

The Eeny Weeny Beeny Ghost

by Bill Harley

This short, silly story created by Bill, is an example of a “jump tale”. In the story, Bill dismisses his younger brothers’ warnings about the ghost visiting their house, only to find that it does, and is able to scare him in a way he hadn’t anticipated.

Jump tales are common throughout our culture, especially among children. Really, their only purpose is to give a fright. As Bill points out in the short talk afterwards, they are usually told among friends at sleepovers or while camping out. Common jump tales include “The Golden Arm”, “Taily Po”, and “The Teeny Tiny Woman”.

Jump tales are almost always told as actually having happened. In fact, jump tales are part of a much larger body of folk material passed on today, even among adults, which include “urban legends” which people believe to be true, usually told by “a friend of a friend”.

In the telling of a jump tale, the tone and pace of the story is crucial to its success. In the “Eeny Weeny Ghost”, humor is used to take people off their guard. Also, the establishment of the characters (Bill and his brother) gives the story more content. Discussion of the story (even though it’s silly!) may lead to observations about description, rhythm in language, and setting as important elements in writing and performing. Questions might include:

- 1) Were you surprised? Why were you surprised? What did the storyteller do to prepare you?
- 2) What about the story seemed real? How did this help the story?
- 3) If you were to tell this story as if it happened to you, what changes would you make to make it seem real?
- 4) What about the rhythm of the language? How does repetition help a story?
- 5) What other jump tales do you know? What tricks do movies use that they have learned from storytellers?

For other stories, look at Alvin Schwartz’s books Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark, Taily Po by Paul Galdone, and the essay “How to Tell a Ghost Story” by Mark Twain in his collected essays. Also, Jan Brunvand has wonderful collections of “urban legends” for older students, including The Choking Doberman, and The Vanishing Hitchhiker.

Available on “The Battle of the Mad Scientists”