

Starting and Ending a Story

Starting the Story

Curtains up. The play begins. Sorry folks, most storytellers don't get curtains. Only eager faces staring up at you. So how do you start a story?

Create a curtain for yourself. An "intro" to your story will serve as your curtain.

First, take the time to calm yourself. Breathe deeply. Say hello. Tell them your name. You may want to let them know where the story is from. Keep it simple. It is often fun to explain a little part of the story that the listeners will need to know at some point during the tale. Make eye contact with your audience; let them know a story is about to begin and that they will want to listen. You may wish to set the mood for the story. For instance, if it's a scary, scary story, turn off the lights and whisper.

The actual first lines of a story are also important. Begin with what will be the main focus. For example, the story, "Brer Bear and the Peanuts," begins with: "Everybody know Brer Bear loves peanuts," letting us know, right off the bat, this is a tale about Brer Bear and his peanuts. A story about the Baker's Daughter may begin with "Oh, the Baker's Daughter was clever!"

Start your story with the main character or theme of the story. Many classic folk and fairy tales begin this way.

Some tellers start their story with a question -- or a set of questions -- that lead into the story.

Also, make sure you have your listeners set up in a way that is conducive to listening and as free from distractions as possible. Try to create an intimate environment so that all of your listeners are close enough to both hear and see you.

Note: **When telling to children**, it is wise to have certain cues that get their attention. You can teach them a signal that lets them know to be quiet. Raising your hand with two fingers up is a signal to quiet down (a signal from Guides and Scouts). They raise their hands as well and quiet down. You can do this without interrupting the flow of your story. You can also ask the teacher if there is a signal the children are familiar with. You may want to practice this with a group before you begin telling. You may never have to use it, but it is a great tool to have at your disposal.

Ending the Story

Your ending is the last thought you leave your listener with, so leave a memorable impression. Listeners don't like to be left hanging. You need a solid ending.

Just as the beginning is the curtain rising on a world of imagination, the ending can transition back into the world of reality, leaving them with ideas to consider. Don't rush into this.

Tell the story out loud several times before you decide what the ending is, as it may not be what you originally expected. Like life, you never know what the ending is until you get there.

After you have told the story's ending, you want to reiterate the name of the story, its origin and, if applicable, the writer. (That was the story of ____ from ____ written by ____.)

After you have finished telling your story, don't rush into other activities or another story. Give your listeners a moment to relax, consider what they have just heard, and then move on. You can also take a few moments to relax and congratulate yourself on a great job sharing your tale.

And remember to take your bow -- and enjoy taking it.