



Storytelling & Critical Thinking

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Storytelling and Critical Thinking

Storytelling can teach by imparting truths. But storytelling can also teach by inviting people to think for themselves and to create their own truths. When people come up with interpretations and support them with reasons, they are doing what is called critical thinking. And when different people work together to create responses to stories, they do something more—like problem-solving, and self-reliance, and respect for diversity, and the habit of cooperation—skills and habits that people who don't live in democratic societies often don't have and wish they did.

It wasn't until I started working in Eastern Europe in the 1990's that I caught on to the value of storytelling as a tool for provoking discussions to help people think critically. The task in those days was to work with teachers who wanted to learn to teach for democracy. They wanted to know how to invite students to think for themselves. In our workshops we always worked through translators, and we rarely had time to have written texts translated in advance. So we would tell a story, and the translator would retell it in the local language, sentence by sentence. And then we would have discussions. Over time, you could see people's originality and openness to other people's points of view grow and grow.

Fast forward to 2013. My adopted state of New York and 44 other states have recently embraced a set of Common Core Standards governing what children should know how to do with language and literacy. The standards require that even young children be able to do sophisticated thinking about stories—making their own interpretations of stories and defending them with evidence, describing how events in a story look from different characters' points of view, detecting themes, and the like. Young readers won't be able to read texts that have enough complexity to support such sophisticated thinking, but they can certainly engage in deep thinking if the story is put to them in an engaging way. So here is another place where storytelling has a valuable role to play.

Our focus in this workshop will be on choosing stories that will inspire interesting discussions, and trying out different methods for conducting those discussions.

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What Kinds of Stories?

Some stories pose their own questions. “The Cow Tail Switch,” from West Africa, and “The Theft of a Smell,” from Peru, are examples of those. You can have a good discussion of each by asking for predictions about how they will end, or you can use a fancier strategy such as “Corners” that gives people group support as they think of reasons to support their answers.

Some stories contain moral dilemmas that invite exploration. They may not come right out and ask a question, but the questions aren’t hard to find. As D.L. Ashliman explains, because stories were traditionally told to audiences of all ages at the same time, they regularly resorted to symbolism and metaphor, spoke on more than one level, to occupy both the literal-minded listeners and those who wanted more. Speaking on more than one level, using symbolism and metaphor, are often the ways people talk about things that are too powerful or too murky or too scary to talk about more directly, which is probably why we use those means for talking about our religious experiences, or our greatest fears and hopes. “Ivan and the Seal Skin,” from Scotland, and “The King and the Shirt,” from Russia, are stories that can invite listeners to voice their own questions. But there are strategies that can deepen the discussion and lead to debate. Some of those strategies are *Shared Inquiry*, *Discussion Web*, *Academic Controversy*, and *Value Line*.

And some stories seem straightforward, but can still yield up engaging issues with a little work. “Jack and the Beanstalk,” from England; “Hansel and Gretel,” from Germany; “The Boy Who Lived With the Bears,” from the Seneca Indians of Upstate New York; “The Orphan Boy and the Elk Dogs,” from the Blackfoot people of the Northern Plains; and “A Gift of Laurel Blooms,” from the Appalachian Mountains in Kentucky, can all inspire interesting thoughts. But sometimes to get at the heart of things you need to compare these stories to other stories. Sometimes you need to twist them around. And sometimes you need to climb inside the skin of the characters and see what they are going through. Strategies like retelling them by casting people in different *dramatic roles*, or *comparing them to other stories*, or relating them to life, or *dramatizing* them can all lead to good thoughts.

What Strategies?

Corners.

Corners is a group discussion activity that is used after people have heard a story, to invite them to choose and defend different positions on an issue raised in that story. Corners requires a story that raises an issue that has three or four defensible responses. (If the story doesn’t have at least two plausible responses, choose another story, or another discussion strategy).

After choosing the question and teasing out three or four likely responses, explain to the participants that they are going to think about a question, choose a position, and be ready to support it.

Once the issue has been raised, have the participants rank order the possible answers from the most to least preferred. For that, you will need to state the responses and assign a number to each one.

Next, have all of the participants who preferred the first response go to one corner, all those in favor of the second go to another corner, and so on. (Note: One corner can be for those who are undecided).

Next, have the people in each corner share their views with each other. What are their reasons for taking the position they have chosen?

Now call for a debate by inviting one corner to state succinctly its position and the main reasons the group has for supporting their view. Ask each group, in turn, to do the same.

Once the formal debate has been presented by the spoken people, all other members of the group should now be encouraged to participate in the conversation. If the groups need prodding to begin this discussion portion then ask some probing questions such as: “why should those of you in group A not accept the opinion of group B? Where do you disagree with what group B has to say?” or, “what about the undecided group? What have you heard that moves you toward a clearer opinion?” or, “why are those of you in group B unconvinced by what group A has said?”

Explain now that some people may have changed their minds by what they have heard. If that is the case they should feel free to change groups at any time. To do so they simply have to walk from the group they are in to the group they now agree with. In fact, encourage people to move as their opinion shifts. Also encourage members in the groups when others are leaving to try to keep them in their group. This puts the burden on the group members within each group to be persuasive enough not to lose group members or draw more adherents. It is also wise for listeners to take some notes on their thinking as they listen and discuss. This will help them later when they have to write down their position on the issue and defend it.

Finally, once the discussion has ended and everyone has moved to their final group, ask each group to summarize its position and the reasons that support it.

The Discussion Web.

The discussion web (Crawford, Saul, and Mathews, 2005) is a cooperative learning activity that involves all listeners in deep discussions of readings. The discussion web proceeds with the following steps:

1. You prepare a thoughtful binary question -- a question that can be answered “yes” or “no” with support. For example, in discussing “Jack and the Beanstalk,” a binary discussion question might be “Was Jack right to steal from the giant?”
2. Ask pairs of listeners to prepare a discussion web chart that looks like the one here. Those pairs of listeners take four or five minutes to think up and list three reasons each that support both sides of the argument.

Discussion Web

Was Jack right to steal from the giant?

Yes!
(Here's why)

No!
(Here's why not)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Conclusion:

3. Next each pair joins another pair. They review the answers they had on both sides of the issue and add to each other's list. Then they argue the issue through until they reach a conclusion, that is, a position they agree on, with a list of reasons that support it.
4. At the conclusion of the lesson, call on several groups of four to give brief reports of their position and the reasons that support it. You can invite groups to debate each other if they took different sides of the argument.

Debates.

It is often useful to follow the discussion web activity with a debate. The purpose of the debate is not to declare winners and losers, but to help people practice making claims and defending them with reasons, even when others defend different claims. Working with claims, reasons, and arguments and debating ideas without attacking people -- these are key elements in critical thinking.

To have a debate, you need a binary question -- that is, a question that has a yes/no answer (since the discussion web we saw above also uses binary questions, you can follow the discussion web with a debate). Here are the steps:

1. Think of a question you think will truly divide people's opinions, and put the question on the chalkboard for all to see. If you are not sure the question will divide people roughly equally, ask for a show of hands on each side of the issue before going forward.
2. Give people time to think about the question and discuss it freely.
3. Ask people to divide up: Those who believe one answer to the question is right should go stand along the wall on one side of the room; and those who think the other is right should stand along the wall on the other side. Those who are truly undecided (that is, after thinking about it, they believe that both sides are partially right or neither side is right) should stand along the middle wall.
4. Explain or review the two ground rules:
 - a. Don't be rude to each other. (You might have to explain and demonstrate what this means.)

- b. If you hear an argument that makes you want to change your mind, walk to the other side (or to the middle). Here is a hint: As the debate proceeds, you can model the behavior of changing sides with a pantomime, by looking thoughtful for a moment after someone offers a good argument and moving to that listener's side.
5. Give people on each side three or four minutes to put their heads together and decide why they are on that side. Ask them to come up with a sentence that states their position. Then ask them to appoint someone to say that sentence.
6. Begin the debate by asking one person from each side (including the undecided group) to state that group's position.
7. Invite anyone on any team to say things (counterarguments or rebuttals) in response to what the other team has said or give more reasons in support of their own side.
8. Monitor the activity to make sure the tone stays away from negative attacks. Ask for clarification. Offer an idea or two as necessary from the devil's advocate position. Change sides. Encourage people to change sides if they are persuaded to.
9. When the debate has proceeded for ten or fifteen minutes, ask each side to summarize what they have said.

Academic Controversy.

Academic Controversy is another cooperative learning activity from Spencer Kagan (1998) that will come naturally to those who enjoy the Discussion Web (see above). The method helps people practice the art of thinking critically—in this case, taking a position and producing reasons to support arguments. It also can help them practice debating politely, using arguments and reasons, especially if you remind them to do so.

To begin, you assign people to groups of four and give them a question to discuss. As in the Discussion Web (see pages 000-000) it needs to be a binary question: the question should have a "yes" or "no," "this" or "that" answer, so people can take two sides to it, not two and a half or three or ten.

People should begin by discussing the question in their groups of four, just so they reach a common understanding of what the question means and why it matters. That shouldn't take more than three minutes.

Then you have people count off with in their group, 1, 2, 3, and 4 (if there are five listeners in any group, then there will be two listeners with the number 1). Tell listeners with numbers 1 and 2 that they should prepare to argue for the point of view that says "Yes, we should." Tell numbers 3 and 4 that they should prepare to argue the point of view, "No, we shouldn't" – or however the issue divides.

Now direct both pairs within each group to go off by themselves, taking paper and pens with them, and spend five minutes listing reasons to support their position, whichever one it is.

Here comes an interesting step: after four or five minutes, you call time. Now tell all people preparing to argue the "No" side of the issue to sit down wherever they are. Tell each of people who remain standing to make eye contact with another listener, but a different listener from his or her partner. Point to each other—make sure they both know they will be pairing up—but don't move yet. Then have those listeners sit down wherever they are, have the other listeners stand up, and have them identify partners other than their present partners. Tell all people they will have four minutes to hear their new partner's reasons, and write down any they did not already have on their lists. Then give the signal for them to join the new partner and exchange reasons.

Call time again. Now have people return to their original partners and pool the reasons they learned from their new partners, together with the reasons they already had. Then they should think carefully about all of the reasons listed, and now think of the best reasons that support their position. They should prepare to debate the other pair within their group of four. Now in order to debate, they should come up with a sentence stating their position, and two or three good reasons for their position.

When they are ready to debate (after about four more minutes), you tell the pairs to join the other pairs in their group and begin the debate. In order to debate, one side states its position with the reasons for it, and the other does the same. Then they debate each other's reasons and conclusions. That is, listeners from one side may say why they believe their reasons are more compelling than those of people on the other side, and thus should lead them to conclude whatever their position is.

Here comes another interesting twist. You let the debate go on for six or seven minutes. Then you tell people in each group that they are now free to drop their assigned positions and argue for whatever positions they personally believe. (Usually a collective groan of relief goes up at this point!). You invite groups to come up with a consensus position: that is, a position with which everyone agrees, and also reasons to support it.

After four or five more minutes, you can now call on a member of each group to give a statement of the group's conclusions from their debate.

Value Line.

A cooperative learning activity that is an extension of the debate procedure is the value line. The value line is well suited for questions that have more than two good answers and listeners might have a range of answers along a continuum. Here are the steps:

1. Pose a question to people on which answers may vary along a continuum. For example, after telling "Jack and the Beanstalk," you might ask, "Do you think we should consider Jack a hero?"
2. Give people three minutes to consider the question alone and write down their answers.
3. Now stand on one side of the room and announce that you represent one pole, or extreme position, on the argument. You might say, "Yes, I think Jack was an outstanding hero, and someone we should emulate." Invite a listener to stand at the other end of the room to represent the other pole of the argument. The listener might say, "No, I don't think Jack is a hero. Not at all. We should never try to be like Jack. We would be terrible people if we did."
4. Now invite people to line up between the two of you in places along the imaginary value line between the two poles of the argument. Each stands at a point in the line that reflects his or her position on the question. Remind people to compare their views with those of people immediately around them to make sure they are all standing in the right spots. After hearing others' answers, some listeners might elect to move one way or another along the value line.
5. Listeners may continue to discuss their responses with people on either side of them.
6. Identify three or four clusters of listeners who seem to represent different views on the question. Invite them to prepare a statement of their position and to share it with the whole group.
7. As an option, the formed line may be folded in the middle so that listeners with more divergent views may debate their responses.
8. You might want to follow this exercise with a writing opportunity in which listeners write down what they think about the issue and why. In this way, the value line serves as a rehearsal for writing an argumentative or persuasive essay.

Following Dramatic Roles.

As French drama critic Etienne Souriau (1955) pointed out many years ago, a large part of the way we understand characters in stories is by the symbolic roles they play in the plot. That is because, whether we are watching sports or reading fiction, it is normal for us to cheer the hero, boo the rival, and have a warm place in our hearts for the trusty helper. Authors of stories wittingly or unwittingly use these propensities to shape the reader's reactions to characters: assigning one the role of protagonist or main character, another the role of helper, and another the role of rival or enemy.

The roles are represented by their Zodiac symbols:

Ω *The Hero* is the desire and need that drives the story forward.

☀ *The Goal* is the hero's main need or desire.

♂ *The Rival* is the person who stands between the hero and her or his goal.

☾ *The Helper* is a person or persons in a story who helps the hero achieve his goal.

You can use dramatic roles in several ways to think about stories. One way is to nominate candidates for each of the roles and discuss your choices with others. These discussions can become lively, because not all role assignments are obvious. Is the helper in "Jack and the Beanstalk" the mysterious old man or the giant's wife? If it is the giant's wife (and the giant is the rival), why should she help the person who is striving against her husband? Is Jack's goal to obey his mother, to get money, to satisfy his curiosity, or to prove himself? Or is it all of these things? Discussing these issues takes listeners deep into the story.

Another way of using dramatic roles is to take different perspectives on a story. Take a character who seems to be playing one role and think how the story would seem if we imagined that character playing a different role. For example, in "Jack and the Beanstalk," suppose the giant's wife were the hero; that is, suppose we saw things from her perspective. What is her goal? Who is her rival? Exploring these questions can lead us to think of even seemingly transparent stories in strikingly new ways.

Save the Last Word for Me.

Save the Last Word for Me (Short, Harste, & Burke, 1996) provides a framework for a small-group or whole-class discussion of a text. The procedure is especially good for encouraging children to take the lead in discussing their reading. The steps of the strategy are as follows:

1. After being assigned a reading to do independently, listeners are given note cards and asked to find three or four quotations they consider particularly interesting or worthy of comment.
2. People write the quotations they have found on the note cards.
3. On the other sides of the cards, people write comments about their chosen quotations. That is, they say what the quotations made them think of, what is surprising about the quotations, and why they chose them.
4. People bring their quotation cards to discussion groups. You call on someone to read a card aloud.
5. After reading the quotation on his or her card, the listener invites other listeners to comment on that quotation. (You might need to help keep comments on the subject of the quotation.) You also may comment on the quotation.
6. Once others have had their say about the quotation, the listener who chose it reads his or her comments aloud. Then there can be no further discussion. The listener who chose it gets to have the last word.
7. That listener can now call on another listener to share his or her quotation and begin the process all over again. Not all listeners will be able to share their quotation if the whole class takes part in the activity, so you will need to keep track of who shared quotes and make sure other children get chances to share their quotes the next time.

Dramatizing a Story.

Dramatizing a story allows listeners to take a closer look at a story by getting a real feel for the action. The procedure for dramatizing a story is adapted from the works of Spolin (1986) and Heathcote (Wagner, 1999).

Immerse listeners in the story. You need to make sure people get the story on a literal level—that they know what happened. This might mean reading the story to them or asking them to reread the part you are going to dramatize.

Warm them up to do drama. There are many warm-up activities that work well to prepare listeners to act with more expression:

- 1. Stretches:** Have people stand in a circle. Now tell them to stretch their arms as high as they can as they spread their feet apart and make very wide faces. Now tell them to shrink up into tiny balls. Then stretch out big again. Have them do the same with their faces: Lion face! (expansive expression). Prune face! (shrunken expression).
- 2. Mirrors:** Have listeners stand opposite each other. One is the person, and the other is the person reflected in the mirror. Have the person move (slowly) as the other mirrors the person's movements. Then switch roles.
- 3. Portraits:** Have listeners get into groups of four or five. Have them think of something to depict that uses all of them as parts. For example, to depict a skier, listeners can act as poles, skis, and the person.
- 4. Superactions:** This activity is more complex. Explain to people that when we do things with other people, we often act on two levels: what we are doing and what we mean by what we are doing. For example, when we pass somebody we know in the hallway, having just seen the person a short time before, we might nod and say, "Hi." But when we see a friend in the hallway who has just come back to school after a long illness, we might say "HI!" with more exuberance. In both cases, the action is the same: to greet the friend. But the *superaction* is different. In the first case, it is just to show the person that we know he or she is there; in the second case, it is to show that we are surprised and delighted to see the person. Now practice dramatizing superactions by setting up brief situations, such as a waiter taking a customer's order. Write superactions on small pieces of paper, and give one privately to each actor. Have different pairs of listeners act out the same scene, with the same actions but with different superactions, leaving time for the other listeners to guess what they thought the superaction was and say why they thought so.

Choose critical moments. It can be particularly useful to dramatize just a few choice scenes from a story, especially the turning points when the most is at stake. In "Jack and the Beanstalk," such a scene might be when Jack first approaches the Giant's castle, knocks on the door, and is greeted by the Giant's wife.

Segment the Situation. Now assign listeners to take each of these roles. Invite other listeners to join them as they think about the situation from each character's point of view. What must be on Jack's mind when he approaches the huge door? What do the door and the walls of the castle look like? How large are they in proportion to Jack? What does Jack hear around the place? What does he smell? How does the place make him feel? What makes him pound his fist on the door? What is at stake for him? What are his choices? What will he do if he *doesn't* knock on the door? Why does he decide to do it?

Do the same for the Giant's wife. How does the knocking sound to her—thunderous or puny? What does she think when she sees the small but plucky boy at her door? What thoughts go through her mind, knowing what she knows about her husband? What are her feelings as she looks down at Jack? Ask the actors to focus their minds on a few of these considerations as they prepare to act out the scene.

Dramatize the scene. Use minimal props and minimal costumes to help listeners think their way into their roles. Ask the other listeners to watch carefully and see what the actors make them think of.

Side coach. As the director, don't be passive, but take opportunities to make suggestions from the sidelines that will help listeners act more expressively. You might ask, "Jack, do you feel scared now or brave? How can you show us how you're feeling?"

Invite reflection. Ask the other listeners what they saw. What did they think was on the characters' minds? It is worthwhile to invite several groups of listeners to dramatize the same scene and have the class discuss the aspects of the situation that each performance brings to light.

Terms In Advance.

It's sometimes good to level the field and invite your listeners to be co-creators of stories. If you are about to tell a story you believe your audience does not already know, one way to invite greater participation is to choose four or five key terms from your story and display them. Tell people the terms will occur in the story you're about to tell. It's also good to tell them what you can about the genre of the story and where it came from. Ask people to think hard about the terms you wrote, and what they might have to do with each other. How might they go together to make a story? Let their imaginations work on them. After a few minutes, ask people in pairs to make up a story that involves all of those terms. They can jot down notes if they want, but they won't have time to write the whole story. After four or five minutes, invite two or three pairs to share their story. Keep a straight face if someone tells the story you're about to tell—or if someone says, "I know this story. It's about..." you may politely interrupt them and ask them to see if they turn out to be correct! Next, invite everyone to listen to your story, and later, ask them to compare the story they made up with the one you told.

Shared Inquiry Discussion.

The Great Books Foundation developed the shared inquiry method to accompany their literature discussion program (see Plecha, 1992), which has been conducted in thousands of schools and libraries for half a century. Shared inquiry is a procedure by which someone leads a deep discussion into a story. It is best done with a group of eight to ten people—few enough for everyone to participate but large enough for a good mix of ideas. It goes like this:

1. Before the discussion, choose a story worth talking about. Such a story should lend itself to more than one interpretation (not all stories do this well) and raises interesting issues. Folktales often meet these criteria very well.
2. Prepare four or five discussion questions. These should be what the Great Books Foundation calls interpretive questions, and they have three criteria:
 - a. They are real questions, the sort of question you might ask a friend as you walk together out of a provocative film.
 - b. They have more than one defensible answer. (This criterion guarantees a debate. If it is not met, the discussion won't be a discussion but a "read my mind" exercise.)
 - c. They must lead the discussion into the text. (A question such as, "Why was the giant's wife kinder to Jack than his own mother was?" leads the children to talk about what is in the text first,

even though they might then comment on what they know from experience. A question such as, “Have you ever done anything as brave as Jack?” leads the discussion away from the text and out into twenty-five different directions.)

3. Tell the story. It often helps to stop and ask predictions and comments along the way—you want people to be really engaged in it.
4. Put a question out there for discussion. The Great Books people usually write the question on a chalkboard, signaling that we will stay with it for a while. But in a less formal setting, you can just say, “I wonder about _____,” and leave time for the question to sink in. (The point is, we’re not in a hurry. Thinking takes time). Ask people to think about the question. It’s good if they can jot down notes on their answers. Allow some time for this.
5. As you invite people to share their ideas, you can invite reluctant speakers to read what they wrote as well. Encourage debate between people, pointing out differences in what they say and asking those and others to expand on the differences. Invite people to support their ideas by drawing on the story or from their own experiences. Give them time to restate ideas more clearly. But avoid correcting anyone, or suggesting that any one’s answer is right or wrong. If you want to offer your own answer to the question, make sure the conversation already has a life of its own, so you don’t come across as the expert.
6. Keep a seating chart with the people’s names a brief note on what each one says. When the discussion of a question seems to have run its course, you can read from your notes, summarize what people have said so far, and ask whether anyone has anything to add.
5. Once the discussion gets going, follow the children’s lead and continue to discuss the issues and questions they raise.

Even when they don’t use the whole approach, many teachers use aspects of the shared inquiry procedure in conducting book discussions. For example, they might ask students to write down ideas to bring to a discussion, or they might take notes during the discussion, or they take care to draw out the students’ ideas and not dominate the discussion themselves.

What Stories?

The Cow Tail Switch

The village of Kundi sat on a hill by the edge of a rain forest near the Cavally River in what is now Liberia. If you happened upon that village on a typical day you would see boys and girls herd cattle and goats, or fish in the river with big, round nets. You would see the women hoe cassava or pound grain in pestles hollowed from logs, and the men, like as not, arguing cheerfully in the palaver hut.

One man by the name of Ogaloussa stayed apart from the other men. Ogaloussa was far and away the most successful hunter in the village. He often slept by day before a night hunt in the rain forest, and sometimes stayed out on the hunt for days at a time, His wife and three sons were used to his coming and going.

One morning Ogaloussa gathered his weapons and went to the forest to hunt. Meanwhile, his wife and three sons went about their daily routine tending to their chores. The day had gone by as normal. As they ate their dinner, they noticed something different. Ogaloussa had not returned.

Another day had gone by and there was still no sign of Ogaloussa. His family began to wonder what could be keeping him. His sons spoke of him often at first. Then, as the days turned into months, their father's disappearance was mentioned less and less.

Ogaloussa's wife gave birth to another child and named him Puli. When Puli was able to talk, his first words were, "Where is my father?" Puli's older brothers suddenly remembered their father's disappearance and decided that they should go look for him.

Ogaloussa's sons gathered their weapons and started out to find their father. Deep in the forest, they lost their way several times. Each time this happened, one of Ogaloussa's sons would find the right path again. Finally, they came to an open space in the forest and there they saw Ogaloussa's bones and weapons. They knew then that he had not returned because he had been attacked and killed while he hunted.

They boys were glad that they found their father, but they were sad because of the condition that he was in. The boys knew that they had to do something. One son spoke out and said, "Even though he is dead, I know how to put his bones back together." He then gathered Ogaloussa's bones and correctly put them back together.

Another son said, "I can put flesh over those bones." Soon, Ogaloussa's bones were covered with flesh.

A third said "I can put breath in his body, and the ability to speak." After he did so, Ogaloussa was once again alive and he got up from the ground. The sons collected their father's weapons and together they headed back to their village.

When Ogaloussa got home, his wife cooked for him and he ate. He stayed in the house for four days. On the fifth day, he came out. Because he had returned from the dead, he had to shave his head. He also killed a cow, and decorated the cow's tail. This cow tail was very beautiful and Ogaloussa took it with him everywhere. At first people just stared and wondered about his beautiful cow tail, but soon people began to beg to have it.

One day, Ogaloussa decided to share with the other villagers the meaning behind the cow tail switch. "One day a long time ago I went to the forest to hunt and I was killed by a leopard. My sons came to look for me and they brought me back from the land of the dead. Each one of my sons did something to bring me back, but I can only give this cow tail to one son."

The sons began to argue over who should get the cow tail. Each son felt that what he had done was the most important. Ogaloussa spoke out saying, "I will give this cow tail to Puli." Everyone remembered that the child's first words were "Where is my father?" All the villagers agreed with Ogaloussa's decision. If Puli had not asked about his father's whereabouts, he never would have been searched for and found. *It is now said that a man is not dead until he is forgotten.*

[Source: adapted from <http://www.ncsu.edu/chass/extension/ghanatalk/folktales/cow.html>]

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The Stolen Smells

In a village in Peru there lived a baker. Every morning he rose many hours before the sun and went to his bakery. He built the fire, mixed the dough, waited for the dough to rise-- hours before the first customer came into his shop. The baker felt sorry for himself. He was jealous of his customers. Why should he rise so early and work so hard? At least people paid for his bread. Except for one person...

Also in that village lived a poor man. His job of picking up trash earned him only a few pennies a day. His family needed those pennies, because he had many children. The poor man's one pleasure was to stand for a few minutes each morning near the door of the bakery, and smell the fresh-baked bread.

The baker saw the poor man standing near his door, enjoying the smells of his bread without paying. Day after day the baker watched the poor man, and his anger grew and grew. Finally one day he ran outside and grabbed the poor man by the front of his shirt.

"You're stealing my smells!" he shouted.

"What?" said the frightened poor man.

"Yes, you're stealing my smells. And now you are going to pay!" said the furious baker. He dragged the poor man down the street toward the house of the village judge. The people on the street stared in amazement as the baker pulled the frightened pauper along the sidewalk.

The baker knocked on the judge's door.

"Come in," came the voice from inside. The baker pushed the poor man into the room.

"What do you want? What are you doing here?" asked the judge, looking up from his desk.

"Your honor," said the furious baker, "This man has been stealing his smells!"

"What?" asked the judge. "Explain this to me."

"Every day I get up hours before the rooster crows. I build my the fire, I mix my dough, I wait for the dough to rise, and I bake the bread, all while others sleep. This man stands by the door every morning and enjoys the smells. He steals the fruits of my hard work, without paying a penny."

"Is this true?" said the judge to the poor man.

"I enjoy the smells, it is true. But I have only a few pennies in my pocket, and I cannot afford to buy his bread," said the poor man.

"You have pennies in your pocket?" said the judge.

"Yes," answered the poor man. "But they are all that I have."

"Give them to me," said the judge.

"Please sir, no. My family needs them. We are very poor..."

"Give them to me," the judge repeated. So the poor man handed the pennies to the judge. The judge held the coins in two hands.

To the baker the judge said, "This man stole your smells?"

"Yes," said the baker, smiling as he waited for his reward.

"Then here is your payment."

The judge shook the coins and made them jingle in his cupped hands. "The sound of money is fair trade for the smell of bread," said the judge. "Court is adjourned!"

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Ivan and the Seal Skin

Along the north coast of Scotland, the winter wind howls through dark nights and gray days, and towering waves smash against black rocks. But in summer, the sea calms, and the days lengthen, so that daylight lasts through twenty-four hours. Then the few fishermen who live on that remote coast may dare to throw their nets out into the sea, and try to catch their livelihood. Even in summer, a sudden storm may overtake them; or a silent fog may creep upon them and make them lose their way. Then their loved ones go down to the shore, and gaze for some sign at the mute waves, perhaps to see a seal stare back with big sad eyes. The people see the seals, and they wonder...

On a little cove by the sea lived a fisherman and his wife, and their one son, Ivan Ivanson. It was the longest day of the year: Midsummer's Eve. Close to midnight, with the sky still a radiant orange, young Ivan, barely seven years old, was exploring the rocks by the shore, searching for shells and bits of net and whatever else the waves might have washed up.

Suddenly a strange sound drifted to him on the wind. It was like the singing of unearthly voices, blended in beautiful harmony. He looked up. Away down the shore to his right he could see a tendril of smoke rising from a hole at the base of the rocks, near the point.

Ivan would have explored, but his short legs wouldn't carry him over the large boulders, so when his mother called, he returned to the family cottage without investigating further.

Seven years went by. Ivan, now fourteen, found himself once again down on the shore, right at midnight, on Midsummer's Eve. Once again he thought he heard strange singing, and again he saw smoke rising from a hole at the base of the rocks, down by the point. I don't know why he didn't go to the source this time. Perhaps some emergency called him back to his parents' cottage. His father's health, like as not. For both his parents were growing old.

Seven more years went by. His father had worn out from fishing the cold brine, so his parents had retired to town, leaving their cottage to Ivan. Ivan lived all alone, with only the cries of the shore birds for company. He fished long days, and warmed himself at night by the little peat fire. I imagine he was lonely.

When Midsummer's Eve came again, Ivan remembered the singing, and the smoke. At midnight, he walked down to the shore. The same strange singing reached his ears, woven into unearthly and beautiful harmonies.

This time, no boulders would stop him, and there was no one to call him back. Ivan made his way down the shore toward the point. As he drew closer, he could hear the crackle of a fire, and could see its reflection against the rocks. Beautiful singing came from inside the cave. And there at the cave's mouth lay a pile of sleek and beautiful gray furs: seal skins. Ivan carefully peeked inside

the cave. A circle of young people held hands around the fire, their eyes closed, raising a chorus of unearthly melodies.

Back outside the cave, Ivan chose the sealskin he thought the most comely and slowly, carefully, drew it off the pile. He rolled the fur into a ball and made straight off for home with it. Once there, he locked the seal skin in a wooden trunk, slipped the key onto a leather thong tied around his neck, and went to bed.

In the morning he took the blanket from his bed and returned to the cave. There he found a sad and beautiful young woman, huddled and shivering, covering her nakedness with her arms and long hair. Without a word, Ivan wrapped the young woman in his blanket and led her home to his cottage.

Ivan treated the woman kindly, and in time they fell in love. They had one son, then another. Ivan was happy enough, and the woman was a good mother. But often Ivan saw his wife staring off at the sea with big, sad eyes. He never told her what was in the wooden box, and he forbade her to open it.

More years passed. One Christmas Eve Ivan readied his family to go to church. The wife, said she was feeling poorly, though and asked Ivan and the boys to go on alone.

Perhaps Ivan was angry at this. In his haste to dress, Ivan left the thong with the key hanging on his bed stead, and went off to church without it.

Ivan and the boys returned from church after midnight. They saw the open door before they reached to the cottage. They found the wooden box lying open, and the key still in the lock. The wife was gone.

They say that sometimes when the boys walked along the shore, a beautiful seal with large sad eyes would follow along close by in the cold water. And they say sometimes when Ivan was fishing, the same sad and beautiful seal seemed to herd the herring fish into his nets. Perhaps the seal was Ivan's wife. We cannot say. All we know is that Ivan never saw his wife on this earth again.

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THE GREAT SELCHIE OF SULE SKERRY
(Traditional, from the Isle of Orkney)

An earthly nourris sits and sings,
And aye she sings, "Ba lilly wean,
Little ken I my bairns father,
Far less the land that he staps in."

Then he had stood at her bed fit,
And a grumly guest I'm sure was he,
Saying "Here am I, thy bairns father,
Although I be not comely."

I am a man upon the land,
I am a selchie in the sea,
And when I'm far frae every strand,
My home it is in Sule Skerry."

Then he has taken a purse of gold,
And he has laid it on her knee,
Saying, "give to me, my little young son,
And take thee up thy nouriss fee.

It shall come to pass on a summer's day,
When the sun shines hot on every stone,
That I shall take my little young son,
And teach him for to swim the foam.

And thou shalt marry a proud gunner,
And a very proud gunner I'm sure he'll be,
And the very first shot that e're he shoots,
Will kill both my young son and me."

The Story of a Crane Wife

(Tsuru no On-gaeShi)

Once upon a time, there lived an honest young man in the countryside of Japan. One day, while he was tilling a paddy field, a crane suddenly came flapping down from the sky. It was a white crane with truly beautiful feathers. The bird was apparently wounded, and did not fly away, but came reeling towards the man and weakly fell to the ground. Wondering, the man checked the crane's feathers and found an arrow stuck in the base of the wings.

"Poor crane! That's why you can't fly!" So saying, the young man pulled the arrow out and washed the wound clean. The crane soon recovered and showed its delight by flapping its wings.

"Now," the man said to the bird, "be careful never to be spotted by a hunter again".

Thereupon, the crane circled over his head three times as if to express its thanks and then disappeared high into the sky after uttering a shrill cry. The young man resumed his work, deeply contented that he had done a good thing.

At nightfall when the stars began to appear, he returned to his home. To his great surprise, however, he found a beautiful young woman, whom he never seen before standing at the entrance.

She greeted him, saying, "Thank you for your day's hard work". Startled, he wondered if he was entering the wrong house, but the woman said with a smile, "This is your home and I'm your bride."

"I don't believe it," the man shouted. "I'm so poor no woman will ever agree to marry me. Besides, I have only enough rice to feed a single person!"

"Don't worry," the woman replied. "I have brought rice." So saying, she took rice out of a small bag and began to fix supper.

The man finally consented saying, "How strange that you should force me to marry you! Well, do what you like!" and thus the woman came to live with the poor young man.

Oddly enough, the small bag the woman had brought always provided the amount of rice they wanted, enabling the couple to lead a happy life.

Time went by and one day, the woman asked her husband to set up a workshop for weaving. He borrowed money and had a special room built. Thereupon, the woman entered the room, saying, "Please never look in here for seven days". And for exactly seven days after that, only the sound of a loom was heard from within day in and day out. The man felt as if he were waiting for as long as one or two years, but remembering her request, he did not peep into the workshop.

The seven days passed and the woman came out somewhat haggard. Held in her hands was a roll of resplendently beautiful cloth such a he had never hoped to see. "Now," she said to him, "I have woven a roll of cloth. Please take this to the town market. It will sell for 100 "ryo" (a big sum in terms of ancient Japanese coinage)."

The next day, the man went to town and the cloth brought a surprisingly high price just as his wife had said. Startled and delighted, he hurried home.

Upon reaching home, he found his wife already closeted in the workshop, and only the sound of the loom was heard. He wondered how she could weave such beautiful cloth apparently without treads. Soon he could no longer contain his ardent desire to see her, and stealthily peeped into the

workshop, breaking his promise never to do so. To his great surprise, he could not find is comely wife there. Only a crane was weaving cloth with white feathers plucked from is body.

Promptly realizing that the man was looking in, the crane stopped weaving, staggered towards him and said: "Well, my dear husband, you have seen everything. Now that you have found out what I really am, I can no longer stay here, to my great regret. I am the crane who was saved by you. To repay your kindness, I have so far served you in the shape of a woman. But from now on, please regard this half finished cloth as myself and keep it dearly."

The crane then flew up with her remaining wings and vanished into the sky, never to return to the man.

Source: www.lksd.org/.../7%20The%20Story%20of%20a%20Crane%20Wife..

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The King and the Shirt

A King once fell ill. 'I will give half my kingdom to the man who can cure me' he said.

All the wise men gathered together to decide how the King could be cured, but no one knew. Only one of the wise men said what he believed would cure the King.

'If you can find a happy man, take off his shirt, put it on the King and the King will be cured'

Immediately the King sent his messengers to search for a happy man. They traveled far and wide throughout the kingdom, but could not find a happy man. There was no one who was completely satisfied.

If a man was rich, he was ailing. If he was healthy, he was poor. If he was rich and healthy, he had a cross and nagging wife. If he had children, they were naughty. Everyone has something to complain about and so, they were not happy.

Finally, late one night, the King's son was passing by a poor little hut and he heard someone say, 'Now God be praised, I have finished my work, I have eaten my fill and I can lie down and sleep, what more could I want'

The King's son rejoiced and gave orders that the man's shirt be taken and carried to the King and that the poor man be given as much money as he wanted.

The messengers went in to take off the man's shirt, but the happy man was so poor that he had no shirt.

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