

From: Dr Eric Miller (PhD in Folklore)
Date: 20 January 2014

Notes Regarding
"Dance, Movement, Gesture, and Posture in Storytelling"

A Poster for Chennai Storytelling Festival 2014 is at www.storytellinginstitute.org/122.html .

The Workshop leaders in CSF 2014 would be working with numerous type of stories, including

- 1) Folklore Stories --
 - A) Animal Fables.
 - B) Fairy Tales (Western, Indian, and other).
 - C) Episodes of Epics.
- 2) Personal-Experience Stories (Autobiographical Stories) --
 - A) Participants' Life Stories.
 - B) Any situations on participants' minds.
- 3) Original Creative Stories --
 - A) Personal-experience Stories, with fantasy added (metaphors, exaggeration, etc).

Some Workshop leaders might also work with story elements, pieces, and fragments -- such as emotions.

Below are some of my notes on "Dance, Movement, Gesture, and Posture in Storytelling".

Many thanks to Dr Anita Ratnam and to Mrinalini Sekar, whose Movement/Dance-related Workshops I have attended recently in Chennai, and from whom I have learned some of these activities.

Some of this material might be relevant to the **Workshop in "Movement/Dance, and Storytelling and Healing"**, on Fri 7 Feb 2014 (in Chennai Storytelling Festival 2014, in the Goethe Institute auditorium).

Movement, Gesture, Posture, and Dance are very powerful tools for storytellers.

When we role-play character when telling stories -- just as we can use "Voice Modulation" to represent characters, we can also use "Body Language" to represent these characters.

Using "Body Language" to represent story characters brings us inside the character, into the experience, mentality, and emotions of these characters.

What are some ways a thing, being, or process can be embodied and expressed through Movement?

"Quality of Movement" is an important term here.

For example, in a workshop (or performance) one might enact the "Quality of Movement" of

A tree, swaying in the wind.
A jellyfish, moving through the ocean.
Any animal (in any environment or situation)
Any emotion.

The "Quality of Movement" of a thing, being, or process may be slow or fast, smooth or jerky, curved or straight, meandering or intentional, etc.
Movement can begin with breathing.

In western Contemporary Dance (known as "Modern Dance"), it has been taught since the 1920s that --

- 1) as one breathes in, the body naturally expands (straightens).
- 2) as one breathes out, the body naturally contracts (bends, twists, etc).

Through breathing -- and related rhythmical movement -- one can enter into (and come to experience and express) the quality of a thing, being, or process.

If one likes, in conjunction with one's breathing, one can make repetitive, pulsating movements (slow or fast, etc), to represent a thing, being, or process.

Storytellers skilled in the use of Movement tend to be able to effortlessly involve story listeners in the physical activities undertaken by story characters. That is, the listeners are encouraged to imitate the actions, and join the imaginative collaborative fun.

Storytellers can also have the listeners physically act-out characters in a sort of parade around the space.

In sum --

Storytelling is largely about bringing characters to life, so tellers and listeners can experience the emotions and thoughts of these characters. Using Movement, Gesture, Posture, and Dance are excellent ways to bring characters to life!

Breathe to Expand and Contract

Breathe in to expand (spine straightens; body becomes upright).

Breathe out to contract (spine curves; body bends and twists).

Torso Generates Momentum; Arms Express This Momentum

Move one's torso (bend forward and backward, twist from side to side, etc). Prevent, then permit, then exaggerate, one's arms (and hands) expressing the resulting momentum.

Smooth and Jerky Movements

Make smooth (and circular) movements. Then, make jerky (and irregular) movements.

Using a hand. A hand-and-arm. A leg. One's neck. One's entire body.

Mirroring (with a partner)

First one partner leads. Then the other one leads.

Using a hand. A hand-and-arm. A leg. One's neck. One's entire body.

The leading-partner could move in a rhythmical, repetitive manner (back-and-forth, circular, etc).

Statement and Response (with a partner)

Partner A makes a gesture signal/message to Partner B.

Partner B responds with another gesture signal/message.

Partner A responds back.

Place a Hand in One Formation, and Use It To Express Numerous Meanings

Place a hand in a particular formation.

For example: a flat palm, with fingers straight and together.

Keeping one's hand in this formation and move it (together with one's arm and the rest of one's body) to express as many different things as possible. Such as,

Commands: Come. Go. Stop (palm facing forward). Quiet down (palm facing downward).

"I don't know" (palm facing upward).

Waving.

Praying.

Using one's hand in a particular formation, play the previous activity (Statement and Response) with a partner.

Character Work

Participants consider characters from well-known stories.

How does this character walk, stand, move? What is the quality of his/her movement? (Slow or fast, smooth or jerky, intentional or meandering, etc.)

How do other characters in the story physically respond to the physical behaviour of this character?

Participants Alongside Each Other (Independently or in Teams) Mime Things and Processes

Participants could be asked to imitate/follow the workshop leader, to form parts of a train, trees swaying in the wind, leaves on a branch, raindrops falling, hairs on a person's head, a number of individual jellyfish swimming together, etc. Anything that might involve numerous component pieces -- each participant could act out a piece. This gives each participant an opportunity to interpret the thing/process for herself, alongside others who are also making such interpretations.

Miming Situations

Form groups (four or five people in each group).

Each group mimes a situation. The situation becomes a story, a skit. Individuals may move together to form still or moving tableaux of any kind, such as representing a building, etc.