



# Oral Retelling

## Purpose

Oral retelling is a technique in which a reader makes a mental representation of the story and uses this to orally retell the story. This generally includes characters, setting, problem, main episodes, and resolution. Usually this technique is used with narrative text and it aids in building comprehension. The retelling approach is most appropriate for students who have verbal strengths and remember the story long enough to internalize it and retell it. Retelling uses their strength to elaborate textual information.

In oral retelling the:

- processing focus is on meaning.
- instructional phase is after reading
- oral production is generally the response mode.
- strategy emphasized is elaboration.
- skill emphasized is literal comprehension.
- information is both reader-based and text-based.
- instruction is generally implicit.

## Procedure

1. Before reading, the teacher explains to the students that he/she is going to ask them to retell the story when they have finished reading.
2. If the teacher is expecting the students to include specific information, she/he should tell the students before reading.
3. The teacher asks the students to retell the story as if they were telling it to a friend.
4. If the student is hesitant, the teacher uses prompts at the beginning, middle, and end. (E.g., What did the fox do after he swam across the river?)
5. When the retelling is complete, the teacher can ask direct questions about the important omitted information.

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## **Paper Bag Theater**

Students illustrate a key setting from a story on the front of a paper lunch bag. They then illustrate and cut out drawings that represent characters and elements of the setting that the readers believe will make the story more interesting to a listener.

When the visuals are completed, the teller stands behind the Paper Bag Theater and begins telling the story while pulling out the appropriate visuals to support the story line.

## **Story Bag**

Students collect realia representing key points in the story and place them in a bag. They then use these real items as storytelling props. For example, a Story Bag for Cinderella might have a cleaning rag, a high-heeled shoe, a pumpkin, and a clock.

## **Storytelling at the Overhead**

Students use overhead transparencies to draw the characters and setting elements from a favorite story. They then stand at the overhead to do their retelling, using the visuals they have created.

## **Wearable Art**

Younger students really enjoy wearing storytelling aprons, storytelling vests, and storytelling hats. The apron and vest can be made from felt with minimal amounts of sewing. The storytelling hat can be made by taking any suitable hat and covering the dome with sticky-back Velcro strips.

*The Process:* Students draw the characters and props that they want to use in retelling a story on heavyweight tag paper. Then, they apply sticky-backed Velcro to the back of their illustrations. The illustrations should be large enough to be seen from several feet away. When they go to perform their retell, the students can wear their felt vest, apron, or hat and adhere their Velcro-backed art to the garment as they tell the story.

## **Book Reviews on Tape**

Book reviews can take many forms. One of my favorites is to invite students to make an audiotape of a retell for a favorite book, place it in a zip-lock bag that attaches to the inside cover of the book. Students who are book browsing and making selections of books to read can elect to listen to the retell as part of their process of deciding whether or not to read this book.

## Spicing It Up with Line Drawings

Students who enjoy drawing often enjoy illustrating *while* they tell a story. They can stand in front of an easel with a felt pen and create line drawing as they talk about story elements. It also works well to have students stand at the chalkboard or at the overhead to draw as they retell.

## Expert Panels on Books

Students read the text several times and prepare to deal with audience questions such as How was suspense maintained? What was critical in the interaction between characters? How does the plot reflect real life? In the meantime, the audience prepares a list of question to ask the “expert.”

## Cumulative Retells

This activity involves physical movement and lots of repetition. Like cumulative story structure, it is an add-on format where everything that is already known is repeated each time a new element of the retell is added.

After reading a story, I ask a volunteer to come to the front of the room and “tell” the first event from the story. A second volunteer comes forward to tell the second event but before that person tells it, the first student repeats event #1. A cumulative retell for Cinderella might sound something like:

**Step 1. Teller #1:** Once upon a time there was a girl name Cinderella who lived with her stepmother and stepsisters.

**Step 2. Teller #1:** Once upon a time there was a girl name Cinderella who lived with her stepmother and stepsisters.

**Teller #2:** She had to clean and work and was called Cinderella because she had to clean the ashes out of the fireplace.

**Step 3. Teller #1:** Once upon a time there was a girl name Cinderella who lived with her stepmother and stepsisters.

**Teller #2:** She had to clean and work and was called Cinderella because she had to clean the ashes out of the fireplace.

**Teller #3:** The stepsisters were very excited because they were buying beautiful dresses to wear to a ball at the palace, and so on.

The students love the repetition and the rhythm that develops as this process unfolds, and I find that challenged learners are especially supported by the fun-filled repetition of story elements. A variation to this would be to have audience members make up a physical action for each teller’s event so they are physically involved even as listeners.