

# TPR Storytelling®

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling

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## Language Acquisition vs. Language Learning

- Language is acquired through comprehensible input. It is an unconscious process; it happens when the learner is focused on the meaning of the message rather than the language.
- An important difference between classroom acquisition and “baby acquisition” is: Students have greater cognitive ability than babies. However, they have significantly less time in the language than babies do. Therefore teachers must make the best use of precious classroom time.
- Classroom language must be repetitive, interesting, and varied. Without these elements, we are not using class time in the best way possible. Our challenge is making the language comprehensible while at the same time making it repetitive and interesting.
- Language “learning” refers to understanding how language works. Learning is enhanced by study.
- Learning enables a student to edit language for accuracy. Acquisition means relying on what sounds right.
- In order to use learned rules in speech, three conditions must be met:
  - The speaker must know the rule.
  - The speaker must be focused on the rule.
  - The speaker must have sufficient time to edit.

## Lesson Planning

If you use TPRS materials, the lessons are already made for you. But in case you want to tell a folk tale or use a different book, here is the format for teaching ANY group of words or structures:

List the items that you **need** to teach in order to tell the story. Put the words into phrases that teach not simply vocabulary, but structure. Typically a chapter “vocabulary list” will have about 20 phrases, with the same structure repeated many times.

Break the list into daily lessons of two to three phrases per day. Sometimes the phrase is a sentence, such as “The dog runs.”

A lesson consists of three steps: *establish meaning, story, literacy*. Each step of the lesson revolves around using the three phrases in as many ways as possible, in an interesting context. It may take two days (or more) to teach one entire lesson.

Lesson plan for each lesson:

- Introduce the three phrases:
- They should be written on the board and translated into English.
- Pronounce them and teach a gesture to signify each phrase.
- As you say the phrases, watch students' gestures to see if they recognize the words.
  
- Use the phrases in context. (When a student needs help in understanding, simply do the gesture or point to the board.) Use your students as the topic of conversation:
  - Ask questions such as "Rachel, do you have a dog?"
  - Talk about the students, using circles to reinforce the words. "Does Rachel have a dog?" (circle) "Does Rachel's dog run fast?" (circle) "Does Rachel run fast?" (compare and contrast)
  - Build on what you have learned about a student so that you can talk about that student. "Class, Rachel has a big brown dog. Rachel's dog is named Al. Al runs very fast."
  
- Ask a story, using actors (or puppets or dolls or pictures). Once again, use your students as the topic of the story. Circle each statement that contains one of the lesson's focus phrases.
  
- (Optional) Retell the story without actors. You may take the place of the actors or you may have everybody in the class act at the same time! You may **slightly** change or embellish the story to keep interest high.
  
- (Optional, can be homework) Students tell or write the story from illustrations. In class, they tell to partners. As homework, they tell to their parents.
  
- Ask students to follow silently while you read aloud to them. Invite them to translate the story.

The above lesson plan may take 90 minutes. Repeat the same procedure for each group of two or three phrases. After three or four lessons of this type, tell a story that uses most (or all) of the words from the preceding lessons.

Then begin again with two-three phrases per lesson, doing a review story after three or four lessons.

After you have taught all of the phrases on the list, you are ready to tell the chapter story (or the fairy tale or whatever story you originally intended to teach.) It is helpful to use a

cartoon strip of the story. Use these illustrations by pointing to each episode and ask plenty of questions about it.

A culminating activity might be to have students tell the story to their families, to have students perform the story (for their families, for the rest of the school, for the video camera) to have students make their own story books, or to have students write their own stories.

- ✓ The book **Fluency through TPR Storytelling** is a MUST for all teachers.

## **Make grammar useful!**

1. Students acquire grammar by understanding how changing things in the language affects the meaning. They do NOT acquire grammar by learning and practicing rules. One effective tool for promoting accuracy is retelling from **perspective**--with guidewords at first and then without. Be demanding of your better students by requiring them to retell without help.
2. Always explain the grammar of guidewords from a **meaning** point of view. For example, let your students know what the "le" or "se" does in the sentence. Teach them the past tenses simultaneously by translating the sentence. Make your explanations very quick (15 seconds MAXIMUM).
3. Pepper every lesson with quick **“pop-up” grammar** questions. If the story says, “She gave him a dollar,” ask for a translation of “him.” Also ask questions that get students to focus on verb endings: Class, what does the “r” do in “mirar?”
4. Use **essays** to teach accuracy, especially with upper-level classes. Correction methods:
  - a. Correct all instances of one or two important errors in each essay, explaining these corrections in detail. Concentrate on verb accuracy and agreement. Your corrections must show that their errors cause confusion. (Yo habla = “I he talks” or livres important = is there one book or more than one?)
  - b. Use a rubric.
  - c. Find and highlight only ten errors in each composition.
5. Speak the language as much as possible in the classroom and **speak it naturally**. DO NOT shelter grammar when speaking to students! If they do not hear natural language they are unlikely to acquire it.
6. English is used only to guarantee comprehension (such as translating readings) or to clarify meaning as quickly as possible (such as in pop-ups).
7. Write a **class story** every month or so. Teacher writes the story on the overhead while the entire class invents the story line. Continually ask about spelling, gender, conjugations, anything relating to accuracy. Students answer questions about all of the structure they know while copying the entire story. Praise them for their knowledge; praise them for asking questions about how the language works. Students are more likely to learn grammar from multiple mini-lessons than from a five-minute lesson that has an explanation and drill. To see an example of a class story, get the DVD “TPRS in the 90’s” by Susan Gross.

## Grammar Schedule

While **all** of the language is used accurately **all** of the time, it is helpful to have a grammatical focus in mind. Certain features like affirmative/negative are obviously essential to understanding. These are the first things that must be clarified. Over the course of level one, I used the following general “point of view” plan:

Aug-Sep-Oct 3rd person singular and plural.  
Nov-Dec 1st person singular.  
Jan-Feb 2nd person singular.  
Mar-Apr 1st person plural.  
May 2nd person plural.

At the conclusion of a story, we quickly retold from the point of view that I was working on. Each point of view included possessive adjectives; direct, indirect, disjunctive, and reflexive pronouns; regular, irregular, reflexive verbs. Some years I did not make it through all of the points of view because I did not move to the next point of view until the students demonstrated mastery.

Since I used all forms correctly whenever appropriate in our storytelling and conversations, they heard all points of view all year long. The above plan simply guided what grammar I chose to **emphasize** and **assess** in the chapter test.

## Reading for greatest language gains

A well-developed reading program is **essential**. A reading program is not an ancillary; it is crucial. The following reading activities make up a good reading program:

- **Kindergarten day.** Teacher reads a children’s book to the class.
- **Free Voluntary Reading.** Students select their own reading material from the classroom library. Classroom materials should include brochures, magazines, baby books, children’s books, storybooks, and novels. An abundance of high-interest materials is required. These materials need not be geared to the student’s vocabulary or grammar lessons; they should simply be appealing to the students.
- **All-class translation.** Everyone reads the same material. Students translate (individually or as a group.) Students need to know at least 75% of the vocabulary for this activity to be successful. In addition to pop-up grammar and vocabulary, discuss the reading in the target language. Personalize the discussion by connecting the events and characters to your students.
- **Homework reading.** Once they know 90 to 95% of the vocabulary, students can read a chapter as homework. Reading is the best use of homework time for levels 3 and above. You may choose to assess with a quick quiz.

Reading **novels** promotes fluent reading skills. Fluent reading means *without dictionaries*. Our students will not start out as fluent readers; they must be guided. Begin with a novel that is almost totally comprehensible. Students translate out loud, while the

teacher assists as needed. All students follow along in their own books. While there are many opportunities for pop-up grammar, remember that reading is a language acquisition activity, not a hidden agenda for grammar lessons. Focus on the plot, the characters, what will happen next, and enjoyment of the story.

In levels 3 and above, students can read novels as homework. Once they understand at least 90 to 95% of the vocabulary, students can read independently. Begin by translating the first few chapters in class. By grouping the students and letting each group run their own translation while you move among the groups, you will know when they are ready to read independently. Assign the next chapter for two or three days later. Most teachers have them write summaries or give them quizzes over what they have read.

Because it is difficult to find novels that are appropriate for level one and level two students, you may choose to order the novels on the order form. If you would like to see more novels for German, French, and Spanish reading programs, go to <http://www.susangrosstprs.com> and click on "Lessons." There are teacher-recommended reading lists for kindergarten through seniors in high school in French, Spanish, and German.

## Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to know how well you are teaching. If you don't know how much of the material has been mastered, you don't know what to do tomorrow!

*Susan Gross*

**Constantly** assess students by listening for instant, unanimous responses to all statements and questions. When the response is low, do not move forward until the cause of misunderstanding has been cleared up.

Frequent unannounced ten-point **quizzes** tell you which items need to be re-taught.

**Chapter tests** (secondary level) may include vocabulary, listening, reading, culture and an essay.

**Semester exams** assess proficiency: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and culture.

## Student Rapport

In order to maintain an appropriate classroom atmosphere, teachers need to be in control. They need to create a safe environment. Very often, student resistance stems from the fear of being rejected or ridiculed. A negative student atmosphere has a negative impact on learning. We must eliminate ALL negativity in our classes. This includes comments, facial expressions, smirks, and overt behavior. It also includes teacher impatience, sighs, and sarcasm.

Show respect for your students. Accept them for who they are. Show them you care. Know about their lives and talk about their lives in class and in mini-stories. Shake their hands and ask them about their friends, family, or hobbies.

“Students don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

-- *Anonymous*



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The International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching

# Two essential skills for storytelling

## Essential skill #1: REPETITION

### Technique # 1 Circle of questions

In order to acquire the structures that you are teaching, learners must hear them over and over. Simply putting the structure into a story is not enough; abundant repetition is key. By asking a wide variety of questions that contain the structure, we require that students pay attention and answer the questions. Here is a list of the types of questions/statements that help us to get repetitions, followed by a blank to indicate student choral response, and then the *teacher responses*:

Statement : **The dog runs** fast.

“Yes” answer : Does **the dog run** fast? \_\_\_\_\_ *Yes, the **dog runs** fast.*

Either/or : Does **the dog run** fast or slowly? \_\_\_\_\_ *That’s right. The **dog doesn’t run** slowly; **the dog runs** fast.*

“No” answer : Does **the dog run** slowly? \_\_\_\_\_ *That’s right. The **dog doesn’t run** slowly; **the dog runs** fast.*

Question word : Who **runs** fast? \_\_\_\_\_ *Right! The **dog runs** fast.*

Notice that there are many possible either/or questions: Does the dog run fast or does the dog dance fast? Does the dog run fast or does the boy run fast?

By the same token, there are many possible “no” answer questions: Does the dog dance fast? Does the boy run fast?

\* It is often helpful to script all of the possible questions for a given statement. A simple glance at the list of possible questions (see **circling template**) will enable the teacher to keep the questions going in a random order.

### Technique #2 Add details to the original sentence and recycle.

Any new words you use are out of bounds! Bring those new words “in bounds” by asking 2 – 3 circling questions and then add another detail:

Question : What is the dog’s **name**?

Statement : The dog’s **name** is Arrow.

“Yes” answer : Is the dog’s **name** Arrow? \_\_\_\_\_ *Yes, the dog’s **name** is Arrow.*

“No” answer : Is the dog’s **name** Spiderman? \_\_\_\_\_ *No, the dog’s **name** isn’t Spiderman, it’s Arrow. And Arrow **runs fast!***



Question : What color is the dog?

Statement : The dog is **black**.

Either/or : Is Arrow brown or **black**? \_\_\_\_\_ *Yes, Arrow the dog is **black**. He's not brown.*

“No” answer : Is the dog brown? \_\_\_\_\_ *That's right. The dog Arrow is not brown, he's black. And he **runs fast!***

Question word : How big is Arrow?

Etc

Now the story has begun:

“Arrow the tiny black dog who is the size of an insect runs faster than a Porsche.”

By the time all of these details have been added and the teacher has repeated the answers, students have begun to figure out how the structure of the language works. They can see where modifier go and how they are pronounced, they see how a dependent clause is inserted into the statement, they understand negation when they hear it, and they have begun to lay the foundation for how the language works. With each sentence and each story they hear, they will solidify and improve on this basic foundation.

### Technique #3 Recycling the story

After adding a new detail, go back a few sentences and integrate the new detail into the story.

“There is a girl named Sheila who has a tiny black dog named Arrow. Her dog runs fast.”

### Technique #4 Asking the story:

Avoid making too many statements in a row. Ask a few questions before continuing with the next statement. This keeps students involved all lesson long. They respond to everything you say:

If you made a statement, they respond with “Ohh!” or “Wow!”

If the question is something they know the answer to, they all yell out the answer.

If the question calls for information that we don't know yet (Like what is the dog's name or color) then they all guess.

## **Essential skill #2: COMPREHENSIBILITY**

### Technique #1 Teaching to all students

Check for comprehension with the slower students during every statement. Don't move on to new sentences until all students comprehend completely.

Encourage students to tell you every single time they don't understand. Often they will be hesitant to signal, so ask them for a translation anyway. The job of the slower students is to make you a good teacher. If they don't slow you down, then they are helping the entire class to fail! (Do not pace the class by teaching to the top students.)

## Technique #2 The pause

Say a question word. Pause. Then continue with the rest of the question. You may need to offer a quick translation of the question word during the pause.

In a long sentence, pause after each phrase so that students can process. If you spoke too quickly at first, just repeat with a little pause after each phrase.

## Technique #3 Salvaging a zero response.

You ask, "To where does the black dog named Arrow run?"

Instead of shouting out a bunch of clever answers, the whole class is silent! Yikes! Normally this means that they are taking time to figure out what you just asked.

Clarify by asking for a translation **of the question**. Or change your question into an "either/or" question: Does the dog named Arrow run to WalMart or to Pizza Hut?

## Technique #4 Staying "in bounds."

The boundaries are anything that the students already know plus the phrases that you are teaching today.

Expand on the boundaries by using cognates (like "automobile"). HOWEVER, students will not recognize "automobile" because the new language changes the pronunciation. So you must tell them what it means. Once you have brought that word in bounds, you may use it.

When adding a new detail to the story, that new word must be brought in bounds with a couple of questions! A good way to add details is by using brand names such as Toyota, Crest, WalMart, Chicago, Frank. For example, if you want to add "shoes" to the story, say "Nikes" instead of "shoes." That way you stay in bounds!

As the year progresses, the boundaries get bigger. Each time you meet with your students, use as much of the language as they already know. Constantly recycle familiar language. Gradually add to their language, creating proficient, proud students!