

# Program 13

# Sherry William

## Description of the Program

Storytelling is an ancient art. It requires the teller to combine character, plot, and setting through the use of words. Think a moment how you would describe a sunrise or how a Western sheriff would talk compared to an Egyptian king. Storytelling is not easy. It is a wonderful art form. Sherry Williams has been creating this type of art for over 10 years and she likes to tell African folk tales.

Telling a story is more than entertaining a crowd. Telling a story is as unique as creating a painting. With words instead of brushes the storyteller must create a canvas of images in the listener's mind.

## The Storyteller's Story

This story is called "Mr. Bear and Mr. Rabbit " and is told using a Gullah dialect. The story is from **The Knee High Man and Other Stories** by Julius Lester.

Mr. Rabbit was coming down the road when he saw a field of lettuce. He wanted to get in the field of lettuce but couldn't find a way in because of the tall fence. He thought the fence was too high to jump over but that he could dig under the fence. He started to dig and was not getting anywhere so he sat under the tree and began to think about how to get into the field. He saw a little gal come down the field and open the latch and go into the field. He decided to come back the next day and ask the little gal to let him in . The next day he told the little gal that her pa said for her to let him in the field and to come back at noon to let him out. So she agreed. Rabbit just ate and ate the lettuce and was barely able to get himself up and out the gate when the gal came to let him out. This continued for days until the farmer noticed that he was missing some lettuce. He went into the field and waited until he saw the rabbit and gal who let him in. The farmer decided to teach the rabbit a lesson. He let him start eating the lettuce before he caught the rabbit, tied a rope around his leg, tied the rope up in the tree, and left the rabbit there.

Mr Rabbit wasn't afraid but he knew he had to think of a way to get down. Finally, he saw Mr. Bear coming down the road, so he pretended that he was enjoying swinging back and forth by one foot from the tree. Mr. Bear begged Mr. Rabbit to let him try swinging and finally the rabbit agreed. The Bear let the rabbit down and the rabbit tied the rope around the bear's foot and left him swinging there in the tree. When the farmer came by and saw the bear in the tree instead of the rabbit, he knew that he would have to get the rabbit another time.

## Questions and Answers

1. *Do you like to use dialects in stories?*

Yes, because I grew up around dialects. The story isn't written in Gullah but I added that because I grew up in the Low Country and always heard it. My mother didn't want it spoken in the house and used proper language, but I learned the Gullah from hearing it. In the book, Mr. Lester writes the stories in Southern Black English which is somewhat different than Gullah.

2. *What is the most important thing to keep in mind when you tell a story?*

You want to make sure that everyone is involved in the story, that you tell the story in sequence, and that everyone is enjoying it. You can also tailor the tale to the audience.

3. *Why is storytelling important to you?*

Most of the stories I tell are out of books and it is a way to bring children and books together.

4. *Would you say you are a particular kind of storyteller?*

I tell African-American animal tales mostly and the Gullah tales because they are the ones that are most comfortable for me to tell.

5. *What authors or storytellers have most influenced you?*

I love Augusta Baker's style of storytelling. She could tell a story and get you totally involved just by using her voice. I like Julius Lester's and Virginia Hamilton's work.

6. *What advice would you give someone who is telling stories for the first time?*

Be sure you like the story and that you know it well. Read several kinds of stories and choose the style you like best. If you really like a story then you can tell it well.

### **Suggested Activities**

1. Have a storytelling festival to finish your study of storytelling. Let students follow Ms. Williams advice and read lots of different tales before deciding on the type they like best. Students may choose a story from a book that they want to tell or they could write their own. Try to include as many different types of stories as possible and not have all animal or folk tales.

2. Once students have selected a story to tell, they need to practice it over and over. Let students critique the stories in a constructive, not critical way. This would be like letting other students read a story that has been written to offer helpful suggestions. Practice, practice, practice.

3. Invite younger classes to your storytelling festival. Let your storytellers sit on blankets around your room, in the Media Center, or on the playground. The younger students can rotate between the storytellers as time permits. Have fun!