Brer Rabbit and Other Trickster Tales from the Americas*, Neil Philip's *Drakestail Visits the King: A Magic Lantern Fairy Tale*, Jim Aylesworth's *Shenandoah Noah*, and Gail Hailey's *Jack and the Bean Tree*.

Developing story-tellers.

Older students can dramatize a scene or a single chapter from a junior novel. Beverly Cleary's *Ramona the Pest*, Patricia Reilly Giff's *The Winter Worm Business*, Ellen Conford's *The Revenge of the Incredible Dr. Rancid and His Youthful Assistant*, Jeffrey and Elaine Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* are a few suggestions. You can help students to focus their story-telling by asking them to dramatize a scene where a character has to make a decision, the most humorous event, or the climax of the story.

With practice, students widen their expectations of what a story is and how it can be constructed. By borrowing and manipulating the original plots, they continue to expand their literary awareness.

Participation Stories

Participation stories are when the narrator collaborates with the audience in the telling. For this activity, the best stories to choose are repetitive tales full of rhythmic refrains, chants, or noises. These immediately invite listeners to become involved. The narrator begins a story and, at appropriate places, stops and asks the students to predict a word or phrase, to join in with a refrain, or to create sound effects or noises.

Repetitive books that utilize highly predictable patterns of language that "tease the ears" are the best choices for participation. The rhythmic language of Richard Pevear's *Mister Can-and-A-Half*, Lorinda Bryan Cauley's *The Cock, the Mouse, and the Little Red Hen*, Nonny Hogrogian's *The Cat Who Loved to Sing*, Maurice Sendak's *Seven Little Monsters*, Pat Hutchins' *The Doorbell Rang*, Arlene Mosel's *The Funny Little Woman*, and George Shannon's *Dance Away* and *Bean Boy* beckon students to join in.

There are a number of tales that invite students to participate by contributing

sounds and actions. Animal noises are fascinating, and students can change their voices to mimic them in Brian Wildsmith's *Goat's Trail*, Wesly Porter's *The Musicians of Bremen*, Pat Hutchins' *Good Night Owl*, Wilson Gage's *Down in the Boondocks*, Joanna Cole's *It's Too Noisy*, Peggy Blakely's *A Christmas Present for a Friend*, Victoria Forrester's *The Magnificent Moo*, Eric Carle's *The Very Busy Spider*, Verna Aardema's *The Vingananee and the Tree Toad: A Liberian Tale* and *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*, and Mem Fox's *Hattie and the Fox*. Any favorite story which has a cast of animal characters invites improvisation and playful noises, such as Pierr Morgan's version of *The Turnip* or Ruth Brown's *The Big Sneeze*.

Because students enjoy interacting musically, they may delight in making story-telling more rhythmic by playing along with drums, sticks, tambourines, bells, pots and pans, or any other sound accompaniments. Instruments can heighten the noisy chain reaction in Jim Aysleworth's *Hush Up!*, the crackling sounds of Bend Bowles' *Grandma's Band*, the onomatopoetic beating in Gene Baer's *Thump! Thump, Rat-a-Tat-Tat*, and the sound journey in Michael Rosen's *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*.

Individual Storytelling

Picture Reading

Pictures from colorfully illustrated storybooks or wordless books can act as a springboard and are the easiest way to foster beginning story-telling.

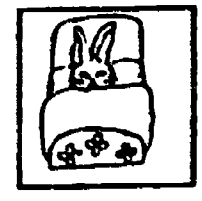
Picture Storybooks

Illustrations serve as "picture clues" and visual reminders that encourage students to re-tell stories they have read or heard read to them. As students develop as story-tellers, they can draw their own picture clues in a thumbnail sketch of a story board.

Beginning

Next Event

Final Event



Wordless Books

Wordless picture books that follow a simple story sequence, such as Brinton Turkel's *Deep in the Forest* (a reverse twist on *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*), Peter Spier's Dreams or Ed Young's *The Other Bone*, are best to use for story-telling.

TEACHING TIP: Picture story-telling is best initiated through add-on cumulative stories. When students feel more confident with a tale, they can tell it independently.

Beginning story-tellers

Younger story-tellers can turn the pages of any number of attractive picture books or follow the cumulative sequence of a story board.

Developing story-tellers

Older students can use wordless books, such as Erich Fuchs' *Journey to the Moon*, Chris Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*, or Lynd Ward's *The Silver Pony*, to narrate a story. An alternate idea would be to have students create their own wordless books for high-adventure short stories or for an exciting chapter from a longer novel. They could narrate the tale that is shown in the picture sequences. Some might want to tape their story and place it in the listening center with the wordless book.

Family Stories

Family memories are a rich source of personal experiences ready to be used in story making. Topics such as family members, favorite places, or their hopes and fears could all be crafted as a narrative. One way to start is to give students a penny and ask them to look at the date and think for a moment about a memorable event that year. Was it a birthday, a vacation, a humorous incident, or a special time when they were happy? The following questions may help them remember details. Where were they? How did they feel? Who else was there with them? Like authors, encourage them to take ordinary events in their lives and reconstruct them in an interesting way. Existing stories, like Jane Yolen's *Owl Moon*, where a child goes out owling with her father on a cold winter's night, and Andrea Spalding's *The Most Beautiful Kite in the World*, a tale about a child's birthday wish, are examples where ordinary family interactions become the magical ingredients of a suspenseful story.

In composing personal narratives, an object such as a button, a photo or a key, is an agent which sparks the student's imagination and releases a flow of ideas and incidents.

Improvising Literary Dialogue

Many stories can serve as literary frameworks for participation and exploration of language. The add-on cast of story characters wanting to march in Barbara Brenner's *Show Parade* can change their actions in each refrain:

Andrew: "Will you march in the snow parade with me?"
Dog: "I can not march but I can wag my tail in the parade."
scratch my ears...
chase the cat...
bark and roll over...

Similarly, students are challenged to replace "tired verbs" as each of the seven goslings responds in Chris Conover's *Mother Goose and the Sly Fox*. In the three scenes where the Sly Fox, masquerading as Mother Goose, knocks and asks the goslings to open the door, students can replace "said" with more powerful options. The possibilities are endless:

"You don't sound like our mother!" snickered Gosling #1.
"You are not our mother." shouted Gosling #2.
"You can't fool me!" stammered Gosling #3.
"No way are you our mother!" stuttered Gosling #4.
"You are a fake!" shrieked Gosling #5.
"We won't let you in!" screamed Gosling #6.
"You are Mr. Fox!" speculated Gosling #7.

These activities are offered as a starting point. With time and experience story-telling can be a pleasurable and stimulating activity, bringing students closer to the language of books.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aardema, Verna. Princess Gorilla and a New Kind of Water: A Mpongwe Tale. Illustrated by Victoria Chess. N.Y.: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1987.

_____. The Vingananee and the Tree Toad: A Liberian Tale. Illustrated by Ellen Weiss: N.Y.: Frederick Warne, 1983.

Aylesworth, Jim. Hush Up! Illustrated by Glen Rounds. N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980.

_____. Shenandoah Noah. Illustrated by Glen Rounds. N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985.

Baer, Gene. Thump! Thump, Rat-a-Tat-Tat. Illustrated by Lois Ehlert. N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1989.

Blakely, Peggy. A Christmas Present for a Friend. Illustrated by Masako Matsumura. London: Black, 1984.

Bowles, Brad. Grandma's Band. Illustrated by Anthony Chan. Baltimore: Stemmer House, 1989.

Brenner, Barbara. The Snow Parade. Illustrated by Mary Tara O'Keefe. N.Y.: Crown Publishers Inc., 1984.

Brown, Ruth. The Big Sneeze. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Lothrop, Less and Shepard Books, 1985.

Carle, Eric. The Very Busy Spider. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Philomel Books, 1984.

Cauley, Lorinda Bryan. The Cock, the Mouse and the Little Red Hen. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Putnam, 1982.

Cleary, Beverly. Ramona the Pest. Illustrated by Louis Darling. N.Y.: Morrow, 1968.

Cole, Joanna. It's Too Noisy! Illustrated by Kate Duke. N.Y.: Thomas Crowell, 1989.

Conford, Ellan. The Revenge of the Incredible Dr. Rancid and His Youthful Assistant, Jeffrey. N.Y.: Little Brown, 1980.

Conover, Chris. Mother Goose and the Sly Fox. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989.

Dee, Ruby. Two Ways to Count to Ten: A Liberian Folktale. Illustrated by Susan Meddaugh. N.Y.: Henry Holt, 1988.

Gage, Wilson. Down in the Boondocks. Illustrated by Glen Rounds, N.Y.: Greenwillow, 1977.

Galdone, Paul. What's in Fox's Sack? An Old English Tale. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Clarion, 1982.

Giff, Patricia Reilly. The Winter Worm Business. Illustrated by Leslie Morrill. N.Y.: Yearling Books, 1983.

Forrester, Virginia. The Magnificent Moo. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Athenuem, 1983.

Fox, Mem. Hattie and the Fox. Illustrated by Patricia Mullins. N.Y.: Bradbury, 1987.

Fuchs, Eric. Journey to the Moon. N.Y.: Delacorte, 1969.

Haley, Gail E. Jack and the Bean Tree. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Crown, 1986.

Hogrogian, Nonny. The Cat Who Loved to Sing. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Alfred a Knopf/Borzoi Books, 1988.

Hutchins, Pat. The Doorbell Rang. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Greenwillow, 1986.

Konigsburg, Elaine. From the Mixed-Up-Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler. N.Y.: Atheneum, 1967.

Lobel, Anita. The Straw Maid. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Greenwillow Books, 1983.

Mantinband, Gerda. Bing, Bong, Band and Fiddle Dee Dee. Illustrated by Anne Rockwell. N.Y.: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1979.

Morgan, Pierr (re-teller). The Turnip: An Old Russian Folktale. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Philomel Books, 1990.

Mosel, Arlene. The Funny Little Woman. Illustrated by Blair Lent. N.Y.: E.P. Dutton, 1972.

Pevear, Richard. Mister Cat-and-A-Half. Illustrated by Robert Rayevsky. N.Y.: Macmillan, 1986.

Philip, Neil. Drakestail Visits the King: A Magic Lantern Fairy Tale. Illustrated by Henry Underhill. N.Y.: Philomel Books, 1986.

Porter, Wesley. The Musicians of Bremen. Illustrated by Kenneth W. Mitchell. N.Y.: Franklin Watts, 1979.

Rosen, Michael. We're Going On a Bear Hunt. Illustrated by Helen Oxenbury. N.Y.: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1989.

Sendak, Maurice. Seven Little Monsters. Illustrated by the author. N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1975.

Shannon, George. Bean Boy. Illustrated by Peter Sis. N.Y.: Greenwillow, 1984.

_____. Dance Away. Illustrated by Jose Aruego and Ariane Dewey. N.Y.: Greenwillow, 1982.

Spalding, Andrea. The Most Beautiful Kite in the World. Illustrated by Georgia Graham. Red Deer, AB: Red Deer College Press, 1988.

Snyder, Dianne. The Boy of the Three-Year Nap. Illustrated by Allen Say. N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.

Spier, Peter. Dreams. N.Y.: Doubleday, 1986.

Turkel, Brinton. Deep in the Forest. N.Y.: Dutton, 1985.

Uchida, Yoshiko. The Two Foolish Cats. Illustrated by Margot Zemach. N.Y.: Margaret K. McElderry Books, 1987.

Van Allsburg, Chris. The Mysteries of Harris Burdick. N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

Ward, Lynd. The Silver Pony. N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

Weiss, Jaqueline Shachter. Young Brer Rabbit and Other Trickster Tales from the Americas. Illustrated by Clinton Arrowwood. Baltimore: Stemmer House/Barbara Holdridge Books, 1985.

Westwood, Jennifer. Going to Squintum's: A Foxy Folktale. Illustrated by Fiona French. N.Y.: Dial Books for Young Readers.

Wildsmith, Brian. Goat's Trail. Illustrated by the author. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Yolen, Jane. Owl Moon. Illustrated by John Schoenherr. N.Y.: Philomel, 1987.

Young, Ed. The Other Bone. N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1983.