

Telling Stories Across Your Fingers

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Telling stories is fun and engaging. Everyone likes to hear a good story told well. Telling stories is also a great precursor to writing stories. While telling stories, storytellers often revise the stories they're telling to make the stories better every time they tell them. Teach your students how to tell stories across their fingers and how to make the stories better every time they tell them.

Here is a sure fire way to teach your students how to tell stories and become better writers.

Begin by saying: All stories have a beginning, middle, and an end. They also move across time. Today I am going to teach you how to make sure your stories have a beginning, middle, and an end, and move across time by teaching you how to tell stories across your fingers. Everyone raise your left hand in the air in front of you. Grab your thumb, this is the beginning, grab your three middle fingers, this is the middle, now grab your little finger, this is the end. To move your stories across time use the transition words, first, next, and finally as you tell the middle of your stories.

Then say: First, I will show you how I tell a story across my fingers. I always like to tell stories about things I know about and care about. One thing I know about and care about is my dog Lilly Rose. I remember three stories I could tell about her, one is the time I chose Lilly out of a litter of puppies, another is the time I taught Lilly how to do tricks, and the third time is when Lilly was sick and I helped her get better. I am going to pick the time I taught Lilly how to do tricks.

Hold your left hand in the air and point to your thumb and say: The thumb represents the beginning of my story. Here, I tell when my story happened, where my story happened, who was there, and what we were doing. My story happened one cold winter morning. I was sitting in the kitchen with my dog Lilly. I decided to teach her how to do tricks. I point to my thumb and say it all together nice and smooth like this: One cold, winter morning I was sitting in my kitchen with my dog Lilly and I decided to teach her how to do tricks.

Hold your little finger and say: When I tell a story, I like to think about how I will end the story before I tell the middle. The story endings should satisfy the listener or reader. Sometimes I use a "big feeling" ending and sometimes I use a "lesson learned" ending. Today, I am going to use a "big feeling" ending. I point to my little finger and say: I really like teaching my dog tricks because we get to spend time together.

Hold your three middle fingers and say: Now I need to tell the events that happened in my story. I tell the events by pointing to my pointer finger and saying, first, and telling what happened first, then I point to my middle finger and say, next, and tell what happened next, then I point to my ring finger and say, finally, and tell what happened last. I point to all three fingers one at a time and say it all together nice and smooth like this: First, I taught her how to sit. Next, I taught her how to shake hands. Finally, I tried to teach her how to roll over.

Hold your hand up and say: Now I have a bare bones story that has a beginning, middle, and an end that moves across time. Listen as I put it all together: One cold, winter morning I was sitting in my kitchen with my dog Lilly and I decided to teach her tricks. First, I taught her how to sit. Next, I taught her how to shake hands. Finally, I tried to teach her how to roll over. I really like teaching my dog tricks because we get to spend time together.

Then say: Yes, I know it isn't much of a story yet. I need to tell it a few more times and each time I tell it I need to add more things I remember such as specific nouns, active verbs, and what I was thinking or feeling at the time.

Hold your hand up and say: This time when I tell my story I am going to slide my finger down in between each finger and tell what I was thinking or feeling at the time. One cold, winter morning I was sitting in my kitchen with my dog Lilly and I decided to teach her tricks. *I was thinking that our friends Rocky and Lesley would like to see her do tricks when they come over to visit.* First, I taught her how to sit. *It was easy. I was thinking that she was a smart dog and I was feeling like a pretty good dog trainer.* Next, I taught her how to shake hands. *Believe it or not, that was even easier. I thought she was brilliant and I felt on top of the world.* Finally, I tried to teach her how to roll over. *This was harder. I began to wonder if she was as smart as I thought she was.* I really like teaching my dog tricks because we get to spend time together.

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Then say: Now, I need to tell my story again at least one more time. This time I need to make it even better. I think I will add some specific action and change the ending to a lesson learned ending. Listen to it again and see if you think it is getting better.

End by telling the story one more time: One cold, winter morning I was sitting in my kitchen with my *Golden Retriever*, Lilly, and I had nothing to do except wait for my wife, Pam, to finish baking cookies so I decided to teach her tricks. I thought, *whoa, I bet* our friends Rocky and Lesley would like to see her do tricks when they come over to visit. First, I taught her how to sit. *I pushed her rump to the floor, snapped my fingers, and said, "sit."* It was very easy. *It only took five dog treats* so I was thinking that she was a smart dog and I was feeling like a pretty good dog trainer. Next, I taught her how to shake hands. *I grabbed her paw and shook it and said, "shake."* Believe it or not, that was even easier. *It only took three dog treats* so I thought she was brilliant and I felt on top of the world. Finally, I tried to teach her how to roll over. *I grabbed her legs and winged her over and said, "roll over."* *She just flopped on the floor. I tried it two more times and she did the same thing.* I began to wonder if she was as smart as I thought she was. *So I decided to teach her how to flop. Now my dog knows three tricks: how to sit, how to shake, and how to flop. And now I know, that when the going gets tough you can just change your mind.*

Then say: Now you try it. Help your students complete each step that you showed them until they can tell a story across their fingers.

After telling the story many times, students can write the story or begin telling another story. Very young children can tell class stories, everyone telling the same story, across their fingers until they can tell their own stories across their fingers.