

CALCON 2015 - Storytime Outside the Lines

Presented by: Cliff Davidson, Kathleen DiLeo, and Lori Crocker

I. Introduction

- A. Where did this come from?
- B. Why do this?
- C. Who are these tips coming from?
- D. Empowerment is the key
- E. Be Yourself, but a slightly more exaggerated, colorful version of yourself, and kids will respond!
- F. Be willing to look silly - kids will think you're funny, not actually an idiot (usually) :-)

II. Audience Management Strategies - Top Tip - have a really engaging, entertaining storytime!

- A. Lots of positive reinforcement - praise good sitting and listening
- B. Give directions as questions or challenges
 - 1. "Who is sitting down criss cross applesauce?"
 - 2. "Let's see if you can all sit down criss cross applesauce before I get back to my seat" (as I go turn the music off after a song)
 - 3. Okay, raise your hand if you're sitting criss cross applesauce.
- C. Countdown technique to transition - We'll start this really fun book as soon as everyone is sitting, in 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5.... Great Job!
- D. Use songs that include transitions
 - 1. Silly Dance Contest - Jim Gill (song with it built in)
 - 2. If You're Happy and You Know It - last verse "sit back down" (add it yourself)
- E. Lower Voice and Lean in
- F. Teach them the reaction you want
 - 1. "Sometimes when I read about characters falling asleep, it puts me to sleep too! If I fall asleep, then just say, "Wake up, Mr. Cliff!" - what do you say if I fall asleep? (Wake up, Mr. Cliff!)"
 - 2. The Wiggles did this at the beginning of their live shows because Jeff would fall asleep through the shows.

III. Using Humor with Children - Top Tip - depending on your personality and history with the kids, you might need to spend more time building this up and leading into it.

- A. Storyteller in Trouble - things keep going wrong and are out of your control
 - 1. misplaced books, floppy flannel board props
 - 2. apologize and say it won't happen again, then repeat several times

3. act surprised/scared/frustrated at something
 - a) example: jack in the box
4. magic that doesn't work (throw something behind you to disappear it)
5. finger gets stuck in some toy or prop

B. Look Don't See - the kids see something that you don't

1. turn the page and don't notice what's on it. be telling the kids there's no way there would be an alligator in this book as the kids are looking at a page with an alligator on it that you haven't seen.
2. say a puppet is sleeping, but have it look around when you are looking at the kids.

C. Repetition - just what it sounds like

1. you might not get a reaction the first time, it should build after the kids catch on to what's going on
2. you can repeat stuff several times if it is still getting great reactions, but 3 is often about right

D. Running Gags - keeps coming up throughout storytime

1. this could be anything that occurs multiple times through your storytime
 - a) magicians often use different types of silly/gag wands that keep messing up through a show
2. could happen in slightly different ways or the same each time - ie. keep falling asleep, have a noise that keeps occurring, keep holding the books upside down, etc.
3. benefit is that the kids catch on to it and react more strongly each time.

IV. **Practice Time** - Turning anything into a comedy prop!

- A. Pass out random objects
- B. Have small groups brainstorm ways to be silly with it
- C. Have some groups

V. **Audience Participation** - Top Tip - goal is to create a powerful, positive memory for the child (which also creates one for the parent)

- A. Use Phrase - "I always choose children who are sitting down nicely with their hand raised."
- B. Don't pick child that is being offered up by parent or other kids -
- C. Talk to the child, just ask questions, and you'll often get funny answers
- D. Treat the child as a person, not like a prop
- E. Goal is to create a really special moment for a child

1. I have on several occasions heard from a parent who's child I called up front to help with something, that their child loved it and it was really memorable for the child and the parent!

F. Works both with single volunteers and multiple children at once.

G. Get down low - Danny Orleans calls it "hydraulics" to get on the level of the child to make him/her feel comfortable.

VI. Closing/General Tips

A. Record yourself doing storytime on video and watch it. You will see ways to improve!

1. i noticed my leg bouncing while I played guitar - looked like a nervous twitch

2. Kathleen noticed her puppet seemed angry

B. Practice these things until they are comfortable, but realize it will be different doing them in front of kids and may not feel natural until you do them for awhile and learn the best ways to respond to the kids responding.

C. Practice your facial/verbal expressions - surprise, frustration, happy, relieved, etc.

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Storytime Outside the Lines Resource List
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Books consulted for Presentation:

- **Seriously Silly by David Kaye (Silly Billy)**
 - entertaining children
 - dealing with challenges
 - comedy magic routines
- **Maximum Entertainment by Ken Weber**
 - general advice on performing/entertaining
 - not focused on presenting to children
- **Beyond Look, Don't See by Christopher T. Magician**
 - lots of ideas on how to adapt anything to be funny for children
 - lots of actual magic routines scripted out

Videos consulted:

- **The Art of Presenting Magic to Children by Danny Orleans**
 - great children's performer with a gentler style - not hyper silly
 - complete magic show, explanations of effects, and commentary on managing an audience of children
- **The Great Zucchini Live! by Eric Knaus**
 - one of the most successful performers for preschoolers (D.C. area)
 - very silly, repetitive and seemingly disorganized
 - kids love him and he has them cracking up

Websites to check out:

- **Kids Entertainer Hub** - www.kidsentertainerhub.com
 - lots of articles, tips, and advice from a wide variety of children's performers
 - quite a bit of business advice, but also great info on entertaining children
- **Julian's Magician School** - www.birthday-party-magician.com/magician-school.html
 - lots of simple magic tricks that anyone can do with a little practice
 - great place to start if you want to include magic (and it's free!)
- **Magic Tricks for Kids** - www.magictricksforkids.org
 - another site with great, free magic tricks that also work for adults! :-)
- **Kidabra** - www.kidabra.org
 - The national association of Children's and Family Performers website

Children's Entertainers to check out:

- Silly Billy
- Danny Orleans
- The Great Zucchini
- Christopher T. Magician
- Julian Mather
- Ken Kelly
- Tommy James