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Tips For Tellers

Story Selection

*Choose stories that you like to tell. There is no more important rule, since your obvious dislike or disinterest in a story is easily picked up by those listening. Different stories suit different people, and just because someone tells a story well doesn't mean you have to, or should be able to tell it.

*Choose stories with clear simple, straightforward plot and a limited cast of characters. Folktales are a natural choice for beginning storytelling.

Learning the Story

*If the story is from a book, read it over several times until you have the plot and characters well in hand. Before trying to practice the story, let it sit for a while - think about it as you go about the day, seeing the images of the story in your mind's eye. This visualization is crucial to good storytelling.

*Except for cases where the written language is crucial to the story, memorizing a story word for word is generally not the best way to learn a story. When you know the story, start to tell it to yourself in your own words. If you get stuck, go back to the book, but when you've read the difficult part over, put the book down again. Describe what you see in your mind's eye.

*Tell the story in front of a mirror, into a tape recorder, and to a friend. These all serve as ways to get feedback. Don't wait too long to tell it to a live audience - it's only when a story is told to others that it begins to come to life and you can see and feel what it is really about.

Performing

*There is no one right way to tell a story; everyone has their own style. In the end, a particular style or technique is not nearly as important as the willingness and interest in sharing a story.

*Enjoy yourself. Easy to say... but "being there", present, when you are performing, and not living in fear of the audience or the difficult part coming up, is what good performing is all about. Take your time. The biggest mistake most beginning storytellers make is to speed up when they feel they aren't reaching their audience. Instead, slow down and watch the story yourself. A good performer draws his/her audience in to what he/she is doing

*Be aware of the power of silence. It is as much a part of the story as words. It adds depth and excitement, and gives the listener, as well as yourself, a chance to picture what is happening. The poet Rilke said "Meaning comes when images have time to ripen the mind."