

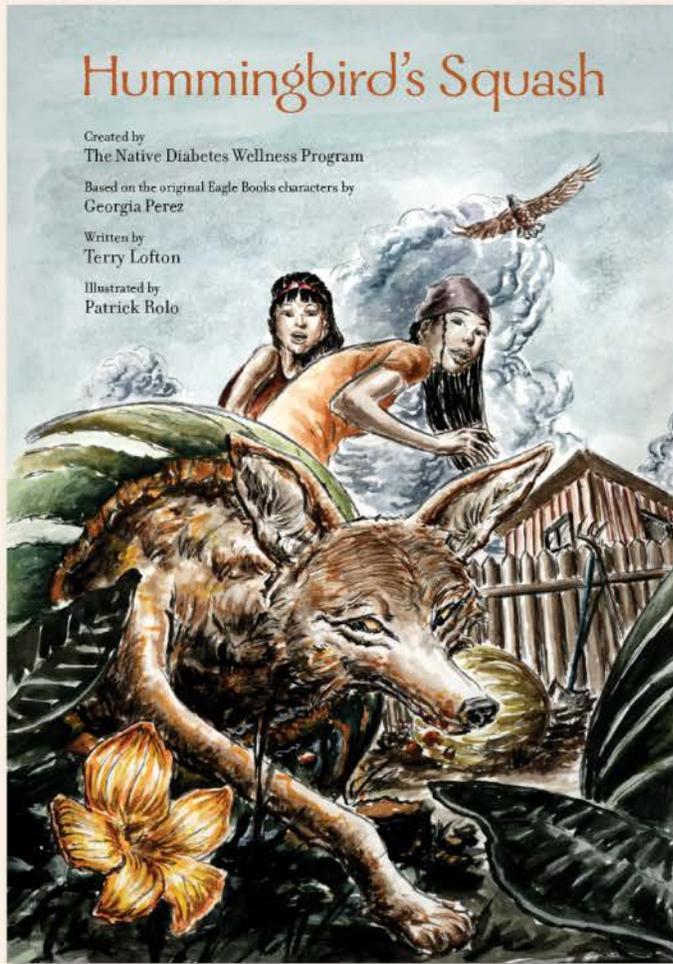


Eagle Books

Youth Novels: Educators and Community Guide



For Hummingbird's Squash





BOOK DISCUSSION

OBJECTIVES

- Describe and analyze characters and events in the book.
- Learn from different viewpoints.
- Behave respectfully when engaged in debate with others.

Background for Teachers

A book discussion is a great way to help students develop language skills, learn new ideas, and develop deeper understandings of what they have read. Very importantly, they are exposed to the give-and-take of open discussion which helps them to express their own thoughts and to appreciate and learn from the perspectives of others.



ACTIVITY

Holding a Book Discussion

There are various ways for a teacher to hold a book discussion. The most common is to throw out questions one at a time and call on volunteers who would like offer their point of view.

However, another approach is to write a number of different questions on a set of index cards, break the class into small teams of two to four students, and pass out a card to each team. The team discusses their question and then shares their thoughts with the class. The class can then ask the team to defend or explain their opinions and conclusions.

Regardless of the discussion approach, students should be cautioned to listen, take turns, and not interrupt when others are speaking.

Suggested Questions

- What specific themes did the author emphasize throughout the novel? What messages do you think she is trying to convey to the reader?
- Do the human characters seem real and believable? Can you relate to their predicaments? Have you ever experienced anything similar to some of the situations in the book? Explain your answers.
- How do characters change or evolve throughout the course of the story? What events make the changes happen?
- Did certain parts of the book make you feel happy, angry, or uncomfortable? If yes, what parts were they? What made you feel that way? Did your feelings change as you read the book? If so, how did they change?
- Did reading the book lead to a new understanding or awareness of some aspect of your own life or the lives of your friends? Has reading this book changed your opinion about a subject or a problem? Explain your answers.
- What did you find surprising about the information introduced in this book? There is information about types 1 and 2 diabetes, the history of Native Science, gardening, and bullying. What did you learn that you did not know before?
- At the end of the book, did you feel hopeful for the future of *all* the characters in the book? Or only some of them? Why?



STORYTELLING

Background for Teachers

Writing and telling stories help students improve comprehension, oral presentation, retention of concepts, and higher level skills such as analysis and synthesis. Storytelling in the classroom also promotes storytelling traditions in the community.

There are many classroom activities that can be used to sharpen students' storytelling and writing skills. *Hummingbird's Squash* is a story that can be used to help students understand the essential elements in a novel (theme, setting, characters, plot, and point of view), and to practice using their imaginations in writing and telling fictional stories.

This section includes a set of activities that address each of the main components of a novel. Teachers can choose among the activities for ones that they think their classes would enjoy.





STORYTELLING

THEME: MAIN IDEAS AND MESSAGES

OBJECTIVE

- 📖 Learn to recognize themes.

Background for Teachers

Hummingbird's Squash is a trickster story. We know that the author will have Coyote, the trickster, set up situations in which Hummingbird and her friends embark on some kind of adventure. What does Coyote want them to learn? Putting it another way, what are the main ideas or messages (themes) that the author wants the readers to remember?

In *Hummingbird's Squash*, the major theme is Hummingbird's quest to help the people to eat healthy and prevent type 2 diabetes.

A theme can also branch out into various subthemes. These are other topics related to the main idea that help flesh it out and give it meaning in terms of the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of the characters. The story emerges from the intertwining of the subthemes. A subtheme in many novels is that obstacles lie in the path of persons pursuing a dream or goal like Hummingbird's. The major obstacles in *Hummingbird's Squash* are presented by the bully characters, Chris Sorrel and his brothers. But the readers learn that, with help from one's friends (both human and animal), bullying and other challenges can be overcome.

Another subtheme is the soundness of Hummingbird's method for fulfilling her quest. Is growing giant vegetables the best way to provide healthy fruits and vegetables for everyone?

Themes are not an easy concept for some students. Themes are not just lying on the surface of the story, already identified for students. They have to dig to find them. Below are two activities that help students understand the concept of theme. In one the theme is very clear; in the other, students have to dig.

ACTIVITY 1

Finding the Theme In a Fable

A good place to start when learning how to identify a theme is to read or listen to old fables (usually animal stories) that teach a single moral. A fable has one theme called “the moral of the story.” A moral and a theme, however, are not the same thing. A moral is a lesson about the proper way to behave, but a theme is not limited in meaning. The moral in a fable is usually very easy to spot!

Print copies of the Cherokee story “How the Possum Lost the Hair on His Tail” located in Appendix 2, *Hummingbird's Squash*, English/ Language Arts. Distribute to the class. Ask students to identify the moral or key theme of this story which is that people will put you in your place if you act too proudly or are conceited. Or to put it another way: be too proud and someone will trim your tail.



ACTIVITY 2

Identifying Main Ideas

Another way to understand the concept of theme is to identify main ideas in short passages from a novel. Select passages from *Hummingbird's Squash* or other novels. Ask students to read them and identify the main idea and any supporting ideas (like a subtheme). Provide a list of topics like those below to assist them in identifying themes. Have students explain their choices.

Topic List

- Determination
- Friendship
- Foolishness
- Forgiveness
- Hope
- Journey or quest
- Fear
- Self-doubt
- Curiosity
- Deception
- Freedom
- Generosity
- Jealousy
- Selfishness
- Wonder
- Tradition
- Respect
- Lack of respect
- Self-respect

- Overconfidence/arrogance
- Discovery
- Justice
- Family
- Science
- Health
- Courage

Demonstrate to students that putting several topic ideas together creates a complex theme. For instance, friendship, courage, and fear combine to become: "Friendship can give you the courage to overcome things that once scared you." This is the key theme of Walter and Larry's story.





STORYTELLING CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

OBJECTIVES

- 🕒 Learn how to write a back story.
- 🕒 Learn the dimensions (many sides) of a character.

Background for Teachers

Students may wonder how writers “dream up” the characters in their stories. Many authors use a technique called a background story or back story that makes the characters seem real. A back story also helps the writer to understand how a character thinks and what he or she would do in certain situations.

Authors have to imagine a whole life for the characters they create. Fictitious characters are not real, but they have to be believable. Sometimes authors will draw on aspects of their own lives or will remember things about real people they have known. The back story for a character usually includes something about a character’s personality or nature, what they look like, a description of their family, where they live and/or where they were born, what they like (for example, playing sports), what they don’t like (for example, washing dishes), and what makes them happy (such as birthdays) or sad (such as being alone). Like real people, characters have hopes and fears, strengths and weaknesses, and one or more goals. When the different characters in a story have different goals, then conflict will arise and the story will be more exciting.

All the descriptions in a back story don’t have to be used in a book, but it really helps a writer or storyteller to understand the people he or she has invented.



ACTIVITY

Write a Back Story

Ask students to select a character from *Hummingbird's Squash* and write a back story for that character. Since the major characters of Rain and Hummingbird are more developed, students may want to select Boomer, Simon, or Arianna. Perhaps they would like to develop more understanding of Chris Sorrel. There are also many other interesting secondary characters like Larry, Miss Swallow, Boo, Aunt Chick, and Uncle Luther. If students need an example to get started, show them the back story originally developed for Walter (see Appendix 3, *Hummingbird's Squash*, English/Language Arts). Students will notice that not all of Walter's back story was used in *Hummingbird's Squash*.

Compare the different back stories that students create for the same character. Are the back stories similar or do they sound like completely different people?



Artists develop character, too.



STORYTELLING THE SETTING: MAKING A WORLD

OBJECTIVES

- 📍 Recognize types of settings.
- 📍 Create a setting.

Background for Teachers

A setting includes geographic location, time, and the context that makes a story believable. It establishes the immediate surroundings. Stories usually include descriptions that include lighting, smells, temperature, objects that are used or seen by the characters (trees, benches, computers, axes), and the larger environment. The setting helps a storyteller establish the mood of the story (“It was a dark and stormy night”). The setting also provides details about the culture of the characters in the story. The primary setting in *Hummingbird’s Squash* is the Medicine Cave Indian Reservation and the town of Thunder Rock. There are also secondary settings: the school, Boo’s Gas ‘n Grocery, the gardens, the shed, houses and backyards, the pow-wow arena, and the fairgrounds. It is a whole world.



ACTIVITY

Fictional and Nonfictional Settings

Introduce students to the different kinds of settings in fiction and nonfiction. Then have them try their hand at creating a world for these three settings:

A Reality Setting

Describe your bedroom as if it were a setting. Describe the furniture. What is on the walls? Is there a closet? What is hanging in the closet? Is there a window? What side of the room is it on? Is there a light on the ceiling? Are there lamps? In your imagination, what time of day is it? Is there anything in the room that would tell someone this is *your* room?

A Fictional Setting

A fictional setting usually involves made-up characters in a setting that *could* be real. The setting is believable. Storytellers can create a setting that seems real because they draw on their knowledge and memories of real places and environments (like the bedroom above). The major setting in *Hummingbird's Squash* is the Medicine Cave Indian Reservation. Does it seem real? Why? Does it remind you of your own town? If not, what would you change to make it seem more like the place where you live? Make up a community based on your own town or village where the characters in *Hummingbird's Squash* might live.

A Fantasy Setting

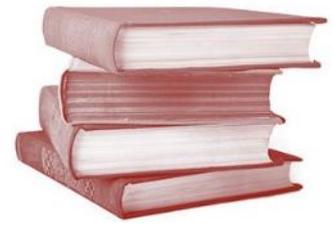
Fantasy is a kind of fiction. *Hummingbird's Squash* includes setting elements that are termed fantasy because people do not usually experience situations or see objects like those created by Coyote. That is because Coyote used his powers to create them. (The trickster, of course, would not consider himself to be a fantasy because his teachings are real.) Describe the magical settings in the book. If you could create a fantasy place in your community, what would it be? What kinds of things would grow there? Live there? What would happen there? How would this fantasy world benefit the community?



A fictional setting



A fantasy setting



STORYTELLING POINT OF VIEW

OBJECTIVE

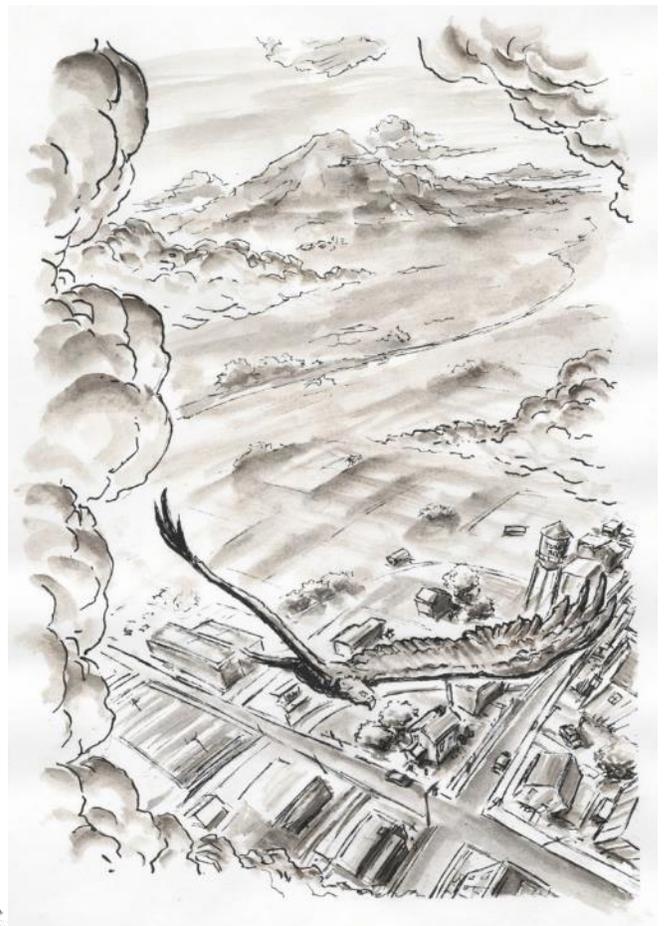
- 📍 Learn about the concept of point of view through role play.

Background for Teachers

Point of view is the position from which events are told. In other words, through whose eyes do we see the action? It is common in a novel for the point of view to be the author (or perhaps the author and one other character) who describes the action and what everyone is thinking and feeling. The author sees and knows all! This is the point of view in *Hummingbird's Squash*.

But there are also novels in which the story is told by a particular person. This is called a “first person” point of view. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, is told by the little girl, Scout, and the Sherlock Holmes mystery stories, told by Dr. Watson, are examples of books told in first person. In 2007, Sherman Alexie, a member of the Spokane Tribe, won the 2007 National Book Award for Young People’s Literature for his novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*. This popular novel is told in first person by a 14-year-old boy.

Students shouldn’t be surprised that the storyteller doesn’t have to be human. In the novel, *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell, the horse tells the story!



ACTIVITY

Writing Letters as a Character

Writing a letter as a character in *Hummingbird's Squash* encourages students to imagine themselves in the role of the character. Using first person ("I") point of view, they can ask questions of other characters. They can also describe events in the book from their point of view, and express how they feel about what is happening.

A fun activity is to have another student answer the letter pretending to be the character to which the letter was addressed. Students may download the stationery on the Native Diabetes Wellness Program Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/projects/diabetes-wellness.htm> and use it to write their letters.



Examples of Letters

- Perhaps students would find it interesting to write a letter from Rain that Dances to Sky Heart, respectfully asking the eagle to tell him the reasons why he chose to give his health messages to him and his friends. In Chapter 17, Hummingbird tells Arianna that the kids want to know why *them*? Why are they so special? They know the eagle has a reason, but they are not sure what it is. Students who assume the role of Sky Heart can really call on their creativity in responding to this letter.
- In the book, Mr. Berry requires that Walter and Larry write a letter to Arianna, apologizing for calling her Miss Ding-Ding. What would each of them say to her? How would Arianna respond to them? What would she say to educate them about type 1 diabetes?
- What would Boomer want to know about Coyote's burping techniques? What would Coyote tell him about the burping contest with the Blue Whale? Students will enjoy checking out *Ocean Explorer* on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Web site for a sound recording of the "Bloop." The origin of the Bloop, one of the loudest sounds ever recorded, has never been determined. There are many sites on the Internet that offer opinions and debate about its origin.

Online Resources

A Collection of Sounds from the Sea. The Bloop!
<http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/explorations/sound01/background/seasounds/seasounds.html>



STORYTELLING

PLOT: STRUCTURING THE ACTION

OBJECTIVE

- ☞ To understand the components of a plot.

Background for Teachers

A plot is the action that takes place in a story from the beginning chapter to the last chapter. The plot is usually driven through the actions and goals of the characters. Throughout the story, they encounter surprises and overcome obstacles until they finally reach their goals (their intended goals or goals they never thought they would reach). If the novel has a good plot, the story will get more exciting as it goes on. In *Hummingbird's Squash*, the major plot line is driven by Hummingbird's goal to raise giant vegetables and fruits that will feed the people on the Medicine Cave Indian Reservation. At the end of the story, she achieves her goal.

A novel can have subplots, too. There are several subplots in *Hummingbird's Squash* about Chris Sorrel, Walter and Larry, and Arianna.



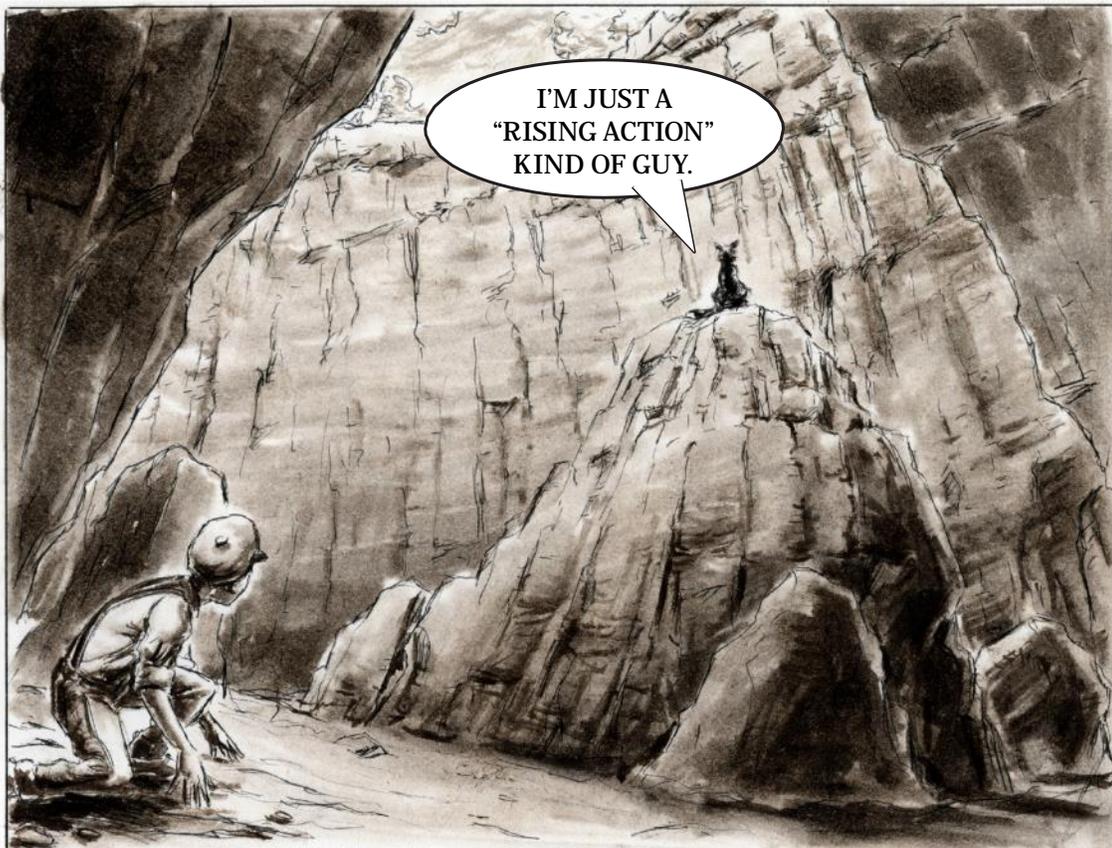
The components of a plot are:

- **Introduction:** The beginning of the story where the characters and setting are described and the action is launched.
- **Rising action:** The part of the book where most of the story takes place. “Rising action” is mostly about revealing the conflict in the story. A good story always has tension between the characters and their different goals. The main character or protagonist is usually the “good guy” in the story; the “bad guy” or antagonist creates the obstacles that the protagonist struggles to overcome. The antagonist is not always a person—it can be a force of nature or an animal, too. Because a character often struggles against his or her own desires and impulses, the protagonist and antagonist may be the

same character!

In *Hummingbird's Squash*, Chris Sorrel is Hummingbird's main antagonist. But Coyote creates a lot of tension in the story, too. As a trickster he can set up a lot of situations that make life complicated for Hummingbird, her friends, and the bullies. Sometimes he is a good guy and sometimes he just makes trouble. Regardless of his motive, Coyote really moves the story.

- **Climax:** The highest point of interest or the turning point in the story. (There may be several in a book.)
- **Falling action:** The conflict and problems begin to resolve themselves.
- **Resolution:** The outcome of the story.



ACTIVITY 1

Discuss the Main Plot Elements in *Hummingbird's Squash*

- **Introduction:** Where are we when the story opens? By the end of the first chapter, how many characters have we been introduced to? Have we already encountered a problem? Has the antagonist showed up?
- **Rising action:** What is Hummingbird's goal? How many obstacles does the antagonist put in her way? What kinds of problems does the antagonist present for other characters? Who helps Hummingbird and her friends to overcome the obstacles?
- **Climax:** What part of the book describes how Hummingbird achieves what she set out to do at the beginning of the story? There can also be a climax of a subplot. What is the climax of the subplot about Miss Swallow and the Miraculous Tree?
- **Falling action:** What problems begin to go away after Hummingbird achieves her goal?
- **Resolution:** How does the story end?



ACTIVITY 2

Describe a Subplot

In addition to discussing the major plot line, students may want to explore one of the other subplots in *Hummingbird's Squash*. The plot about Walter (Dumptruck) and Larry (Tater Tot) turning over a new leaf and abandoning their bullying behavior is an exciting one. Ask students to describe 1) the part of the novel that introduces their characters, 2) the rising action that shows their conflict with Chris Sorrel and their strategy for “de-bullification” (with a lot of help from their new friends); 3) the climax at the basketball tryouts; 4) the falling action that describes how their past bullying behavior is forgiven and resolved; and 5) the resolution that is evidence of their friendship with Hummingbird, Arianna, and the boys. Have students tell the story that occurs in each of the plot elements.



ACTIVITY 3

Write a Different Ending or an Epilogue

Students may enjoy writing a different resolution to the story. Perhaps Coyote plays another big trick and the giant squash experiences another fate than to be eaten by the families on the reservation. Perhaps the news reporter and the photographer arrive at the reservation before the giant squash is “turned into groceries.” They photograph it and submit a news story to a national news outlet. Hummingbird and the Medicine Cave Indian Reservation become world famous!

Or students may enjoy writing an epilogue, another chapter which tells what happens next or several months or years later. What happens to Chris Sorrel? Does Simon learn to drum and sing? Will Larry move away from the reservation? Will Hummingbird ever try to grow giant vegetables again? Will she tell Miss Swallow about the coyote? Will Coyote start up another game? Who will he try to trick next?





STORY GAMES

Background for Teachers

Fun and play is a way to learn. When the students' creativity is encouraged through word games, treasure hunts, art projects, role-playing, singing, and other methods that are promoted in the Guide, middle schoolers have an opportunity to mix intellectual, emotional, social, and cognitive challenges with entertainment. That is the premise behind the *Eagle Books* youth novels. When readers are entertained, educational messages embedded in the story are more easily learned. This section includes some fun activities that relate to the suggested storytelling and writing activities. Have a good time with them. Coyote would approve!

Coyote's Plot

In this game, students sit in a circle. One student is tapped to start telling a story about an experience that is real or purely imaginary (the teacher may suggest a topic). He or she begins the story in a positive way, describing wonderful events and situations.

Then, the teacher hollers, "Coyote!" and the next student in the circle continues the story, but now only strange or negative things occur in the plot. The teacher yells, "Coyote!" again and the next storyteller shifts back to a positive story. As the story progresses, the teacher will yell "Coyote!" more quickly. See how fast the story can shift back and forth. Make the class really work for the rising action!

Rabbit from a Hat

There are many games which involve slips of paper with random words, phrases, or quotes written on them. These phrases can be suggested by members of the class. "Rabbit from a Hat" is one of these types of games.

Write nouns on slips of paper. Proper nouns are acceptable. In fact, the stranger the noun, the more entertaining this game will be. Once all of the nouns have been collected into a hat (a bag will do fine), a scene begins between two storytellers.

About every 30 seconds or so, as they establish their storyline, the performers will reach a point in their dialogue when they are about to say an important noun. That's when they reach into the hat and grab a rabbit (noun). The word is then incorporated into the scene. The results are really funny! (This game is similar to "Tricking a Trickster" in the English/Language Arts section for *Coyote and the Turtle's Dream*.)

Teachers or invited storytellers can play the game to entertain the class. Students will see how to play the game and then can give it a try.

Presto Change-O

On cold winter days play this game in the classroom. Type up a tribal trickster story that is told socially in winter or at any time. (Follow the guidance of tribes regarding when and where a story can and cannot be told.) Cut up the story into sections. Paste each section on a separate sheet of paper and number in sequence with the beginning of the story being page 1. Give out the sheets to students. Have them read their section and prepare to orally present their part of the story. Assemble the students in a line starting with the student who received page 1. Have each student retell his or her part in the plot's sequence. Keep the flow going as the story is told. Do a second round by giving students different sections to retell.

Students will be amazed that the story has completely changed the next time it is told! But magic is not involved. As each student takes his/her turn, they respond differently based on the way previous tellers are now relating the story.

Pirate's Treasure

Two groups in a class select a well-known fable or folktale. The teacher simplifies the plot into a sequence of events that can be transcribed onto cards with short sections of the tale on each. Each group hides their story cards throughout the school or classroom. The story will naturally be out of sequence. Each group makes a treasure map showing the exact location where all the cards are hidden and gives it to the other group. The two groups then compete with each other to find the cards and assemble them in correct order. The winning group will be the first to correctly assemble the whole story (the treasure) of the opposing group.

Online Resources

Graphic Organizer: Plot Sheet and Conflict List. A worksheet for organizing plot and conflict in a story. <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plan/graphic-organizer-plot-sheet-and-conflict-list>

Wacky Tales

Give students a hand-out that includes a list for each of three story elements: characters, a setting, and an object in the setting. Instruct the students to select one choice from each list. Then write a one page story based on the characters, setting, and object they selected. The stories are more fun to write when the characters and settings are a bit *wacky*. Teachers can use the provided lists (cartoon characters are always fun) or make up their own lists.

- **Characters:** Batman™ and Superman™; Tom and Jerry™; Yogi Bear™ and Boo Boo™; Alvin™ and Theodore™ (chipmunks); Scooby Doo™ and Shaggy™; SpongeBob™ and Sandy Cheeks™; Wily E. Coyote™ and the Roadrunner™; Fred and Wilma Flintstone™; Bugs Bunny™ and Elmer Fudd™; the Powder Puff Girls™; Blossom™, Bubbles™, and Buttercup™.
- **Settings:** A hot desert, an island in the middle of the ocean, the planet Mars, a submarine, a cave, a library, a rollercoaster, a hollow tree, a hot air balloon in the sky, an ice cream truck, the top of a snowy mountain, in the middle of a forest fire, or a pow-wow.
- **An object in the setting:** A sandwich, a birthday cake, a frog, a snake, a hat, a key, a firecracker, a pair of sunglasses, a television set, a rope, an ice cube, a gallon of gas, a screwdriver, a cough drop, a flashlight, a bag of charcoal, a sack of money, or a camera.

Storytelling in Schools. The resources section is great! <http://www.storynet-advocacy.org/edu/>

Circle of Stories. This site uses documentary film, photography, artwork and music to honor and explore Native American storytelling. There are wonderful lesson plans for teachers. <http://www.pbs.org/circleofstories/>

Instructor Notes

For an excellent article on the value of storytelling, teachers will enjoy “The Power of Story: Using Storytelling to Improve Literacy Learning” by Sara Miller and Lisa Pennycuff. *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education* 2008; 1: 36-43