Telling tales

A guide to developing effective storytelling programmes for museums

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‘We are stories. We make sense of the world through stories. We make meaning out of stories and remember through stories.’
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Introduction by
Professor Jack Lohman

Storytelling is at the heart of what many museums do. They use stories to breathe life into their collections, making connections with different times, often different continents, cultures and beliefs, capturing a range of emotions. Listening to these stimulates and nourishes the imagination helping to learn about oneself as well as about others. Living in Africa where oral traditions are so strong, I was struck how stories change in telling from one generation to another and the way they change the way we see things. I am delighted that the London Museums Hub can champion storytelling much closer to home. There is much to learn from our own museums and storytellers that really use this intangible heritage tradition to give life to their tangible heritage collections.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the storytellers, museum and heritage professionals who helped in creating this handbook. I hope their example inspires you.

Professor Jack Lohman
Director, Museum of London Group
Lead partner, London Museums Hub
What is oral storytelling?

Storytelling has been described as an *ephemeral art*. It's here; then it's over and it's gone. This does not mean that the telling of stories has no lasting impact; but the art as a whole (story, teller, and listener together) cannot be duplicated. The unique but intangible qualities of good storytelling make it a fantastic medium for museums to use to communicate to their audiences.

One of the most influential and successful storytellers in Britain, Ben Haggarty, suggests that participation in a successful storytelling event involves a different sensory experience from reading or listening to the radio or even a live recitation. Each telling of a story is uniquely re-created for each fresh audience, meaning that the audience becomes aware that their communal and individual listening has a direct effect on the way the story and its protagonists develop and take shape. This is why so much consideration needs to be put into creating the optimum spatial conditions for good storytelling – the possibility of silence and focus.¹

The nature of the triad – story/storyteller/audience – means that oral storytelling cannot produce a material product. Books and recordings can be no more than secondary offshoots of this sort of storytelling; playing invaluable *archiving* roles.

‘Storytelling predates the written word; people have been telling stories for as long as we have had speech. Stories passed from lips to ears, changing as each teller forgot things, or deliberately left them out, and replaced them with their own inventions. This is the “oral tradition”. Even now we think in narrative and tell anecdotes, urban myths and personal stories almost without realising it.’

The Society for Storytelling

‘The grand old process of storytelling puts us in touch with strengths we may have forgotten, with wisdom that has faded or disappeared and with hopes that have fallen into darkness.’

Nancy Mellon (1992); *Storytelling & the art of imagination*

¹ Ben Haggarty (2004); *Memories & Breath – Professional Storytelling in England & Wales*
Step-by-step guide:

to organising a storytelling programme in your museum, art gallery or historic house
Storytelling is central to how we express ourselves – healthy, respectful, and productive relationships are founded on people listening to, understanding, and knowing each other’s stories. Stories are gifts – passed on from one to another through time. By discovering and sharing stories, The International Storytelling Centre believes we can transform our approach to our lives and increase empathy with others.

As this guide is part of the on-going research feeding into the development of the London Museums Hub Education Programme for school-aged children and their teachers and carers, the educational role of storytelling in children’s learning will be emphasised here. However, it must be stressed that the educational value of storytelling is relevant to people of all ages and backgrounds and that a common misconception is that storytelling is equated with children’s events; whereas storytelling is for everyone.

‘I think [you] have to understand why storytelling is important before you even approach using it, and as a result you need to have a grounding in the philosophy of storytelling. It is such a powerful interpretation tool, that you need an informed respect for the medium before you think about it practically. It is also helpful to ask the question – why are you using story as opposed to another mode of interpretation? Jane Cockcroft, Handel House Museum

‘Storytelling gives children a reason to listen and something to remember.’ Mary Medlicott (2003); The little book of storytelling
‘It is empowering for young people to tell stories, particularly in a formal education context, as it helps develop confidence and encourages a love of words. It is a magical thing.’ Jane Cockcroft, Handel House Museum

General reasons for choosing storytelling:

• Stories and storytelling are Universal aspects of human communication: connecting people through time and across cultures.

• Storytelling for sharing cultural heritage: Stories as ‘artefacts’: they are preserved in people’s memories and shared with others through time.

• Storytelling for Literacy: Storytelling supports literacy development in the National Curriculum.

• Storytelling for curiosity and motivation to learn across the curriculum: A good storyteller can engage interest and enthusiasm for a range of subjects such as History, Religious Studies, Geography, English Language, Literature and Drama.

• Storytelling for changes in values and attitudes: Storytelling can stimulate a questioning attitude and expand people’s emotional, cultural and moral responses to a variety of issues. The distancing frame of a story can enable sensitive issues to be explored and considered.

• Storytelling for increased self-confidence: A storyteller can teach storytelling skills to participants. Storytelling has been proven to raise self-confidence amongst children who have low self-esteem or are ‘low achievers’.

• Storytelling for inspiration and creativity: Many storytellers offer workshop sessions, which may either teach storytelling skills or engage participants in creative activities linked to the stories for example using art, drama, music or puppets.

• Storytelling for empathy, citizenship and peace: Storytelling has long been recognised as a formidable tool for reconciling differences and building peaceful relationships. If we think of conflict as the clash of divergent stories centring on real or imagined wrong-doing and superiority, then we can take advantage of the ethical underpinning of stories, in general, and of storytelling, in particular, to defuse these harmful narratives.

• Storytelling for performance: Listening to a good storyteller brings something akin to a literary experience to a performing arts event.

• Storytelling for helping people to ‘read’ objects as cultural artefacts by giving them meaning, purpose and context. This is particularly relevant for storytelling in museums, galleries and historic houses.
Case Study 1: Livesey Museum for Children

The Livesey Museum for Children has been designed for children under twelve, their families, carers and teachers. The Museum has a new interactive exhibition every year that is specifically designed to help children experiment, investigate, have fun and use their imagination; and every exhibition is designed to support the National Curriculum at Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. In 2006 the museum was short listed for The Guardian’s Family Friendly Museum Award.

As part of the London Museums Hub’s Education Programme Delivery Plan 2004–2006 the exhibition ‘Myths and Legends’ explored myths and legends from all over the world. A key feature of the exhibition experience was the storytelling delivered by a well-established oral storyteller, which took place in the galleries. The storytelling provided a link between the fantastical learning environment, including a life-size dragon, a labyrinth, Viking ship and jungle scene, and the content and morals of the stories featured in the exhibition. The storytelling and the hands-on exhibition were designed so that they were intrinsically linked, because they added a depth of knowledge and understanding that could not be obtained through one source alone.

‘Linking the stories with the exhibition is vital. The visual aspect... to be able to see Anansi and then come downstairs and listen to a story about him, I think that put everything together for her.’ Quote from parent. From the evaluation report for ‘Myths and Legends’

‘They have ensured that this programme becomes a fully immersive experience, allowing children to delve into the world of stories using a range of senses, and play an active part in shaping their own learning. The programme supports children’s formal learning as well as provides an exciting opportunity for parents and children to explore and enjoy together in their spare time.’

From the evaluation report for ‘Myths and Legends’
Reasons for choosing storytelling in museums, galleries and historic houses

Museums are about stories. Stories about people’s lives, of things people make and use, stories about nature, the universe, of all living things. In comparison to other modes of interpretation, storytelling is unique in that both the tangible and the intangible can be explored simultaneously. Significantly, storytellers are important contributors to sustaining culture, by preserving and perpetuating intangible heritage through the oral tradition. Giulia Gelmini of the University of Nottingham, suggests that there are several reasons why museums are ideal places for storytelling.² For example;

- The museum can be seen as a laboratory and a cultural system that is deeply involved in the creation and elaboration of shared knowledge. By creating stories, we can structure and express our own perceptions, understandings and opinions about the world in a form that can be passed on to others.

- Storytelling is a powerful tool for making meanings for objects. The way the objects are presented should allow the visitor to participate in the process of ‘reading’ objects as cultural artefacts.

- Storytelling helps museums to be places for informal and formal learning.

¹ Today’s museums are wonderful for recognising the historic and artistic value of storytelling as a traditional and living folk-art. Storytelling can return the favour by deepening the audience’s awareness of exhibits and objects and by using story to create an emotional relationship with the museum’s content.’ Yvonne Healy, Storyteller

² ‘Stories and objects are a good combination – a story can give an object a context and purpose. An object can be the focus for listening, aiding the imagination to create the world of the story.’ Katy Cawkwell, Storyteller

¹ How can we satisfactorily make sense of the motifs of the ‘eye of Horus’ or the ‘Scarab beetle’ on Ancient Egyptian artefacts if we do not tell the stories that underpinned the beliefs (and lives) of the people at the time?’ Maureen James, Storyteller

² http://www.psychology.nottingham.ac.uk/staff/gg/home%20page/publications/nov%202003.ppt, Learning Sciences Research Institute Seminar Series 2003-2004
Case Study 2: Historic Royal Places

Historic Royal Palaces is the organisation that looks after The Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, the state apartments at Kensington Palace, the Banqueting House in Whitehall and Kew Palace. It is an independent charity with no government funding and they recently became concerned that their charitable status and their purpose of conservation and education were not recognised either by their visitors or by the wider world. As a result, they began a major review of their purpose called ‘The Identity Project’.

As a result of their research, the Historic Royal Palaces want to take visitors on a journey into the lives of the Kings and Queens of England, but also into their servants’ lives and behind the scenes of a palace; by opening up histories of style, gardening, water-closets and food, power and politics. The staff are also seeing the palaces through the eyes of the people from all over the world who have flocked here throughout history, as well as through the eyes of the people who look after the palaces today. They are only halfway through their review, but they are considering training in oral storytelling for both front-of-house and behind-the-scenes staff such as conservators. They are also looking at a visitor’s journey as a story with a beginning, a middle and an end, and investigating how they tell stories to the world through the work that takes place off site.

‘We realised that our resources consist not only of five wonderful buildings, but also a rich store of stories. We began to wonder how we could apply the best features of the oral tradition of storytelling to everything we provide for visitors. We quickly decided that a story is a useful metaphor for the experience of visiting one of our palaces. The stories that Historic Royal Palaces can tell may begin with something familiar, before taking you on a journey away from normal life into unfamiliar territory. We hope that visitors will end up somewhere completely unexpected, learning something completely new about either the world or themselves.’ Lucy Worsley, Historic Royal Palaces

‘This little word – storytelling – has spurred us on to re-think all the different kinds of work we do.’ Lucy Worsley, Historic Royal Palaces
Having discovered the general purpose and benefits of using storytelling as an interpretive approach in your museum, art gallery or historic house, you need to decide on the specific context for your storytelling event.

Part of this will be to decide specific objectives, timing, environment and target audience/s. You will also need to consider the events content: if you want there to be a workshop element to the story event, the types of stories that are to be told and which collections they relate to. You may want to consult with your target audience on their ideas about the content or themes of the event. Knowing something about what your audiences will bring to the event will help to inform your brief.

To use this section effectively, use the planning sheet at the back of this booklet to record your choices as you go through each ‘decide’ section. This will help you compile your ideas into an effective brief and find the right storyteller for your event.

‘Consider carefully the time of the storytelling session(s). At a family event do not expect the storyteller to be able to perform all day. Many storytellers want to have dedicated time slots others like to be flexible depending on the audiences i.e. young children who normally may only have a short attention span may be so engrossed in the stories that they sit for ages.’ Maureen James, Storyteller

Decide: The specific objectives for your storytelling event

Have a look through the previous section, ‘General reasons for choosing storytelling’ and see if this sparks any ideas for your storytelling event. Possible objectives include:

- **To give a ‘feel’ for a period in history** – perhaps tacked onto an exhibition on ‘life in the…’ e.g. the Viking saga storyteller sitting in his authentic tent.
- **To provide added value to education sessions** – historical storytelling set in a time and place with a costumed storyteller to enhance understanding of an historical period.
- **To enlighten understanding of a museum collection** – many museum educators emphasise the importance of linking storytelling to collections and/or the special environment in which the storytelling takes place, as a special form of interpretation. You need to consider the following:
  - Do you want to link the storytelling with the collections?
  - How? Is it through the theme (e.g. Roman myths to ‘Romans’) or specific objects in your collection?
  - If stories are to be linked with collections or objects, does it matter if elements of the stories are factually correct or not?
- **To provide an entertaining performance for adults and/or older children** – perhaps during an evening.
- **To provide family entertainment** – perhaps a number of short sessions during the day.
- **To inspire a reminiscence or local history project** – perhaps through the use of local folk tales.
- **To help the museum cover Literacy or History in the National Curriculum.**
Decide: How long will your event last?
- Is this to be a one-off event or a residency?
- Is it going to be a drop-in session or with specific starting times?
- How many sessions will there be?
- How long do you want each session to last?

Decide: Where will the event take place?
- What venue are you planning to use?
- Do you require the storyteller to work outdoors? Remember that extraneous sounds carry and can be disruptive to a storytelling session.

Decide: Who will participate?
- What age groups will be involved? Will the ages be mixed? E.g. school groups, families or adults?
- Do any of the participants have special needs that the storyteller should be aware of?
- Will many have English as a second or additional language?

Decide: How will the audience participate?
- Will it be formal or relaxed, a performance in front of a large audience or working with smaller groups in workshops?
- How much audience participation do you want?

  If you decide that you want a lot of audience participation, you may want to consider a storyteller who uses:
  - music
  - art
  - puppets

  Storytellers may include elements of these art forms in the storytelling, or use them as part of a workshop linked to the storytelling.
- You may also choose to link the storytelling with a participatory story building session, where the audience and the storyteller make up stories together.

What is participatory story building?
Story building takes the participatory storytelling process a step further. In the act of story building, children are encouraged to make up stories together using free and creative thinking and team working skills. Story building helps children to use their imaginations and express themselves, both to each other and to grown-ups, through play. Speaking, listening, writing and acting become easy activities as story building is fun and breaks down barriers.

‘In every language, in every part of the world, story is the fundamental grammar of all thought and communication. By telling ourselves what happened; to whom, and why, we not only discover ourselves and the world but we change and create ourselves and the world too.’
Aidan Chambers, Author

‘[Storytelling] is a very intense performance art. The project manager should be aware that they are probably looking at two or three, forty-five minute slots during the day, and that is about it, because it is so intense.’
Anna Salaman, ABL Cultural Consulting

‘I think sometimes an intimate environment freaks people out more than an open environment. Again, it depends on the audience. School groups are much easier, because the pupils are used to being forced to listen in environments and then responding. They are like a captive audience. Families are totally different and I think they would prefer a more open environment.’
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Case Study 3: Discover, Stratford

Discover is a children’s museum in Stratford, East London, especially for children aged 0–8 years and their families, carers and teachers. Discover is about making stories together through story building. The museum has a patron character, developed by children, called Hootah. Hootah comes from an imaginary planet whose stories have run out and Hootah is looking for new ones on planet Earth. The children’s task is to build new stories and share them.

A school story building day at Discover normally starts with the process of unpicking what a story is and then the children are introduced to the concept of character by either talking about what a character is or dressing up in character. The children then engage in different activities such as art and craft, drama and free play in the Discover environment. They then come back as a group to build a story together using the children’s ideas that they have generated through imaginative play and workshops during their day. Sometimes, the story building is aided by ‘story bags’ which have a specific theme and include: a ‘character bag’, an ‘objects bag’ and a ‘places bag’.

There is never a right or a wrong involved in story building. Anything is possible, and this makes it a very special and empowering medium. It works especially well with children who have English as their second or additional language, or children who have low self-esteem – it doesn’t matter what you say – everything is valid. It is the idea that stories can go wherever we want them to go.

‘...we had a really lovely part of the session, when we had all got onto a boat, it was just a piece of fabric on the floor, but we all got on to the boat, and then we showed a picture of a boat, and there was this quite vague charcoal drawing, it wasn’t literal at all, it wasn’t that kind of picture you get in a storybook. You could see it was a boat, but there wasn’t anything specific about it. It was a really nice image because you could get much more imaginative ideas from the kids, because it was much more open ended, it wasn’t – oh it is a brown wooden boat with two oars. I remember one child saying – it’s made from sugar. And I thought – great! Let’s hope it doesn’t melt.’ Eleanor Walford, Discover
‘Stories set in the past do not have to be true; they have to be authentic. While anachronism has no place in good stories about the past, imaginative reconstruction does.’ Grugeon & Gardner (2000); The art of storytelling for teachers and pupils

Decide: What kinds of stories will be told?

Are you looking for stories on a particular theme or from a specific culture or time? In briefing and communicating with storytellers, it may be useful to be aware of different types of stories and the most frequent types of stories currently told. This will help you find the right storyteller for your event.

Professional storytellers will have a solid repertoire to offer. When commissioning storytellers, it is helpful to brief them about what kind of stories you would like them to tell. Various people have put forward definitions of different kinds of stories, and the following descriptions are partly adapted from a book by T. Grainger.3

- **Folk tales** emerged from the need that communities have for sharing their wisdom and experience in a memorable manner. They are tales about the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, men and women, the old and the young, the brave and the cowardly. They are often humourous involving trickery or foolishness. They can also be serious tales of heartbreak and romance and include the trickster tales of Anansi (Africa/ America), Coyote (North America), Baba Yaga (Russia). Folk tales include:
  - **Urban Legends** – the most popular living oral tradition; humourous or grim tales that play upon the neurosis of modern life.
  - **Tall tales or lies** – extravagant stories which become increasingly nonsensical but highly entertaining – for example the exploits of Baron Munchausen.
  - **Noodle tales** – tales of exemplary fools, often there are whole villages of them, for example in Chelm, Gotham or Jutland.
  - **Fairy tales** open up the world of magic, of kings, queens, little people and the supernatural and includes many tales collected by historians, scholars and folklorists such as the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen.

- **Nursery tales** are specifically for very young children, and often have cumulative runs that become almost like verses or songs – they build on very strong repeated patterns, demonstrating language and causality for example ‘The House that Jack built’ or ‘The Gingerbread Man’.

- **Teaching tales** are from the religious traditions of the world and include Zen stories, Sufi stories, Saint’s tales, Jataka tales etc. They impart specific values, attitudes and ethics according to specific mythological and religious world-views.

- **Legends** are fantastical stories attributed to actual places or figures from history. They have a toehold in time and place and can range from local Fairy Legends and Ghost Tales to legends of kings and great heroes such as King Arthur, Robin Hood and Dr Faustus.

- **Myths** tend to refer to stories which explain the origins of natural and supernatural phenomena, human and superhuman characteristics. The dominant characters are deities, they may interact with humans, but the Gods are definitely the central focus of the tale. Examples include the Yoruba Orisha stories, Scandinavian Eddas and Norse Myths, most of the Greek stories and the Hindu myths.

- **Creation Myths** are immense stories, telling of how the world and the cosmos came to be, why humans were put into it and why they die. They have an often humourous set of little cousins, known as Aetiological or ‘How and why’ stories, which, in the form of fables and folk tales, explain the origins of things.

- **Fables** are often very short tales with few characters and a strong element of the fabulous. These are stories about humanised (anthropomorphic) animals and are often didactic in nature, imparting values, morals and ethics.

- **Epics and Sagas** are stories, which were composed as poetry. They are extended episodic narratives in which the lives of mortal heroes and heroines interact with the Gods and other world beings – for example Beowulf, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Old Testament and the Iliad.

- **Ballads** are closely related to tales of heroes and epics and are sung or chanted to recount heroic deeds.

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3 T. Grainger (1997); Traditional Storytelling in the Primary Classroom
Case Study 4: Handel House Museum

The Handel House Museum was home to the baroque composer George Frideric Handel from 1723 until his death in 1759. The Museum celebrates Handel's life and works, displaying portraits of Handel and his contemporaries in finely restored Georgian interiors and bringing live music back to his house.

‘That Handel actually lived and composed his music in this space gives the house an extraordinary resonance. Re-telling the opera stories that he himself would have thought through in such depth, searching for a musical language to convey the complexities of the narrative, not only brings the music to life but also recreates this important creative process.’

Jane Cockcroft, Handel House Museum

Amongst their interpretative approaches, the Museum’s Education Manager Jane Cockcroft currently uses storytelling to interpret opera for broad audiences. One of Handel’s great passions was opera, and amongst his operatic work, he wrote a series of operas called the Magic Operas, which have strong supernatural, mythical and magical themes. The museum’s storytelling is based around the narrative components of the operas and includes ‘musical illustrations’ with live music in order to provide a context which will bring the stories of the operas to life.

Jane Cockcroft believes that it is valuable to include elements at the very beginning of storytelling sessions which serve as a kind of pre-amble to stories, focusing on what stories are and the oral storytelling tradition. This way, learners will enter the storytelling session with the idea that they are part of a much bigger picture, of stories as connecting people through time, of the story that they are listening to and participating in as part of an ancient but living art form and tradition.

‘By bringing the story to life you are more likely to understand the emotional impact of the music. Because Handel’s music is incredibly emotionally direct it is very accessible, and you really register what the characters are feeling when you hear the music. A performance of the story gives the music that vital context while hopefully throwing light on the meaning and depth of the music for audiences new to opera.’

Jane Cockcroft, Handel House Museum
With an ever-increasing variety of storytellers to choose from, how do you find those who will suit you and your event? What distinguishes a professional storyteller? What are the different kinds of storytellers to choose from? Our consulted experts provided useful advice about what educators should consider when working with storytellers. They assert that whatever event you are planning, give yourself plenty of time; many popular storytellers are booked up months in advance.

Creating a brief for your storyteller

Having decided on a range of aspects relating to the objectives, timing, audience, environment and types of stories told during your storytelling event, you will have a pretty good idea of what you want your event to look like. In communicating with storytellers and finding somebody who fits your needs it will be useful to compile your thoughts into a short brief. However, this brief should recognise that storytellers are creative artists and as such, programme managers must be sensitive not to be too prescriptive or for example blind the storyteller with schools jargon or curriculum links.

‘…because it is an interpretive act, while you may have every respect for the skill of the storyteller, what you are doing is creating something together for the audience in order to meet the agreed learning aims of the event or session. This will involve a degree of compromise.’ Jane Cockcroft, Handel House Museum

The storyteller Katy Cawkwell thinks that:

'A short brief is a useful starting point – it makes it clear what the museum wants to achieve. It is useful for it to include:
• information about the collection / display that the programme should be linked to
• which audiences the museum hopes to attract
• other artists / museum staff working on the project
The following might be developed with the storyteller (for a big project) or outlined by the museum (for a one-off event):
• type of space available
• expected numbers
• timing
• mix of storyteller telling stories v’s more interactive work.'

It is always good if the storyteller can contribute to the development and has a chance to suggest what would work well, given their own experience and awareness of their strengths.

Use your responses on the planning sheet (at the back of this booklet) to form the basis for your brief. This brief can then be used to form the basis for your contract when you appoint your storyteller.
Standards in storytelling: Finding a good storyteller

In all art forms the skills of practitioners range from inspired, to competent, to poor. Ben Haggarty suggests that it is well understood that in, say, acting or poetry writing, a vast pyramid of talent supports the 10–15% of superlative artists. Professional storytelling is no different, but as it is currently a completely unregulated art form there really is a very great range of differing standards.

A storyteller can set his or herself up by simple self-declaration. In a locality where there is little competition they may find themselves rapidly in demand particularly as there is a ready and viable market in education. Unless their clients have seen other storytellers they may not have yardsticks by which to make comparisons.

A lack of knowledge about what constitutes best practice in professional storytelling, means that the field is also exposed to exploitation by opportunists – such as struggling writers, actors and children’s entertainers who, wanting to add a money earning string to their bow, attend a couple of workshops and then put themselves on the market.

The best way of finding a good storyteller is to become a consumer of storytelling. There is no substitute for seeing a storyteller interact with an audience. Failing that, ask for detailed references from previous clients. First and foremost, good professional storytellers can be distinguished by their skills. Skills and attributes to look for are:

- technical skills i.e. vocal and physical performance skills
- compositional skills
- a lively sense of poetry in their language
- adaptable and able to think quickly on their feet
- responsive to the myriad variables of audience, mood and space
- extensive repertoire.

‘Don’t be too prescriptive. Don’t say – we would like you to use props. Because actually that storyteller might not use props, but they might do amazing things, imaginatively, in other ways.’

Anna Salaman, ABL Cultural Consulting

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*Ben Haggarty (2004); Memories & Breath — Professional Storytelling in England & Wales*
Decide: What type of storyteller do you want?

Once you have defined the context for your storytelling event, choosing a type of storyteller should be easier. Storytellers often have their own specific profile; sometimes storytellers perform individually, or as a duo or a group. Sometimes they perform with music, sometimes without. When looking for a storyteller, first and foremost ensure that the storyteller actually is a storyteller and not somebody reading from books. Depending on the specific type of event you are planning, you may, choose between:

- **A costumed storyteller** with good historical knowledge. You may also need to consider if you want them to use ‘authentic’ language as this can make comprehension/involvement in the story more difficult for younger listeners.

- **An historical storyteller** who is well versed in the classics and has a good knowledge of the historical period and who may or may not want to be in costume. A number of high quality storytellers like to dress inconspicuously believing that their appearance should not take the audiences attention away from the story.

- **A performance storyteller** with a good knowledge of stories linked to your collection, and perhaps practical experience of working with the material.

- A storyteller who has **experience** of working with **family groups** and a repertoire of stories for ‘tinies’ who are often brought along to such events.

- **A local storyteller** or someone with a good knowledge of local stories or is able/willing to do the research or use your research as appropriate.

- **A storyteller of traditional tales.**

- **And / or someone who can organise workshops.**

Short-listing storytellers

The Directory of Storytellers is an excellent resource for contacting storytellers and is produced and updated annually by the Society for Storytelling (SfS). It is important to note that the SfS does not recommend these storytellers, as they will not have seen all the storytellers listed, and that they strongly advise you to ask for and take up references. However, you should be aware that there are also many excellent storytellers that are not SfS members:

- Use the quick reference section of the Directory of Storytellers and list those that meet your requirements.

- Use the county listing of the Directory of Storytellers to find storytellers who are local to you.

- Contact other museums that you know employ storytellers to ask for recommendations about who to contact.

- Visit storytelling festivals – they are good showcases.

‘Storytellers vary in the prices they charge for performances. Do not be tempted by someone offering a cheap price until you have checked their work for yourself, and/or followed up references.’

Maureen James, Storyteller
When you have short-listed a few storytellers that fit your draft brief:

• Contact the storytellers to discuss your requirements. They may be able to suggest more ideas or help modify what you planned to do. Ask for CVs, like you would for any other employee.

• Send your brief.

• Ask when they are performing and if possible check them out by attending their events.

Copyright:

The basic position under English law is that the copyright in a work is owned by the author of the work i.e. the person who created it. The only exception is where the author created the work in the course of his employment, in which case it will belong to his employer. If the storyteller is working as a freelance and work is commissioned by a museum, the copyright will not pass to the museum unless the storyteller assigns it in writing.

In order to avoid disputes over copyright ownership, it is better to agree in advance and record in writing who will own the copyright in a work.

Payment:

Expect to pay at least as much as you would for a supply teacher in a school.

• Ask what they charge and if this includes travelling expenses. Be prepared to pay a storyteller at least as much as you would for a supply teacher in a school.

• Does the fee include time for extra research? (e.g. stories to fit in with collections etc).

• Payment to correspond to a contract: include special requirements and timings.

• Payment to take place after the event.

Availability:

• Ask if they are available on the dates you want.

• Ask for references from previous employers for whom they have done similar work.

• You do not have to make a firm booking at this stage.

• If you have asked several storytellers to pencil in the same date whilst you check their references etc, and then decide to use someone else, be courteous and immediately tell the others the date does not need to be held anymore. They may be turning away other work.

Child protection:

Check that the storyteller:

• Has been Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checked.

• Has public liability insurance. A number of storytellers are members of Equity and are insured as part of their membership.

Your organisation:

• Should have a Safe Child Policy. The Society for Storytelling together with the Association of Festival Organisers (AFO) has produced a child protection policy framework that can be adapted by individual organisers.

‘Remember also that storytelling requires a lot of preparation before the event to ensure that the story or stories are internalised and that the storyteller knows the material well enough to communicate it to the audience – this will be reflected in the price.’ Maureen James, Storyteller
Case Study 5: Greenwich Heritage Centre

Greenwich Heritage Centre brings together the Borough Museum and Local History Library to offer a wealth of research opportunities as well as fascinating displays about the history of Greenwich.

‘Consulted teachers did not feel that it mattered that objects were not included in the session, nor that there was no time for the pupils to look around the Heritage Centre. They felt that the session was linked with the collections through the stories, and that objects were not needed on this occasion.’ From the evaluation report for ‘River Storytelling’

As part of the London Museums Hub’s Education Programme Delivery Plan 2004–2006 storyteller Pat Ryan worked closely with Frances Ward from the Greenwich Heritage Centre to develop a storytelling session called ‘River Storytelling’. The session was developed to help the museum cover Literacy and History, in particular local history, for Key Stage 2. The session included participatory storytelling of stories linked to Woolwich, Blackheath and Greenwich history; story building; riddles and brain-gym exercises, and was framed by questions about what stories are and what makes a good story. As a result of Frances Ward’s experience of working with Pat Ryan she has since used a number of the techniques that Pat demonstrated in a variety of the sessions that she delivers to both formal and informal education groups.

‘Both pupils and teachers reported that they had enjoyed the storytelling session enormously. Pupils were observed shrieking, laughing, jumping with surprise and excitement, taking part in role-play and making sound effects to the stories... Having had an enjoyable and encouraging experience with a professional storyteller and writer taking the ideas of pupils seriously, pupils’ motivation to engage with the written and spoken word during formal education and informally, may increase and have longer term positive effects.’ From the evaluation report for ‘River Storytelling’
Step 4: Preparing and supervising your storytelling event

Having considered the theoretical, professional and practical elements of your storytelling event and recruited a storyteller who fits your needs you now need to ensure that everything runs smoothly during the event and that people know about it. Having any artist, writer, poet or storyteller come into the museum is an expense and you want value for money.

Consider the following practical check-lists for communicating with your storyteller and ensuring a successful event (adapted from recommendations by Tina Bilbe, Society for Storytelling):

Confirm your booking with your chosen storyteller:

- Contact your storyteller to confirm that they are still available and willing to come.
- Send a contract. This should confirm in writing the date, time, place, copyright and fee.
- Include a map, a timetable and a copy of the agreed brief.
- Include any information about the site or collections that may be of use to the storyteller, including any website addresses.
- Let the storyteller know who, from the museum, will be present during the event.
- Let the storyteller know how you will be evaluating the event.

Planning your storytelling event:

- Make sure you have booked the venue that fits your chosen storyteller’s as well as your own requirements.
- How do you want to arrange the performance space? Will the storyteller bring drapes, a set (backdrop); will they require an amplifier or other technical equipment, a chair, table, water etc?
- Make sure the audience is able to sit comfortably during the event and that they can see the storyteller clearly. If you are holding a workshop, then ask your storyteller how the room should be set up.
- Ask your storyteller to provide you with publicity photographs and media information and provide them with copies of publicity and reviews for the event. For more thoughts about publicity see the next section, Promoting your storytelling event.
- Confirmations of booking are essential for both parties – some storytellers have a cancellation fee. If you have to cancel due to inclement weather will you re-schedule?

Final pre-event checks:

- Contact your storyteller to make sure that they received your contract, map, timetable etc. Check whether they will need lunch provided, and if so, ask if they have any special dietary requirements?
- Confirm arrangements for payment.
- Check travel arrangements and ask for their mobile phone number in case of delays on the day.
On the day of the event:

- Have a representative available to greet and escort the storyteller to the exact venue and to help unload and to orient them with the performance space, lighting, and electrical outlets.

- Before the event starts, make sure the storyteller knows where to find the toilets and staff room. Make sure they have everything they need e.g. a glass of water.

- Be ready to start promptly. A late start means that there will be less time for the storytelling.

- Ask if the storyteller would like you to introduce them. If they do, check how to pronounce their name. You will find that many storytellers are willing to introduce themselves.

- Do not leave the storyteller alone with young audiences as it is hard to tell a story and provide proper supervision. This also makes sure that you are complying with the Child Protection Act.

- Listen to the storyteller with your audience. This shows that you value the storyteller’s work.

- Avoid any interruptions during the storytelling as this can spoil the magic. Delay letting others into the audience until there is a break.

- Between performances, make sure the storyteller has somewhere to relax.

After the event:

- Give the storyteller constructive feedback – what went well, any concerns.

- Forward any visitor comments sent to you via evaluation forms or thank you letters.

- Make sure that payment is sent promptly.
Promoting your storytelling event

Your museum will use a number of regular methods for publicising events, such as handouts, posters, event programmes, newspapers and local radio. However, you could also consider promoting your event through a specialist storytelling outlet. Since the early 1990s, a number of high profile storytelling festivals have become established in the UK. There are now over a dozen storytelling clubs, which offer regular quality performance storytelling and have become a proving ground for aspiring storytellers. Museum, arts and heritage venue organisers can draw on the experience and expertise of people who have been promoting storytelling to a range of audiences.

The Society for Storytelling (SfS) gives free listings for storytelling events in their Storytelling Diary and updates this information quarterly in March, June, September and December. This is sent out to all SfS members and can be accessed on their website (www.sfs.org.uk). If you email the details of your event to their website manager, but are too late to get into the Diary, they can still circulate this information to a list of storytelling enthusiasts who request regular weekly updates. Many storytelling enthusiasts are willing to travel considerable distances to see their favourite storytellers.

Many people think of storytelling as an activity primarily for young children. However, if you want to attract adults you may have to think carefully about how you describe your event. The SfS recommend emphasising the title and the content of the event and suggest using evocative language which mirrors the style of the performance. Emphasise that this is storytelling; for example, a successful Storytelling Café leaflet invited people to: ‘Treat yourself to the luxury of listening.’

‘I believe that good storytelling immerses the listener fully and takes them on a journey into their imagination. It involves even, and especially, those lively children whose imagination is pronounced and who often have trouble sitting still to concentrate on the more mundane.’ Maureen James, Storyteller
Evaluating your storytelling event

Reflecting upon and evaluating your event or programme is extremely important. Evaluation is not simply an activity to consider at the end of the event or programme: for example, you may want to consult audiences at both front-end and formative stages of the development of your storytelling programme, capturing the ideas that audiences will bring to your events. It should be seen as a continuous process and an intrinsic part of the life of the project. It will allow you to learn about the impact of your event and help you to develop and promote future events more effectively. Evaluation can also provide important evidence to support future advocacy and fundraising campaigns. Evaluation does not have to be expensive or time consuming but it does involve planning from the outset of the project and a commitment to learning from feedback. Effective evaluation goes beyond number crunching (number of people attending, number of tickets sold) to look at impact and outcomes. Be creative in the development of evaluation methods, and seek advice from professional evaluators where needed.

The Renaissance funded programmes mentioned in this book were evaluated using generic learning outcomes from the Inspiring Learning for All framework (ILFA) developed for the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA). See www.inspiringlearning.gov.uk for a wealth of downloadable material including a ‘question bank’ linked to generic learning outcomes.

At the outset the museums set the learning outcomes they aimed to deliver through their storytelling programmes. Questionnaires and interview questions were then devised to capture whether these outcomes were realised. For instance, at the Livesey Museum, one of the aims of the ‘Myths and Legends’ storytelling programme was to increase participants’ listening skills. A combination of interviews, visitor observation and questionnaire results confirm that this occurred.

Excerpt from Livesey Evaluation Report

79% of parents who filled in the questionnaire suggested that they felt that speaking and listening skills had been encouraged to a ‘good extent’, and 16% felt that these skills had been encouraged to a ‘high extent’. One mother, whose child suffers from a hyperactive disorder, suggested that he had been captivated for the length of the telling, and had even asked that storyteller at the end of the session about aspects he didn’t understand. Other parents agreed that the storytelling strongly encourages concentration, and that the telling ‘draws the children in’ from the start.

Quotes from interviews:

‘It sinks in so much more – I think they’ll even remember what a myth or legend is’

‘It helps them concentrate’

‘They switch straight in because of the storyteller’

‘The different voices and expressions made me listen’

‘It’s an introduction to live performance and to sit still and listen’
This planning sheet is based on the step-by-step guide to organising a storytelling event. Please refer back to each section for full explanations.

**Step 2: What do you want to do at your storytelling event?**

Use Step 2 to create an accurate brief for your prospective storyteller which can be turned into a contract later.

**What are your specific objectives for your storytelling event?** (Tick as many boxes as needed)

- [ ] To give a ‘feel’ for a period in history
- [ ] To provide added value to education sessions
- [ ] To provide an entertaining performance for adults and/or older children
- [ ] To help the museum cover Literacy or History in the National Curriculum (NC)

The specific NC topics you want to cover are: ________________________________

______________________________

- [ ] Other: ________________________________

______________________________

**What are some of the Generic Learning Outcomes you are hoping to encourage amongst the audience?** E.g. what are your generic learning objectives?

**Knowledge and Understanding:** ________________________________

______________________________

**Skills:** ________________________________

______________________________

**Attitudes and Values:** ________________________________

______________________________

**Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity:** ________________________________

______________________________

**Activity and Progression:** ________________________________

______________________________
**How long will your event last?**
- One off
- Residency
- Drop-in
- Structured
- How many sessions will there be? ______________________
- How long do you want each session to last? ______________________ minutes

**Where will the event take place?**
- Indoors
- Outdoors
- Where on your site will the event take place? ____________

**Who will participate?** (Tick as many boxes as needed)
- School groups
- Family groups
- Individuals
- Other ______________________
- Special Educational Needs
- Which kind(s) of special educational needs? What % of whole audience group? ______________________

**Ages of participants**
- 0–5 years
- 5–7 years
- 8–11 years
- 12–13 years
- 14–16 years
- 16–18 years
- Adults

**How will the audience participate?**
- Formal
- Relaxed
- Large audiences
- Small workshop groups
- Other ______________________

**What sort of audience participation do you want?**
- Music
- Art
- Puppetry
- Story building
- Other ______________________

**How much audience participation do you want?**
- None
- A little
- Some
- A lot

**What kind of stories will be told?**
- Folk tales
- Urban Legends
- Tall tales or lies
- Noodle tales
- Fairy tales
- Nursery tales
- Teaching tales
- Legends
- Myths
- Creation Myths
- Fables
- Epics and Sagas
- Ballads
Step 3: Commissioning the right storyteller for your storytelling event

What type of storyteller do you want?

- A costumed storyteller
- An historical storyteller
- A performance storyteller
- A storyteller who has experience of working with family groups
- A local storyteller
- A storyteller of traditional tales
- Someone to organise workshops

Any other skills or experience you would like your storyteller to have? E.g. ability to play an instrument; recent CRB check; experience of working with children or adults with English as an additional language etc.

What stories would you like the storyteller to provide?

- Stories from an existing repertoire
- Stories created for this event

Who will own the copyright if stories are created for this event?

Step 4: Preparing and supervising your storytelling event

Planning the event

- Confirm equipment needed by storyteller: E.g. props, sets, amplifiers, sockets, chairs etc.
- To be supplied by storyteller
- To be supplied by you

- Send contract and all relevant information to storyteller
- Publicity photographs and media information received from storyteller
- Publicise event in local press, media and storytelling websites
- Develop an evaluation programme

The week before

- Confirm booking
- Confirm arrangements for payment
- Check travel arrangements and get mobile phone number

On the day

- Welcome and orientate storyteller

After the event

- Give the storyteller constructive feedback
- Forward visitor comments
- Ensure prompt payment
Contacts

Professional storytelling and affiliated organisations

There are a range of storytelling organisations and affiliated institutions that promote storytelling as a powerful educational tool.

Beyond the Border
www.beyondtheborder.com
Beyond the Border is Wales’ leading International Storytelling Festival and is dedicated to promoting understanding of the world’s pre-literature and oral traditions.

Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
www.clpe.co.uk
The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) is an educational centre for schools and teachers, parents, teaching assistants and other educators. CLPE has a national and international reputation for its work in the fields of language, literacy and assessment.

The Crick Crack Club
www.crickcrackclub.com
The Crick Crack Club organises and promotes storytelling events. The website includes lists of recommended storytellers and advice on how museums can use storytellers effectively.

The International Storytelling Centre
www.storytellingcenter.com
The International Storytelling Centre works to promote storytelling through advocacy, research and development and learning, primarily in the US.

Festival at the Edge
www.festivalattheedge.org
Festival at the Edge is an annual festival and holds events throughout the year in Shropshire to promote storytelling.

National Association for Literature Development
www.nald.org
National Association for Literature Development works with professional storytellers in Britain and is the professional body for all involved in developing writers, readers and literature audiences.

National Centre for Language & Literacy
www.ncll.org.uk
The National Centre for Language and Literacy are concerned with all aspects of language and literacy learning for schools.

The Poetry Library at the Royal Festival Hall
www.poetrylibrary.org.uk
The Poetry Library is the most comprehensive is accessible collection of poetry in Britain.

Scottish Storytelling Centre
www.scottishstorytellingcentre.co.uk
The Scottish Storytelling Centre aims to encourage and support the telling and sharing of stories across all ages and all sectors of society in particular those who, for reasons of poverty or disability, were excluded from artistic experiences.

The Society for Storytelling
www.sfs.org.uk
The Society for Storytelling aims to provide information and promotion on all forms of storytelling and a network for people interested in storytelling.
Storytellers
This is a very small selection of storytellers featured in this booklet, however there are many more storytellers who may also suit your needs.

Ben Haggarty
www.crickcrackclub.com
www.TheLCIS.org.uk
Ben Haggarty has a repertoire of over 350 folktales, fairytales and myths and works with adult audiences and families, in targeted community contexts and in all levels of education. He has extensive experience of site-specific work, devising residencies, workshops and performances for heritage sites, art galleries and museums.

Katy Cawkwell
www.katycawkwell.moonfruit.com
Katy Cawkwell works as a performance storyteller and story-based workshop leader. Her education projects include work for the Barbican, ENO Baylis, Hackney Round Chapel, Beyond the Border International Storytelling Festival and the Roundhouse.

Janet Dowling
www.janettellsstories.co.uk/Janettellsstories/contact.htm
Janet Dowling is a professional storyteller who specialises in telling stories to inspire, to create and to make a difference. She tells stories with an inspiring energy that come directly from her heart! Janet has an extensive repertoire of stories derived from studies of adult’s and children’s literature and classical myths and legends.

Maureen James
www.tellinghistory.com
Maureen James works in historical interpretation, using many techniques including living history; role-play; object handling; stories and practical activities in schools, museums and at heritage sites around the country.

Diana Olutunmogun
d.j.olutunmogun@btinternet.com
Diana Olutunmogun brings stories to life, interacting with her audience in a magical way with tales of myths and legends from around the world including trickster and Anansi tales. She has worked across London and at the Horniman Museum and Livesey Museum for Children as well as at many festivals.

Pat Ryan
www.telltale.dircon.co.uk
Pat Ryan tells folk tales, wonder tales, myths and legends, riddles, rhymes and proverbs from all around the world, many derived from the traditions of his family and home region in America, as well as from Ireland and Britain.

Yvonne Healy
www.storyteller.net/tellers/yhealy
Yvonne Healy is a featured teller for Detroit Institute of Art, Flint Institute of Art and Michigan Historical Museum in the USA. Healy tells stories from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean as a member of Michigan’s Touring Arts Program and the National Storytelling Network.
Organisations

Below are the organisations that were consulted during the research for this booklet and are featured within it.

ABL Cultural Consulting
31 St Martin’s Lane
London
WC2N 4ER
Tel: +44(0)20 7420 9700
www.ablconsulting.com

Discover
1 Bridge Terrace
Stratford
London
E15 4BG
Tel: +44(0)20 8536 5555
www.discover.org.uk

Greenwich Heritage Centre
Artillery Square
Royal Arsenal
Woolwich
London
SE18 4DX
Tel: +44(0)20 8854 2452
www.greenwich.gov.uk/Greenwich/LeisureCulture/HistoryAndHeritage/HeritageCentre

Handel House Museum
25 Brook Street
Mayfair
London
W1K 4HB
Tel: +44(0)20 7495 1685
www.handelhouse.org

Historic Royal Palaces
Apartment 25
Hampton Court Palace
Surrey
KT8 9AU
Tel: +44(0)870 751 5175
www.hrp.org.uk/webcode/home.asp

Livesey Museum for Children
682 Old Kent Road
London
SE15 1JF
Tel: +44(0)20 7635 5829
www.liveseymuseum.org.uk
www.Southwark.gov.uk

Theatre Museum
The Theatre Museum
1e Tavistock Street
London
WC2E 7PR
Tel: +44(0)20 7943 4700
www.theatremuseum.org.uk

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