

Gooney Bird Greene and Her True Life Adventures

a Wheelock Family Theatre at Boston University Study Guide
prepared by Marianne Adams



“Out there, invisible, are a lot of stories not yet told.”

—Gooney Bird Greene

WHEELLOCK
FAMILY
THEATRE

BOSTON
UNIVERSITY

200 Riverway | Boston, MA 02215-4176 | 617.353.2994 | www.wheelockfamilytheatre.org

A Note About Wheelock Family Theatre at Boston University

WFT@BU has been on the forefront of inclusion and nontraditional casting since 1981, offering enhancements for audience members with physical and developmental disabilities and fulfilling our mission to have every child (and grown up) see themselves on stage. This production of *Gooney Bird Greene* is no exception.

Casting. This production continues WFT's long tradition of multicultural and intergenerational casting, featuring actors in lead roles from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds and of all ages.

Access for All.

- You will notice rectangular screens on either side of the stage- that is our open captioning system. All the words the actors say are put up on the screens so that audience members who are Deaf or hard of hearing can enjoy the performance.
- Our entire theatre facility is fully wheelchair accessible.
- Braille and large format programs are available upon request.
- Sound enhancement devices are available upon request.
- **This production of *Gooney Bird Greene* will be interpreted in American Sign Language and Audio Described on November 11, 15, and 17.**



THE AUTHOR

“It is very risky. But each time a child opens a book, he pushes open the gate that separates him from Elsewhere.”

— Lois Lowry (https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/2493.Lois_Lowry)



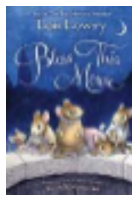
(Photo: Matt McKee)

Lois Lowry Biography

Lois Lowry is known for her versatility and invention as a writer. She was born in Hawaii and grew up in New York, Pennsylvania, and Japan. After several years at Brown University, she turned to her family and to writing. She is the author of more than thirty books for young adults, including the popular Anastasia Krupnik series. She has received countless honors, among them the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, the Dorothy Canfield Fisher Award, the California Young Reader's Medal, and the Mark Twain Award. She received Newbery Medals for two of her novels, Number the Stars and The Giver. Her first novel, A Summer to Die, was awarded the International Reading Association's Children's Book Award. Ms. Lowry now divides her time between Cambridge and an 1840s farmhouse in Maine.

(<https://www.hmhco.com/search?term=lois+lowry+bio>)

Other Books by Lois Lowry



THE PLAYWRIGHT

Dr. **Kent R. Brown** is Professor Emeritus at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville and former Playwright-In-Residence and Adjunct Professor of English at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut. Dr. Brown is the recipient of a Drama-Logue award, a McLaren Comedy Playwriting Festival award, Mill Mountain New Play Competition and Year End Series New Play Festival awards, a Julie Harris/Beverly Hills Theatre Guild Award and a Denver Center Theatre US West TheatreFest Award. From 1985 to 1996 he was co-founder and director of the Mt. Sequoyah New Play Retreat in Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he helped develop fifty new works written by playwrights from across the country. His plays are published by Dramatic Publishing Company.^[1]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kent_R._Brown

THE BOOK

Gooney Bird Greene is the first in a series of books about 2nd grader Gooney Bird Greene (that's a silent "e") who loves to be in the center of everything. Gooney Bird arrives at Watertown Elementary bringing color and wit and a love of life that helps everyone see the extraordinary in the ordinary. Her amazing storytelling skills help Mrs. Pidgeon's class learn how to take a simple story and, with the right choice of words, make it into an elaborate adventure. Some of the absolutely true stories we hear in this first installment of *Gooney Bird Greene* are: How Gooney Bird Got Her Name; How I Moved from China on a Flying Carpet, and How Beloved Catman Was Consumed by a Cow.

Genre: Humor, Fiction

Look for these other *Gooney Bird Greene* titles:

- *Gooney Bird Greene*
- *Gooney Bird and the Room Mother*
- *Gooney the Fabulous*
- *Gooney Bird Is so Absurd*
- *Gooney Bird on the Map*
- *Gooney Bird and All Her Charms*
- *Gooney Bird Collection: Gooney Bird Greene; Gooney Bird and the Room Mother; Gooney the Fabulous; Gooney Bird Is so Absurd.*

BEFORE YOU READ THE BOOK....

Start with Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). This is a technique that helps students understand ideas and text through visual images. Start by asking three simple questions.



What's going on in this picture?

If the student needs to elaborate to make their statement more clear ask:

What makes you say that?

If the conversation comes to a halt you may ask:

What else can we find?

As the discussion is taking place the facilitator must...

Paraphrase each student's observation.
Point at what they are observing.
Make connections between the student's observations.

<https://emprobstvts.weebly.com/vts-the-three-simple-questions.html>

Do this with several pictures.

Follow up by making predictions about what the book is about: *Where it is set? What do you think this character likes? What might happen in this story?*

Then jump right in and read GOONEY BIRD GREENE!!

As you read *Gooney Bird Greene* complete the following graphic organizer based on the stories that she tells.

Story	Characters in story	In the beginning....	In the middle....	In the end.....
How Gooney Bird Greene Got Her Name				
Magic Carpet Ride				
Prince, Palace, and Diamond Earrings				
Why Gooney Bird Was Late for School				
Catman Consumed by a Cow				

AFTER YOU READ THE BOOK....

1. Describe Gooney Bird Greene. How would she fit into your class? Do you, like Gooney Bird, like to be “smack dab in the middle of everything”?
2. Mrs. Pidgeon’s class is talking about how to write or tell a good story. What do all stories need?
3. What makes Gooney Bird Greene a great storyteller? Is there a difference between good storytelling and good writing?
4. Which of the stories that Gooney Bird tells is your favorite? Why?
5. Who are the main characters in this story? How do you get to know them?

http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/kids/resources/GooneyBirdGreene_discussionguide.pdf

CCSS

Key Ideas and Details

RL 1: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, when, where, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

RL3: Describe how characters in a story responded to major events and challenges.

Craft and Structure

RL 5: Describe the overall structure of the story, including how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.

BEFORE THE CURTAIN RISES.....

After you read *Gooney Bird Greene*, ask students to make predictions about the play they're going to see.

Discuss:

- How will Gooney Bird's stories be acted out on stage? Do you think the stories will be acted out as the class imagined them or as they really happened or both? *Will there be a flying carpet? A cow? A palace?*
- How do you imagine the locations will be created onstage?
- Will the classroom change or stay the same after Gooney Bird joins the class? How might it change?
- What will the scenery, costumes, and props be like?
- Will there be music? If so, how will it sound?
- What challenges do you think the designers had to meet in creating the world of Gooney Bird?
- Try drawing some pictures of the people and places from the book. **You can compare them to ones you draw after seeing the show.**



BEHIND THE SCENES.....

The DIRECTOR and the DESIGNERS work behind the scenes to make the script come off the page and onto the stage. Here's what some of them said about their work on *Gooney Bird Greene*.



DIRECTOR- Yo-EL Cassell

What do you like most about working on this story?

Unlocking the inner child sense of play in all of us.

What was challenging about coming up with your design/concept?

The wonderful challenge was making sure the design and concept mirrored Gooney's own imagination.

What is the message of the play? How does your work help the audience get it?

Four words come to mind: TRANSFORMATION, EXPRESSION, EMPOWERMENT, AND MOVEMENT. Through design and direction, how do we begin to see "movement" in the thoughts and actions of the characters and in the environment? How do we begin to embrace the color that perhaps was always there?

What is one thing you want us to know about what you do?

Bring physical attention to intention.



PROPS AND PAINT -Matthew Lazure

What do you like most about working on this story?

Helping to figure out the many different ways a story can be told through props and imagination.

What was challenging about coming up with your design/concept?

Loosening my style up to accommodate the idea that the props for the show would be made by the children in the second grade classroom.

What is the message of the play? How does your work help the audience get it?

Storytelling and imagination can lead to learning and growth. Color gets added as the play goes on and the kids start to show their own style.

What is one thing you want us to know about what you do?

I used my left hand to draw for most of the projects I worked on (I'm right-handed). I thought this would help me to mimic the dexterity of a second grader.



SCENIC DESIGN- Steve McGonagle

What do you like most about working on this story?

The story stresses the importance of our imaginations, and this is what theater is all about.

What was challenging about coming up with your design/concept?

I had a hard time getting in touch with my second grade imagination and letting it out to create the world of the play, I haven't been that age for a while. The story is set in a realistic classroom but takes us on fantastic journeys beyond its four walls, so coming up with a way to reflect that in the scenery was a challenge.

What is the message of the play? How does your work help the audience get it?

I believe the message of the play is that by looking at things through a different lens and using our imaginations we find that everyday events can seem wondrous.

What is one thing you want us to know about what you do?

As the scenic designer I support the story telling of the playwright and the vision of the director by creating a world that fulfills both dreams.

AFTER THE SHOW.....

About the Play

This play is an adaptation of a book. To adapt something means to change it so that it's suitable for a new purpose. Turning a book into a play can be very tricky: a playwright can't include everything that's in the book in the play.

- Were there scenes in the *Gooney Bird Greene* book that you missed or were different in the play? Why do you think that is?
- Try dramatizing a familiar story. Discuss how you decided what to include and what to leave out.

About the Production

- What did the classroom look like? The Palace? The orchestra with all their instruments in the bus? **Have students draw pictures of the set and costumes as they actually appeared in WFT@BU's production of *Gooney Bird Greene*.** Then, compare these drawings with the pictures they made before attending the show or the illustrations in the book. How are they similar? How are they different?
- How did WFT@BU's set and costumes show the difference between *Gooney Bird Greene* and her classmates? How did the set and costumes change during the course of the show to reflect Gooney Bird's influence on the class?
- What did each character's costume tell you about them?
- How was music used in the play? Describe it, and the different sound effects that you heard. How did they help to tell the story?

About the Overall Experience

- Have you ever seen a live stage show before?
- How was that experience like the one you had at WFT@BU?
- How was it different?
- What part of the show was the funniest? The most surprising?
- How did Gooney Bird help her classmates see that they all had stories?
- How did having a live audience add energy to the performance? Did you feel you were part of the experience of the performance?
- If you could be in the show, which role would you like to play?

Now You Do It!

- Tell your own **Absolutely True Story** (see tips for creating stories below), then have classmates act it out.
- Create a set or costume design for a favorite book. Talk about why you made the choices you did.
- Make a storytelling corner in the classroom with a few props and costumes and hold a storytelling café every week.
- Some of Gooney Bird's stories are like riddles because of the way she uses words. Can you make your own riddle stories?

Gooney Bird Greene's Advice On Stories

"Stories have to be exciting, Mrs. Pidgeon, and have lots of surprises and interesting people who are clever and mysterious and fun and fascinating!"

"The main character is the most important character, because the main character is.....Smack dab in the middle of everything! Like Gooney Bird."

"When an author jumps backward in a story, it is called a 'flashback,' so maybe jumping ahead would be called.....a Flash-forward?"

"Well, as you know, sometimes stories start in the most ordinary ways, like Once Upon a Time! But at other times something exciting and unexpected happens."

"[A story has to have] lots of suspense. Exciting details, and funny things, too. But most of all it has to have...you smack dab in the middle!"

"Sometimes storytellers have special outfits that they wear. I think that's fine as long as they don't interfere with the story."

How Gooney Bird Got Her Name:

Stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Using characters and dialogue helps make a story interesting.

What We Learn About Elements of Stories in each Scene

How Gooney Bird Came from China on a Flying Carpet:

Tell your reader or listener what the story is going to include. This one had a long journey, a mystery, and a rescue.

The Prince, the Palace, and the Diamond Earring:

Using elements like "Suddenly," secondary characters, suspense, and flash forward (or backwards) can make a story interesting.

Why Gooney Bird Was Late to School Because She Had to Direct a Symphony Orchestra:

Starting out with ordinary details can make the action of the story more exciting. When you give too many details that are not important to the main action, the story becomes less interesting.

Beloved Catman Is Consumed by a Cow:

Using props or objects to illustrate or inspire a story can be helpful, but don't go overboard. Make sure the center of the story is always in focus.

Compare and Contrast – Which was better?

Name: _____

Now that you've read Gooney Bird Greene and Her True Life Adventures by Lois Lowry and seen the play adaptation by Kent R. Brown, let's compare the two. Fill in the following chart comparing and contrasting them.

	Compare – How were they the same?	Contrast – How were they different?
Characters		
Setting		
Plot		

Would you say that the play was more the same or different than the book? Explain your answer, citing examples from the book and play.

Now, review the book and play.

<p>★★★★★ 5 Stars: Extraordinary</p> <p>★★★★☆ 4 Stars: Excellent</p> <p>★★★☆☆ 3 Stars: Very Good</p> <p>★★☆☆☆ 2 Stars: Good</p> <p>★☆☆☆☆ 1 Star: Fair</p> <p>☆☆☆☆☆ 0 Stars: Poor</p>	<p>The Book</p> 	<p>The Play</p> 
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Which did you rate higher? Why?

MAP IT!

Gooney Bird uses words in a very special way. We don't always understand what she means at first, like when she tells the class she moved to Watertown from China.

Get out your atlas or look online and find the towns named after foreign countries, then mark them on the map.

Peru, Indiana
Peru, Kansas
Peru, Maine
Peru, Massachusetts
Peru, Nebraska
Peru, New York
Peru, Pennsylvania
Peru, Vermont
Peru, West Virginia
Peru, Wisconsin

Mexico, Indiana
Mexico, Kentucky
Mexico, Maine
Mexico, Maryland
Mexico, Missouri
Mexico (village), New York
Mexico (town), New York

Poland, Maine
Poland, Chautauqua County, New York
Poland, Herkimer County, New York
Poland, Ohio
Poland Township, Mahoning County, Ohio

Turkey, North Carolina
Turkey, Texas

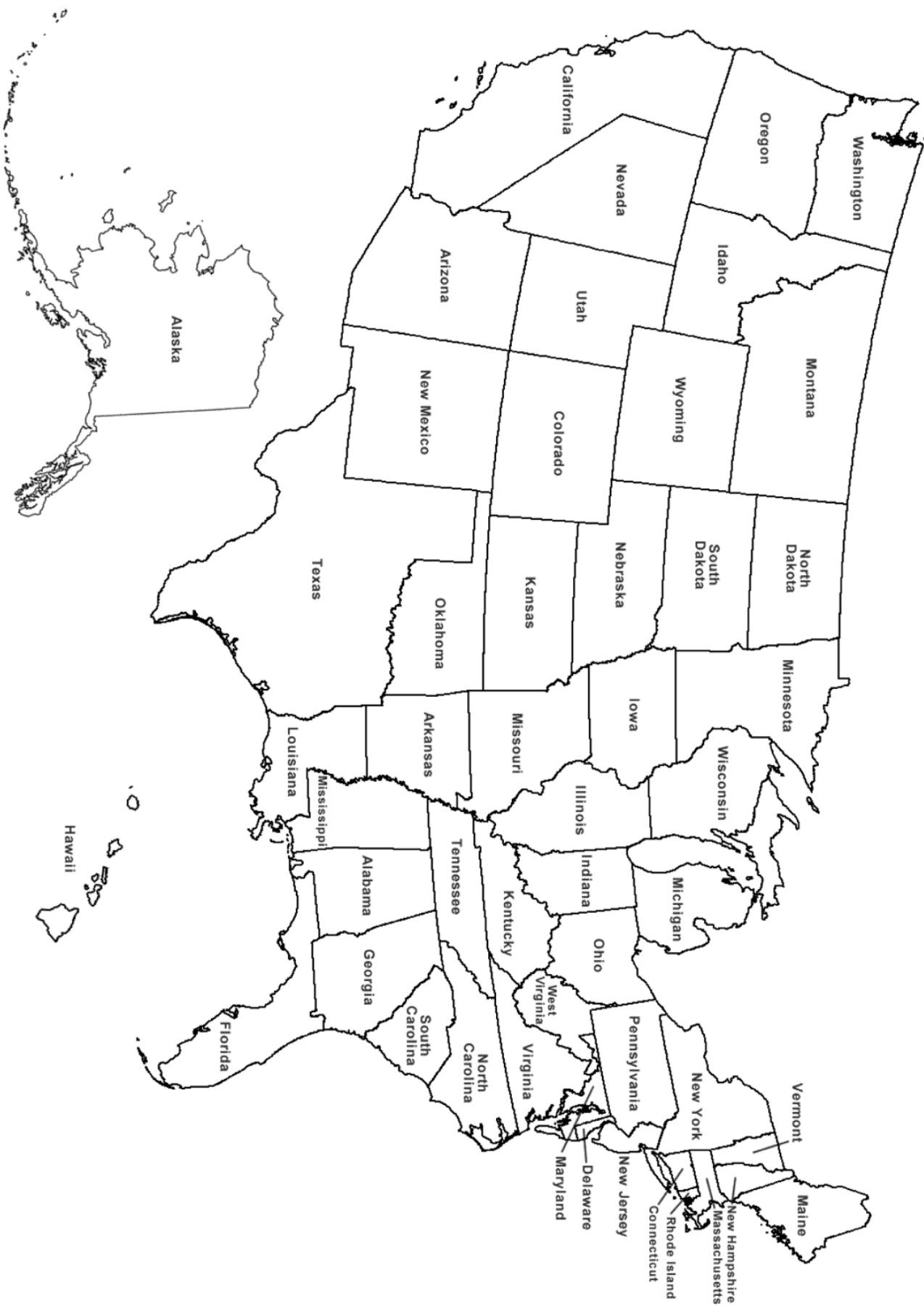
Germany, Georgia
Germany, Indiana
Germany, Texas
Germany Township, Pennsylvania

China, Maine
China Township, Michigan
China, Texas
China Grove, Texas

Cuba, Alabama
Cuba, Illinois
Cuba, Kansas
Cuba, Missouri
Cuba, New Mexico
Cuba (village), New York
Cuba (town), New York
Cuba City, Wisconsin
Cuba Township, Minnesota

Syria, Virginia

Sudan, Texas



Gooney Bird tells stories in a magical way, she gets her classmates imagination going a mile a minute. Take a look at these ideas from author and storyteller Norah Dooley and tell your own TRUE LIFE STORIES!

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A Recipe for a Story

First of all: *Something happened to you! You experienced and you remember it. We want to know about it. Go, in your imagination, to that place and time (Guided Sense Memory) and notice what you would:*

- see [shape, size, color, pattern] √ most common sense memories
- hear [sounds, voices/specific words] √ most common sense memories
- smell [usually use a simile] √ very powerful for some people
- feel [all physical sensations, warm, cold, wet, dry, etc.] √ lesscommon
- taste [sweet, sour, salty, bitter] √ least common but can be powerful

Tell a partner what you imagined (not the story, yet), then draw or make simple lists of some key memories.

Answer the questions below [oral—interview, in pairs or written form]

- **who** besides you was there?
- **what** happened ----- and then, and then?
- **where** did it happen ?
- **when** did it happen? [How old were you? What season of the year? What time of day or night?]
- **how** did it all turn out ?

Make lists of these memories and/or tell a partner. Draw a picture of a character and/or a map of your story.

Tell your story to a different partner. Have them ask the questions above – do no ask for or take suggestions, yet. Ask them what they could see or especially enjoyed. Tell your story to a family member tonight. Let them ask you questions. Do not ask for or take suggestions, yet.

NOW—Tell your story from beginning to end to yourself. Try making a “slide show of images” and describing each “slide.” Now, make an outline of the images you will use, to catch all your ideas and answers. If you are stuck or want more “See it again” and ask yourself the first set of questions another time.

PERSONAL STORYCATCHERS

STORY CATCHERS are simply good questions that bring out stories from our memories. Another way to catch a good story is to answer one of these questions with a story from your life and tell it to someone.

- Did you ever get in trouble?
- Did you ever have a great moment playing a sport/on a team? Performing on stage? Have you ever laughed so hard you cried?
- Have you ever rescued or saved someone? Or been rescued? Do you have a pet? Did it ever get in trouble or lost?
- Do you remember a time when you felt like you did or didn't "belong"?
- Do you remember a time when you felt unwelcome/welcome? Have you ever felt judged? Have you ever judged someone?
- Have you ever been really scared? Have you ever been totally lost?
- Have you ever been really embarrassed?
- Have you ever lost (or found) something or *someone* really important?
- Did you ever play a practical joke?
- What was your best meal ever? What is your favorite food? Least favorite?
- Tell us about your first...best friend, bicycle, haircut, day of school...any other "firsts"?
- What was your favorite birthday...party...present...surprise?
- Do you have a story about you and your siblings? You and other family members?
- Do you remember a story that has to do with fire? With water? With a wild storm?
- Did your car ever break down? Run out of gas? Get in an accident?
- Did you ever get locked in or out of somewhere?
- Did you ever lose the keys to something?
- Did you ever break something that belongs to someone else?
- Did you ever have an accident? Go to the ER?
- Did you ever survive an illness? Do you have a scar? ...
- Do you know a story about the day you were born? How you got your name?

If you or someone says "yes" to any of these questions, ask the leading questions below to create a story...

- WHEN? WHERE? WHAT? HOW? WHO (else)?
- (WHY should be answered by the story.)

Ask questions more than once to get a good story!

www.norahdooley.com



REVISE & TELL AGAIN – Next Step Exercises...

Check your story for meaning. What is the most important thing in this story? Ask yourself, **What is the main thing that I really want you, my listener, to know ?** Why is this story important to you? Write it down here in one sentence:

Then...tell your story. Ask yourself... Does my story **show my** meaning? Next, ask one or a few or many listeners to guess what you wrote above.

Revise your story by adding what you must and taking out any distracting parts.

Let your meaning shine through!

STORY 1,2, 6 WORD MEMOIR

Tell your story to a partner in one minute... then cut it in half and tell it in half a minute. Now tell your story in six words. Do it again. And tell it once more until you have six words that feel right. You can evoke or summarize in the 6 words.

GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

Take 2 minutes to tell your story in a “Good News” and “Bad News” format.

BEGINNINGS: START AGAIN | ENDINGS: END A DIFFERENT WAY

See page 18 for some ideas for rethinking your story!



see [shape, size, color, pattern]	
hear [sounds, volume, pitch, rhythm, voices/words]	
smell [usually use a simile from sense of taste]	
feel [all physical tactile sensations – warm, cold, wet, dry, smooth, soft, etc.]	
taste [sweet, sour, salty, bitter]	



who... besides you, was there? How old are they? What do they look like? Where are they from? What are they like?	
where... did it happen ? [Location affects plot.]	
when... did it happen? How old were you? What season of the year? What time of day or night?	
what... happened? And then... ...and then?	
how... did it all take place [plot and action details] and how did it all turn out ?	



SUGGESTIONS FOR...

BEGINNINGS: START AGAIN | ENDINGS: END A DIFFERENT WAY

Here are some specific ideas and strategies for revising a story.

Beginnings: Start Again. Rethink and try your beginning three or more different ways. Tell two of these beginnings to a partner. Listen to two from a partner. Repeat as needed.

- Start with a sound, a sight, a smell, or a taste from your guided sense memory.
- Describe the main character in action.
- Describe a minor character observed or observing.
- Create a dialogue.
- Create the thoughts of a main character.
- Make a generalization. Begin with a sentence that starts with:
 - Usually...
 - They say...
 - All...
 - She always believed that...

You get the idea!

Endings: End a Different Way. Rethink and try your ending three or more different ways. Tell two of these endings to a partner. Listen to two from a partner. Repeat as needed. Try...

- a new bit of action...based on what happened in the story.
- some of the character's thoughts.
- how you felt; a wish or a hope.
- a comment on what has changed or is different.
- a memory.
- a decision.



Your Performance ✓ Check List

Name: _____ Date _____

Story (working) Title: _____

___ My Beginning Sentences: After I introduce myself, make eye-contact with the audience, and introduce the title of my story, I will use these words (written below) to begin. I have marked the pauses with a line →→ | and the words I'll emphasize are →→ underlined :

___ My Ending Sentences: I will use these words (written below) to end my story. I have marked the pauses with a line →→ | and the words I'll emphasize are →→ underlined. I'll remember to thank my audience for listening and **wait for and acknowledge their applause before I sit down:**

___ I know my characters' voices and my audience knows who is speaking.

___ I have practiced nonverbals: gestures/movements/facial expressions.

___ **I have my beginning and especially my ending words, memorized.**

___ I have told my story, out loud; I've timed it; and I've told to someone else and/or to myself three times.

___ A story Map, Board, or Outline: Without looking at notes I can take my story from Beginning to End with pictures, a diagram map, or outline. (Draw or write on the back of this page.)

Some Tips for Rehearsing and Learning Your Story

Learn your Beginning and Ending first. Write them, draw them, and recite them over and over. This builds confidence. Don't try to memorize "word for word." Do know what happens and tell it!

Make a "story map" of your story. This is a simple drawing of what happens to whom. Carry it with you everywhere. Use it to tell your story to a friend or family member.

Imagine your story, picture by picture, as a slide show you narrate --describe it to yourself in your mind and/or out loud.

Draw pictures of your characters. Describe these pictures to someone. Imagine you are interviewing your characters—what is their favorite food, color, story, etc. This does not have to go in your story; it just makes your characters more real to you. Hear their voices in your head. Use their voices at breakfast, on the bus, and at recess.

Get someone to listen to you. Perhaps someone you live with will listen to you? If you do not have access to a good listener, find someone in your class to work with on the phone or in person. Or, set up a photo, a pet, or even some action figures or stuffed animals as an audience in your room. Make "eye contact" with them. Tell them your story without stopping.

"Tell" your story without words, just with movements or mime. Stand in one spot. Do this once for yourself. Then you may try "telling" someone who knows your story. Stop occasionally and see if they can guess where you are in the story.

Tell your story while looking in a mirror and don't stop. Notice your face—does it show what your characters are feeling and thinking? Notice your gestures—do they distract or help people use their imaginations? Are you making nervous movements?

Tell your story in the car, before you go to sleep, doing the dishes, walking or riding to school; anywhere and anytime. By saying your story out loud and repeating it, your mind helps you learn quickly and easily. Tell it to your family, to your dog, and to your backpack. The more you practice, the easier it will be to enjoy telling your story in front of an audience.

Record and listen to your story. Find photos and make a slideshow for your story and add your recorded telling as the soundtrack. Find a current popular song that speaks to a theme or idea in your story. Play this in the background or as an intro or "outro" to your story.

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