

The Power of Stories to Engage Students

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Have you ever noticed that the student who has difficulty focusing and paying attention to most tasks in the classroom will sit and listen intently to a story? Stories, it seems, are special. Cognitive Psychologist Daniel Willingham explains that stories are “psychologically privileged” and that there is indeed something special about them. He says, “Stories are easy to comprehend and easy to remember, and that’s true not just because people pay close attention to stories; there is something inherent in the story format that makes them easy to understand and remember. Ron Nash, author of [The Active Classroom](#), offers more insights into why stories are so powerful, “Storytelling engages our minds in a way that television simply cannot do.” He goes on to explain that stories help to stimulate images in the minds of the listener. During a story, the listener interprets and expands upon those images as the story unfolds.

Teachers can engage students by telling them stories that connect to the content but they can also have students tell their own stories. Here are some ideas for classroom use:

- Create a story that connects to the content to be mastered. For example, a fictional story about relationship between a river and a lake could help students to understand geography concepts.
- Use stories as hooks or leads into a lesson to heighten student interest.
- Ask students to take the content being learned and turn it into a story. For example, you could ask the students to create a story of a boy who struggled to learn his times tables. Students could also take selected vocabulary terms and use them in a story.
- Ask students to bring in toys, props, or other important items to use as props as they tell stories. Objects such as photos, baseball cards, or special toys can tell entire stories.

You don’t need to be a master storyteller to engage kids. There are numerous resources available to teachers on the internet and in curriculum guides that will provide examples and help you get started.