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*Sincerely,
Karen Haag*

Try a Retelling Center Year-Round

I told a story about Fred Rogers on closed-circuit television at school. Later that day, I came across several students trying to write a retelling of the story I had told. When I asked why, I got answers like, "I want to be able to tell the story when I get home," to "I thought it would be good practice for me to retell the story to improve my writing." I was floored.

One student showed me her retelling of the story and said that something was missing but she didn't know what. I thought it was fine, but she was not satisfied. I suggested she use my copy of the story to help her. I know that when I'm retelling a story, I have to REREAD the story several times. By watching her work out the details of retelling, I got to thinking about the role of retelling in my comprehension instruction.

I looked up retelling in *Reading With Meaning: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades*. Debbie Miller gives her students this advice: "Tell what's important... in a way that makes sense... without telling too much." I think that's good advice. Try it though and you find it easier said than done.

I was reminded of an adult writer who once told me, "When I really get down about my writing, I retell or copy someone else's story. Sometimes just feeling powerful words come off my pen makes me feel like I can write again."

Am I missing something obvious here? Should retelling be more prominent instruction in my classroom? Have I skipped children too fast into writing, forgetting the value of retelling and storytelling? Could retelling be an activity on which to focus year-round?

I'm thinking that when you don't have something to write, read! Then, try retelling it. Or, how about a center? All we have to do is change the books and put up a chart: "Tell what's important...in a way that makes sense...without telling too much." Debbie Miller

And what about nonfiction? I've never had kids retell sections of the social studies or science book before, but why not? How about using a different retelling structure for nonfiction? How about, tell what you learned... in a way that makes sense... with details that will interest others. We could retell nonfiction in partners or groups. We could retell nonfiction in our writing notebooks for homework.

That fifth grader who wasn't satisfied with her retelling really has me thinking about all the complexities. Retelling is just the beginning of synthesis - a very complex, metacognitive skill! First, the reader must read and understand the story. For the retelling, the teller must sift the important from the unimportant. Since the student can't tell the whole story, retelling requires summarizing some parts and then slowing down others. Retelling requires constant rereading and sequencing of facts. An audience either acts interested or does not, so observant tellers revise on the spot, which links to improvement in writing as well.

Retelling is a skill that's not too easy or too primary. Let me think on that.

Try Retelling Fred Rogers' Commencement Speech

Have you heard the story that came out of the Seattle Special Olympics? For the 100-yard-dash there were nine contestants, all of them so-called physically or mentally disabled. All nine of them assembled at the starting line and at the sound of the gun, they took off. But one little boy didn't get very far. He stumbled and fell and hurt his knee and began to cry.

The other eight children heard the boy crying. They slowed down, turned around and ran back to him -- every one of them ran back to him. One little girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed the boy and said, "This will make it better." The little boy got up, and he and the rest of the runners linked their arms together and joyfully walked to the finish line.

They all finished the race at the same time. And when they did, everyone in the stadium stood up and clapped and whistled and cheered for a long, long time. People who were there are still telling the story with obvious delight. And you know why?

Because deep down we know that what matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What really matters is helping others win, too, even if it means slowing down and changing our course now and then.

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Retelling Station

Can you **retell**
a story?



1. Partners choose a narrative picture book from the tub in the center.

2. Put the book between you and your partner. Read the book independently.

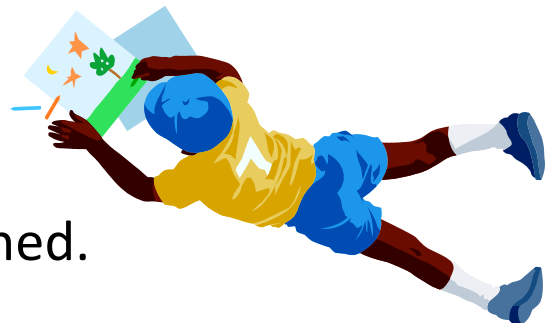
3. Retell the story to your partner.

4. As you retell the story, your partner scores you on the retelling assessment sheet.

5. Read the story again.

6. Your partner retells the story while you mark the sheet.

7. Answer the questions at the bottom of the sheet reflecting on what you learned.



RETELLING ASSESSMENT**Personal Reflection: Retelling Checklist**

Name _____ Date _____

Story _____

My Assessment: Yes Or No	Partner's: Yes or No	<i>Parts of the Retelling</i>
		<i>Opening</i> I began my retelling with an introduction.
		<i>Setting</i> I included where and when the story happened.
		<i>Characters</i> I told about the main character.
		I told about the supporting characters.
		<i>Problem</i> I told about the problem of the story.
		<i>Solution</i> I told how the problem was solved.
		I told how the story ended.
		<i>Author's Message</i> I shared my ideas about the author's purpose for writing the story.

The best part of my retelling was _____

Next time I retell, I need to remember _____

My audience was _____

Adapted from Linda Hoyt's Reflect, Revisit and Retell by Karen Haag