

Program 12

Michael Leonard

Description of the Program

Do you know a story? Is it a story you can tell someone aloud? Storytelling is a wonderful art. Michael Leonard has been preaching it and teaching others the craft of storytelling for more than 25 years from places as far away as London, England. Currently, Michael is the head of the Chicago public library's North Town branch.

Have you heard a good story lately? No matter what country you're in, you'll hear those words "Tell me another story".

The Storyteller's Story

The famine was over and the rains came. First the clouds covered the skies and the rain came down in floods. The ground was so dry that it drank the rain up until it could drink no more. The grass was parched but it became green. Soon every thing became alive and everyone began to plant, even Anancy. Now Anancy was not known for working very hard, but he planted yams and potatoes all around his house.

Now it was time to harvest those yams. He looked out his window and thought he would like to have a flower garden where the jams are. He called Tiger and asked him to come dig up his yams. Tiger asked, "what will you give me if I dig up your yams?" because he knew Anancy was a trickster. Anancy said, "you can keep all the yams you dig up" and that seemed like a good deal. The next day Tiger went to dig the yams with his hoe, but the more he dug the deeper in the earth the yams went. By 4:00 he still had not dug up any yams. Tiger was so angry that he took his machete and cut the largest jam into hundreds of pieces. He started to walk home when he heard the strangest noises behind him and he turned to see hundreds of yams coming down the road some with one leg, some with two and some with more. They were all making the noise "tick-a-tickey-boom-boom". Tiger was frightened so he ran and the yams ran, he jumped and the yams jumped, he galloped and the yams galloped. He saw Mr. Dog and called to him for help. Mr. Dog said for him to stand behind him and not to make any noise. When the yams ask Mr. Dog if he had seen Tiger, the dog looked straight ahead and said, "I can't see Tiger at all". Well Mr. Tiger was so frightened that he called out, "don't tell them where I am". Mr. Dog was so angry that he went away and left the yams following Tiger. Tiger ran and the yams followed until Tiger was so tired. He came to a river edge and saw a plank of wood across the river and Mr. Goat on the other side. He asked Mr. Goat to help and Tiger hid behind the goat and was not supposed to say anything. When the yams asked for Tiger, Mr. Goat looked straight ahead and said, "I don't see him anywhere." Again Tiger called out, "don't tell them where I am" and the yams started coming across the river on the wooden plank. Mr. Goat went and butted all the yams into the river where they broke into thousands of pieces. Mr

Goat and Mr Tiger collected the pieces and took them to Tiger's home and had a feast. They did not invite Anancy. Today when Tiger is in the forest at night and hear "tick-a-tickey-boom-boom" he still becomes frightened and runs away.

Questions and Answers

1. *Does telling a story vary depending on the locale?*

You have to feel the audience out and tell the story based on the audience. In England they were interested in hearing American tales.

2. *Do you tell stories on your job?*

I did, but I don't have that much opportunity to tell stories at work now. Fortunately the children's librarian still asks me to tell stories.

3. *How do you select your stories?*

I read collections of stories to find new stories to tell. I read and read.

4. *Do you tell any stories that you have written down?*

I only tell other people's work. I have not written any stories myself from my own personal experience.

5. *How is storytelling different from reading aloud?*

Storytelling lets you look directly at the audience and tell whether they are involved in the story. When you read aloud you have to look at the words and therefore lose some of the personal interaction. Eye contact is very important in telling a story.

6. *Do you memorize your stories?*

I write the story down and then read the story over and over again. Then I start telling the story over and over. Some people record stories and work that way. I practice in front of a mirror and watch my gestures so that they do not distract from the story.

7. *Do you change the story based on the size of the audience?*

Yes, because audience reaction is so important. The more involved with the audience the better. You may even need to change the types of stories you are telling depending on the audience.

Suggested Activities

1. Continue giving students the opportunity to tell stories. Ask some students to try to add dialect to the stories as they tell them. Can the students think of something they do differently based on the number of people or the locale. Let them do this to their stories.

2. Discuss trickster tales. Read or tell some to the class.