

## Storytelling Tips – Simon Airey

### Working a Story

Here are some devices you might find helpful when working on a story.

#### **Personal connection with the story**

The stories we tell best are the ones that have touched us. Take time to understand how the story relates to you and why you want to tell it. Are there scenes or characters that seem familiar to or strike some chord in you? Understanding what the story does for you, why, when, and how will help you tell it with power and conviction.

#### **Bones of the story**

Often storytellers will identify the bones first when preparing a story. These are the key events that are vital to the story. These can be numbered and internalised as a structure to hang the story on.

It is important to see how and when the story will turn. What are the mood and fortune changes? How do elements such as suspense and humour work in the story? Are there any phrases that you have to deliver exactly right for the story to twist and turn with power and impact?

#### **Mapping the story**

You may find it helpful to draw the story in the form of a map. Show where each event is located. See where each character is located and get a sense of the geographical space landscape and climate of the story. It can help give you a feel for the way the story flows from one place to another and often, returns.

#### **Ninefold analysis**

This is a way of understand the story and particularly it's meaning for you.

1. Divide the story into three main acts
2. Divide each act into three sections. You should end up with nine sections.
3. Devise a strapline for each section which expresses (for you) the essence of what happens in that section.
4. Devise a strapline for each of the three acts. Then a final strapline to describe the whole story.

#### **Visualising scenes**

You should tell an oral story from pictures in your mind not from words. You must see the story as it happens so that your listeners will be able to see it. Therefore you must visualise the story scene by scene. See it and feel it.

*NB* it is vital that you know how you see it but that you allow other people to see it for themselves. They will see it differently from you. You must be light in detail or you will quickly become dull and steal the story from them rather than giving it to them.

## **Eight favourite sayings about STORYTELLING**

You should tell a story, eye to eye, mind to mind, heart to heart

*Scottish saying*

God created people because he loves stories

*Jewish saying*

You have to tell a story 6 times before it's yours, but once it's yours it will always be inside you.

*Storytellers saying*

Ears empower tongues

*African saying*

The shortest route between the truth and the human heart is ... a story

*Stephen Lawhead, popular novelist*

The truth goes hidden in the folds of the story

*Scottish saying*

If I explained the meaning of a story it would be like giving you a piece of fruit and then chewing it for you.

*Rabbinic saying*

You tell a story from inside it. If you don't feel the emotions of your story then neither will your listeners.

*Simon Airey, storyteller*

## Tips for Storytellers

- Be yourself. Find your own natural way of storytelling.
- Do not try to learn a script. Use your own words as you naturally would in conversation.
- Know the story. This does not mean learn the story but rather visualise the story scene by scene.
- Do not go into great detail while telling. Be minimalist in description, this will enable listeners to see it for themselves.
- Only tell a story that has touched you in some way. Reflect on how it has touched you and why you want to tell it.
- Tell a story from inside it. This means that you will relive a story as you tell it. You must feel the emotions of the story in order for this to transfer to your listeners.
- Remember the true power of a story is felt when it becomes a shared, immediate experience.
- Keep the story moving, don't let it drag. Use dramatic pauses but keep the action and dialogue crisp.
- Understand the structure of the story. It should have stepping-stones so that you know where you are as you move along. Sometimes these can be formulas of words.
- Remember that the beginning and ending are vital to the story. Here the storyteller is allowed to know exactly the words they will use to cast and land the tale.