

# Program 1

Lyn Z. Mueller

## Description of the Program

This first program begins with the question "Have you ever hear a story so good that you hung on every word until it became alive and you became a part of it?". A good story attracts, entertains, and inspires children. This series is about stories that are told by good storytellers. All of the 13 storytellers seen in this series were inspired by Augusta Baker, a leading authority in children's literature who believed that stories stand alone when they are told.

This program's storyteller is Lyn Z. Mueller, director of the state's Writing Improvement Network who has been a storyteller for ten years. Since August Baker influenced her and gave her the power to teach reading and writing through storytelling, she considers August Baker to be her fairy godmother. Ms. Baker who helped her as a writer create rhythms and pauses in her writing and to experiment with language in a new way.

Storytelling is a wonderful art form. Telling a story can transport the listener into the story and also allow a child to make the connect between listening and reading. Listening to a story can transport the listener to another time and place.

## The Storyteller's Story

Ms. Muller's story was a South Carolina Gullah tale that is at least 150 years old. It was first documented by John Bennett, in Charleston at the turn of century. The story is about a corpse that refused to stay in the grave. The widow wants the corpse to go away, but the bones stay in the house, talk to her, and rock by the fire. One day a fiddler comes to court the widow while the corpse sits by the fire. The corpse asks the fiddler to play and the bones begin to dance and "cut the buck". When the widow sees the dead man dance and his bones start falling off, she asks the fiddler to play faster. The faster the fiddler played the more bones fell off until only the head bone is left and it is still talking. The fiddler hurries away and the widow collects the bones but stacks them criss crossed so the corpse can't get back together. The widow stays a widow forever because the fiddler refuses to court her again.

## Questions and Answers

1. *What have you learned about stories from being a storyteller?*

She learned to use rhythm in stories and to use words beyond alliteration. She said she learner ways to put words into the story so that she sculpts the words. In her own way she has learned to dance with the words and to crawl inside the story like slipping into an old pair of comfortable jeans. She now sees the story from the inside out after becoming a storyteller.

2. *Should children try storytelling?*

Storytelling is wonderful for children. Sometimes even children who are reluctant to read, will not be reluctant to tell stories. Books are just stories that were written down by someone.

3. *What advice do you have for student storytellers?*

Most children first try to retell a fairy tale, but they should stick with folk tales because a folk tale isn't as long or as complicated as a fairy tale. They also try to create their own stories too soon. They should tell and retell family stories that they know and are comfortable with retelling.

4. *Do you memorize your stories?*

Yes, I learn my stories by heart. Augusta Baker said to learn stories like you learn your favorite songs. When you know a song by heart and the song is started you can always join in. It is the same with stories. Since you memorize the stories, you are learning them word by word, therefore you have learned them by heart.

### **Suggested Activities**

1. At the end of the program, Ms. Mueller began a story called, "The Hag". It can be found in Gullah or South Carolina folk tale books. Remember that there may be different versions of a tale depending on who told the tale as it was written down.

2. Discuss the way Ms. Mueller used dialect to tell her stories. Did this add to the story? Would the story have been as enjoyable without the dialect? If this story would be told in a different type of dialect, what would it be like and what kinds of things would have to be changed?

3. Could the students understand the words even though some of the words and phrases may not have been familiar to them. Ask what "cut a buck" might mean in dancing. Can the students think of other such words or phrases?

4. Ask students to tell short family tales in small groups. Each group should select one storyteller to tell the family tale to the class.

5. Let students read folk tales and practice telling them to each other. Let them tell the story to the class when they know it by heart.