

Program 10

Minnerva King

Description of the Program

Long, long ago storytellers traveled from city to city, weaving tales. Today, many storytellers continue this tradition. One such storyteller is Minnerva King. She lives in South Carolina and is an artist in residence for the South Carolina Arts Commission. This means she travels from one school to another telling stories.

Ms. King's story comes from the West Indies. There it is the custom in the evening when work is done for people to gather around as the sun goes down and tell stories. Before they can tell a story they have to ask permission by saying, "crick crack" and the people respond by saying, "break my back", then the story can begin. When the story is over the teller says, "wire bend" and the people respond with "story end". Ms King does this as she tells a tale about how the tortoise got a cracked shell.

Storytelling began many, many years ago. Almost from the very moment man began to talk, he began using his imagination. Today storytelling continues, still using the ancient form of using words to tell a story. Yet this way of weaving a tale continues to create powerful images in our imagination. Even today it entertains and teaches us.

The Storyteller's Story

Crick, Crack. Break My Back. Long ago when all the animals spoke the same language and understood each other, the tortoise did not look like he looks today. He had a glossy shell that was so shiny you could see yourself in it. All his friends would come over and look at themselves in his shell. Since all of his friends were birds, Tortoise wanted to be a bird that could fly through the air instead of trudging across the ground. It took forever for him to get anywhere and he had to get his food on the ground and from under logs where it was rotten instead getting fresh food way up in the trees as the birds did. The tortoise saved all of the feathers that his bird friends shed until he had quite a collection of different beautiful feathers. One day Crow came to visit and told him about the invitation he had received to Chicken Hawk's birthday party. Tortoise wondered why he hadn't been invited. Crow said it was because Chicken Hawk lived way up on the mountain and knew there was no way for Tortoise to get there.

All Tortoise wanted to do was to go that party. He realized that all of his friends had feathers and they could fly so he decided to use his feather to help him fly. He took the feathers and stuck them around on his body keeping them in place with his shell. He practiced and practiced until he was able to fly up the mountain and go to the party. At the party everyone was having so much fun. When Tortoise saw the food table he couldn't believe all of the good fresh food, not the rotten stuff he normally had to eat. He ate and ate and made a pig of himself. Chicken Hawk didn't recognize the big fat bird and went over to him and realized it was Tortoise

with feathers on him. Chicken Hawk decided to teach him a lesson so without saying anything he pulled all the feathers out and kicked Tortoise out of his house. Tortoise fell down the mountain. He had the good sense to pull his body inside the shell, but he couldn't protect his shell. Every time the shell hit the ground it cracked and by the time he reached the bottom his smooth glossy shell was full of cracks. As he was recovering from his fall he had time to think. He decided that he had learned three lessons from this adventure...1) never go anywhere you are not invited, 2) never make a pig of yourself, and 3) most importantly, never pretend to be something that you aren't. This is the story of how the tortoise came to have a cracked shell. Wire end. Story end.

Questions and Answers

1. *What is the best part of going from school to school sharing stories?*

Going into schools with the idea that you are going to entertain and to educate the students. There is so much you can teach through stories. I start entertaining them, then zap a little lesson into the story.

2. *Is storytelling becoming more popular now?*

The time is right now for a growth in storytelling. Children are ready for human storytellers. In fact, they are hungry for the human touch after playing so many video games.

3. *Are folk tales your favorite kind of story?*

I think so, I tell mostly folk tales and if I do tell another type of tale it has the same magic love of fantasy that you find in a folk tale.

4. *What makes a good story for telling?*

It just feels right. It sounds right and feels good. I like it to have a message or a moral to it so you can learn something from it.

Suggested Activities

1. Let the students find other animal folk tales in the library to share with the class. Many different cultures have animal tales, especially the Native Americans. Some of these tales are very similar even though they are told by people of different cultures.

2. Ask students to write a folk tale about how an animal looks the way it does or is able to do something in a certain way. Use the stories from the above activity as samples. Remind the children to be very imaginative in their work.

3. Find other folk tales that have morals in them. Aesop's Fables and the newer **Book of Children's Virtues** would be good examples. Find the same morals told in the ancient fables and the modern book of virtue. Why would this happen?