

Boost Memory and Comprehension With Retelling Activities

SESSION S2

2:45 - 4:15 pm

Colleen Politano
jcpolitano@gmail.com

©C.Politano 2014

Aa	Bb	Cc	Aa
Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt
Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx Yy Zz
Mm	Nn	Oo	Pp
Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt
Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx Yy Zz

Doing an ABCDARIAN as a whole class activity is a great way to start a unit or introduce a book or topic. The words the students generate can become a word wall for a topic or theme. This idea also works as a great way to summarize a unit. Some teachers take a board and rule it off with tape or make an ABCDARIAN mat on a shower curtain liner.

Retelling Gloves

You can use painters gloves (\$ Store) or make construction paper gloves show students to help students focus on story elements to support retelling.

Thumb - Where?

Pointer Finger - When?

Middle Finger - Who?

Pointer Finger - What?

Pointer Finger - What else?



Handy Memory Booster
Children can use their
own hand to help them
organize retelling.

Thumb is the grabber.

Fingers are the points.

Pinky wraps it up.

Spaces between fingers

Retelling – Finger Countdown

One of the easiest ways to remember the most important features of a story is to use fingers to count off the main points. “Finger Countdown” works because with only ten fingers, you can focus on the main points of the story and not get distracted by details.

- After the story has been read or told, ask students to give the main points of the story.
- As each main point is recalled, hold up a finger (start with your thumb for the first point, add your second finger for the next point, and so on), to mark each part of the story.
- If students give responses out of sequence, ask them to hold the thought until you reach that part of the story.

Whenever students need to recall a sequence of events or a series of points, “Finger Countdown” is such a quick and effective strategy that it becomes the first step in most retelling activities.

Retelling: Auditory Ping-Pong

This retelling strategy gives students an auditory tool for memory, comprehension or recall of a story.

This strategy works well for auditory learners who recall best by talking and listening to others. It works like a ping-pong game because you go back and forth, back and forth like ping-pong.

- Read a story to the class.
- Do a “Finger Countdown”
- Group students in pairs and have them sit, “eyes to eyes, knees to knees.” One student is A, and the other B.
- Student A starts by telling the first main event of the story. Student B tells the next thing, and they go back and forth until the story is complete.
- If one student can’t recall the event the other student can give them hints or give them a lead to get started on the point. If one student gets stuck we tell our students to tell the point and keep the process going.

Retelling: Visual Scripting

Visual scripting gives students a visual tool for memory, comprehension or recall of a story. It works well for students who are strong visual learners.

I tell the children that actors use something called a “script”, which tells them what to say. Explain that they will be creating their own scripts that will help them remember the story. Their script can have words, pictures or pictures and words. I explain that this is a time to sketch out ideas quickly rather than do detailed art work.

To demonstrate the strategy:

- Read or tell a story to the class.
- Do a “Finger Countdown” to decide the main points of the story.

Group students in triads and give each group a large piece of paper (at least 11 x 17, larger if possible) and tell them to create a script that helps them recall the main points of the story. Tell students they have a time limit of ten minutes, so they do not have time for detail, only main points. Also assure them that their scripts are for their eyes only, so the perfectionist in the group does not have to worry about the final product.

- After ten minutes, instruct students to take turns retelling each part of the story using their script as a visual cue.

Retelling: 'Knots' on a Rope

This strategy is a kinesthetic tool for memory, comprehension or recall of a story. To demonstrate this strategy:

Read or tell a story to the class.

Do a "Finger Countdown".

Give each student a piece of cord about 1 yard or 1 meter long.

I like to use garden twine because it is cheap!

Ask students to retell the main parts of the story and for each main point students put a knot on their ropes.

Younger students or students with special needs can use beads, paper clips or clothes pegs in place of knots.

When the main points each have a knot (bead or clothes peg) in place, group the students into pairs or triads and have each group of children retell the main parts of the story using their ropes as kinesthetic clues.

Use "Knots on a Rope" to help children retell factual information such as the stages in the life cycle or a sequence of events. We use it for retelling our school day.

At the end of the day we go over our agenda and one person a day takes home the 'rope' with the job of retelling our day to their family.

A length of rope or a couple of long skipping ropes tied together make a great group activity. After reading a story, have students decide on the main points of the story. Lay the rope out and have a child pick up the rope and retell as they walk the rope.

Check out [Knots on a Counting Rope](#) by Bill Martin Jr.

Using Action Songs

As soon as we involve kinesthetic as well as visual and auditory processing we increase children's recall. Once we have acted out the poem, chant or song several times we choose one child to be the director and point to the words as we read. We also do some 'word work' such as looking for repeated words, looking for rhymes.

When Goldilocks Went to the House of the Bears

When Goldilocks went to the house of the bears

(Make curls, roof for house)

Oh, what did her blue eyes see? (Thumbs under eyes, fingers out)

A bowl that was huge, a bowl that was small, a bowl that was tiny

(Use hands to show sizes)

And that was all! (Hold hands out flat)

She counted them 1,2,3. (Raise fingers 1,2, 3)

When Goldilocks went to the house of the bears (Make curls, roof for house)

Oh, what did her blue eyes see? (Thumbs under eyes, fingers out)

A chair that was huge, a chair that was small, a chair that was tiny (Use hands to show sizes)

And that was all! (Hold hands out flat)

She counted them 1,2,3. (Raise fingers 1,2, 3)

When Goldilocks went to the house of the bears (Make curls, roof for house)

Oh, what did her blue eyes see? (Thumbs under eyes, fingers out)

A bed that was huge, a bed that was small, a bed that was tiny

(Use hands to show sizes)

And that was all! (Hold hands out flat)

She counted them 1,2,3. (Raise fingers 1,2, 3)

When Goldilocks woke up at the house of the bears (Make curls, stretch and yawn)

Oh, what did her blue eyes see? (Thumbs under eyes, fingers out)

A bear that was huge, a bear that was small, a bear that was tiny

(Use hands to show sizes)

They growled at her "GRRRRRRRR," "GRRRRRRRR," "grrrrrrrr."

She jumped up, ran down the stairs, out the door (run on the spot)

And never went in other peoples' houses unless she was invited!

(Shake finger)

Retelling Wave

The Retelling Wave is a quick and easy way to use oral language to review information. When students know they are going to be accountable for retelling they tend to be more focused. Try this:

Talk to students about the 'Wave' at sports events. Have students sit in a line or circle and do the wave.

Explain to students that they will be doing a Retelling wave. Each student will make one statement to retell information about a topic the class has been learning about.

Give students time to get their statement ready.

Ask students to keep the wave going by being ready to say their statement as soon as the person before them has finished.

Once students get good at the fact wave try a story wave with small groups. The first person tells the beginning, the middle people add details and main action and the final person wraps up with the ending. It is fun to do story wave once though then have students change places and repeat the process.

Retelling wave works very well with a small group or a whole class.

Try adapting for Reading Wave. Each student prepares a short sample from something they have been reading. We talk about making our reading match the writer's words then do a reading wave. This is also a quick way to have all students share personal writing.

What's In A Name?

A class project that gives students a reason to polish their speaking and presenting skills is to have all students find out and tell the class how they came to have their name. I send home a letter to the student's families.

I set up a schedule and we have 2 children a day tell the stories of how they came to have their name.

Dear Families,

Each of the children in our class will be telling the class how they got their name. Will your help your child by telling them the story of how they got their name. So that your child is comfortable speaking to the class please have them do a rehearsal or 2 for the family.

Supportive Retelling

Younger students, students with special needs and English language learners can be successful in doing retelling with support. Try this:

- Have students retell using the book. The student retells the story using the pictures.
- Partner the student with an older or more able child who can scaffold the retelling using phrases such as:
 - “At the beginning ...”
 - “Then ...”
 - “Next ...”
 - “In the end ...”
- Make reminder cards by copying selected illustrations from the selection. Copy the pictures on tag board and let the student use the picture cues.
- Have older students make storyboards to support retelling.
- Invite English language learners to retell in their native language. If possible, pair children who speak the same language so they can retell the story in their language before attempting to tell in English.
- Give students post it notes to mark significant points in the story. Encourage them to use these to aid in

Possibilities for English Language Learners

We have students who are learning to speak English in many of our classrooms. Retelling can be an excellent activity for these students because it provides opportunities to use language in a supportive, structured way. Some possibilities to help English language learners take part in retelling are:

- giving them opportunities to observe
- have them work with someone who speaks their language
- have them work in groups of 3 with 2 English speakers
- have them retell in their first language
- using simple texts such as ABC books
- give them the chance to use alternate forms of representation such as drawing or using pictures from the book.

Supporting the Less Verbal Child

Many of us have students who are very shy or nervous about speaking to others. Some possibilities for supporting the less (non) verbal students are to:

- Provide opportunities for preparation
- Try groups of 3
- Give time for rehearsal with peers
- Have students use the book as they retell
- Begin with other forms of representation

If the child is a selective mute I ask them to participate by being part of a group of 3. I talk with families and support staff about ways to make this activity work.

4 Corners Retelling

4 Corners is a great memory builder! We do 4 Corners Sharing or Presentations to review learning. When students know they will be presenting to their peers they have a more vested interest in remembering material. Students get 4 times as many turns to talk and build confidence presenting to a small audience. 4 Corners is a great way to wrap up a theme or unit, practice for a test and celebrate learning.

4 Corners Sharing is adapted from a routine called 4 Corners Poetry or 4 Corners Reading. I put poems we have read together on charts or overhead transparencies. I also give students their own copy of the poem for their poetry folder. My children find the poems easy to read because we have a bank of poems to choose from. I invite children to lead us in reading one of these poems or another poem they can read.

I tell the children that when they retell to others it is enjoyable and it is good for them because when we present we put extra effort into polishing our telling. I tell them that I have a way to make sure they get 4 x as many chances to talk! This strategy is also helpful for student who would be uncomfortable speaking to the whole class but can handle a small group. I draw a rectangle on the white board or overhead to represent our room. I use magnets or markers to show my students how we will have 4 people reading at once and that each person will have 4 or more listeners.

I ask the students to sign up for a retelling time, explaining that everyone will have a turn. I tell the students that if they are keen sign up right away, if they want to wait, sign up later. (I ask family members or our learning support teacher to give their students a little extra support so they will be successful.) I assign students to audience groups. We talk about the responsibilities of the audience and recall what good listening sounds like, looks like, and feels like.

Once the students have done their retelling the other children can give them specific compliments, comments or make connections. If time allows we can do a second round of presentations. The speakers stay where they are and the audience moves one group to the right.

Bonus: Try 4 Corners Show and Tell. The children take turns to be the leader and 'run show and tell. This is a great way to support oral language development and make the most of every minute.

All Inclusive Dramatic Retelling

Involving students in dramatizing a story is an excellent way to build memory because dramatization involves multiple intelligences. The kinesthetic nature of drama helps to reinforce memory. The challenge of doing repeated performances to give all students a turn can be solved by doing 'all inclusive' retelling. Read students a story once or twice, explain to students that they are going to act out the story but rather than having one person act as a character we will have a group of students play the part of each character. Tell students that as you re-read the story each group will act the characters part. (This activity is great because even your shyest child can take part. Safety in numbers.) Involve students in:

Making a list of characters

Choosing what group they would like to be in

Meeting to discuss their character's role

Practicing any refrains the characters may say

Dramatizing the story

Feedback

Oral or written retelling (optional)

My favorite book for this routine is Tacky, by Helen Lester, Houghton Mifflin. This book is an ideal length and has such great characters the children all want to take part so here is a way to make that happen:

Tell the children we are going to have a group of people act for each character. List the characters. Let the children choose their group.

Set up the "stage." Tacky and the other penguins front and center, hunters offstage. Use a desk, chart stand or cupboard for the ice. You may want to put the hunter's chant on a chart or sentence strips.

As you read the story each group acts their part. When you read "Goodly, Lovely, Angel, Neatly, and Perfect always marched 1-2-3-4" all the children in that group march 1-2-3-4. When you read "Tacky always marched 1-2-3, 4-2, 3-6-0, 2 ½, 0" all the 'Tackys' march Continue reading the whole book as each group acts out their parts.

Reflect, repeat, retell.

Retelling Homework

Name _____

My homework is to tell you about

Please listen then tell me:

Students tell a family member who replies with:

3 things you learned?

2 things you liked about how I did the retelling.

1 question you have.

Once a month I may send this form home with a request that someone in the family write the response. We find that children are more likely to do this homework if we build in a few minutes the next day to have partners talk about how it went.

Retelling Train

Retelling helps to move memory from short to long term memory. Once information is in our immediate memory it needs to be rehearsed or it will be lost. There are 2 forms of rehearsal: rote and elaborative.

- Rote rehearsal works for material that will be used in the same form as it is rehearsed. Capitals cities, math facts, names of places, and dates all can be rehearsed through rote rehearsal. When I went to 'Brain School' Eric Jensen had us work with partners with flash cards to learn the names of neurotransmitters.

We do a routine called Reading Train that can be adapted to help students rehearse material. Students line up in pairs, shoulder to shoulder with directions to take turns to practice a task.

I say, "All aboard the retelling train." Students on side 1 practice while students on side 2 listen until they hear, "Retelling train in the station." Students on side 2 give the students on side 1 feedback. Then the students on side 2 practice while the students on side 1 listen. The advantage is that all the students are together and I can see that they are focussed on the task.

- Elaborative relies on creating meaning. As students manipulate information and make connections information is transferred to long term memory.
- Skill learning requires practice to become proficient. We look at 24 times or 21 days to build a habit.

The 10 Step Guide

Laura Numeroff's 10 Step Guide To Living with Your Monster is a great book to use as a frame for retelling information. I read the book to students then we work together to write a guide to something of interest to the class. I remind students that our brain remembers 5 things + or - 2 so we write 3, 5, or 7 step guides. Some of the great class books that have been built on this pattern are:

A 7 Step Guide To Having A Great Year Together

A 5 Step Guide to Making _____ A Happy Teacher

A 5 Step Guide To Being Good At (Math, Reading, Drawing, Writing)

A 5 Step Guide To Having a Happy (put your holiday here.)

A 3 Step Guide To Everything You Need To Know About (put any topic here)

A 7 Step Guide To Being a Great (Dancer, Friend Soccer Player ...)

A 6 Step Guide To Being A Good Friend (Brother, Sister, Helper ...)

Colleen's 5 Step Guide To Using Retelling To Improve Learning

Step 1 Build in retelling power to make all routines more effective.

Step 2 Try a variety of retelling activities to meet the needs of all students.

Step 3 Set criteria with students, increase descriptive feedback and have students set goals to get results.

Step 4 Use retelling activities to build skills, improve behavior and quantity of students' writing.

Step 5 Enjoy the many ways the retelling will help all students.

Action Songs to Support Retelling

Princess Game

Actions use more pathways so stronger memories are formed. The melody of the song aids recall.

CHILDREN TAKE TURNS TO BE THE PRINCESS WHO STANDS IN THE CENTER OF THE CIRCLE,
WICKED FAIRY AND PRINCE WHO STAND OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE UNTIL THEIR TURN
CHILDREN MOVE IN A CIRCLE AROUND THE PRINCESS

There was a princess long ago, long ago, long ago,

There was a princess long ago, long ago.

CHILDREN RAISE THEIR ARMS TO MAKE THE TOWER
She lived in a big high tower, a big high tower, a big high tower.

She lived in a big high tower, big high tower.

FAIRY ENTERS CIRCLE WHILE ALL CHILDREN WAVE HANDS AS WANDS
A wicked fairy cast her spell, ...

CHILDREN HOLD THEIR HANDS BESIDE FACE TO SHOW SLEEPING

The princess slept for a hundred years, ...

CHILDREN HOLD ARMS UP TO MAKE THE FOREST

A great big forest grew all around, ...

PRINCE RIDES IN, CHILDREN TROT AROUND THE CIRCLE

A handsome prince came riding by, ...

PRINCE PRETENDS TO CUT FOREST, CHILDREN FALL GENTLY

He took his sword and chopped it down, ...

PRINCE REACES THE PRINCESSES' HAND TO HELP HER UP

He woke the princess from her sleep, ...

ALL STUDENTS STAND AND CLAP IN TIME TO THE SONG

So everybody's happy now, happy now, happy now,
So everybody's happy now, happy now!

