

Ideas for your teacher storytelling group

Activities for teacher storytelling groups can be divided into

- activities with a focus on a single episode such as 'reframing', 'case study', 'critical incident' or 'role-play a story',
- activities with a focus on teachers' whole teaching lives such as 'fiction v. fact' or 'future self'.

Below are two sample activities, one of each type.

A: Activity with a single episode teaching story focus

Reframing



1 In small groups everyone tells a teaching story about an incident involving an issue, puzzle or problem, such as –

- A classroom dilemma,
- A conflict between teaching style and syllabus,
- A conflict between learner needs and syllabus,
- Time management in a lesson or a course,
- A misunderstanding between colleagues,
- A misunderstanding between teacher and students/a student.

2 The group decides on one story to work on.

3 An appropriate alternative perspective is chosen, such as; a student, the class, a colleague, an educational inspector or advisor, an educational psychologist, an academic administrator.

4 A brief history for the new character is established: How long have you been a member of this group/had this position? Who are your closest associates? What are your major fears or worries in this position/as a member of this group?

5 The story, or the issue it raises, is discussed by the group from the new perspective.

6 Looking at the story from someone else's viewpoint may suggest a course of action or a new stance. If so, the 'solutions' or 'guidance' proposed should now be clearly stated.

B: Activity with a whole-life teaching story focus

From fiction to fact



1 Everyone gets into small groups and reads an extract* from a story in which the heroine is a classroom teacher.

2 The group creates an oral summary of the story and/or viewpoint of the fictional teacher.

3 The group discusses differences and/or similarities between their own attitudes to teaching and that of the heroine. Choose one of you to keep note of your main thoughts.

You might discuss:

- Your willingness (or not) to persuade people to become teachers,
- The metaphor of a 'battlefield' for your place of work,
- The relative difficulty of (EFL) teaching as a profession,
- The number of hours per week you work and whether you are happy with that,
- 'The more you give in teaching, the more you get out of it.' Agree?
- 'It is really the most satisfying job on the planet.' Agree?

- Whether you would like a career break.

*The extract below is from *To Miss With Love* (Birbalsingh, K. 2011. London: Penguin. P.44). The heroine has been asked to speak at an event designed to encourage people to go into teaching.

'It's great to see so many of you here today. There's nothing I like more than telling lots of people all about the fantastic job of being a teacher.'

The crowd waits patiently to hear. They've just heard a talk from a head of a London school, but now they want to hear from someone who is on the battlefield, day in, day out. I gesture with my hand to catch their attention and launch in: 'Look, I'm not going to lie to you. It ain't easy. It's damn hard. It's so hard you're going to find yourselves working every hour that God gives you. If you want an easy life, then teaching isn't for you. I work anywhere from sixty to seventy hours a week. I'd say some teachers manage to get away with maybe fifty hours a week, if they're lucky.'

I can see the audience beginning to twitch. Maybe teaching isn't for them after all? I wag my finger at the crowd. 'But that doesn't mean teaching isn't worth doing. I'm just telling you: be prepared to work hard. And you have to be prepared for the kind of work it is: it's exhausting; it's challenging; it's all-consuming.' I pause, watching them twist in their seats. 'But the thing is: there is no better job in the world than being a teacher.'

I raise my voice. 'The reason you'll find yourselves working so hard is not necessarily because you have to. You'll do it because you want to. You'll do it because the more you give in teaching, the more you get out of it. When people say that teaching is rewarding, they're not just saying it. It really is the most satisfying job on the planet. Those same friends of mine who don't understand how I can work so hard for so little pay, they always say to me, "You may not earn much money, Snuffy, but I don't know anyone who loves their job the way you do." There is never a Monday when I think, Gosh, I don't want to go to work. Sure, sometimes I get tired and I think, I need a break, I need some time off - but if I won the lottery tomorrow, I assure you, there is no way I'd give up on school.'

A man in the audience puts up his hand and I nod in his direction.

***Brief list of novels, poems, films for 'Fact v. Fiction' (there are many more)**

Novels and stories

E.R. Braithwaite. *To Sir With Love*
Charlotte Bronte. *Jane Eyre*
William Hart. *Never Fade Away*

Feature film

Goodbye Mr Chips, Dead Poets Society, Dangerous Minds.

Personal accounts of teaching

Katharine Birbalsingh. *To Miss With Love*
Frank McCourt. *Teacher Man*

Poems

Allan Ahlberg. *The Supply Teacher*
Peter Dixon. *Oh Bring Back Higher Standards*
Roger McGough. *Streemin*

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