

# From the author

*'A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.'*

Laozi

Chinese philosopher, 6th century BC

About twenty years ago, I joined a storytelling workshop led by Dr Geoff Fox, a fellow member of The Brown Paper Bag Theatre Company in Crediton, Devon, UK. The plan was for members of the cast to prepare well-known Robin Hood stories to tell students in Exeter schools on the day before we actually performed our play, *Robin Hood to the Rescue*, in the school grounds in the evening.

Although I had experience of theatre acting, this was to be my first attempt at classroom storytelling without a script. Geoff is an experienced storyteller and an excellent teacher, and in his workshop he had us all putting away the *printed* word and telling our stories in our *own* words.

What had seemed like a huge step was in fact a simple 'letting go'.

The stories sprang to life, and we quickly discovered that – each time one of us told our story – the way we told it became more and more our own. We didn't just find our own *words* to tell the story, we were telling the story using our imaginations, bodies, faces and voices – until the stories were no longer coming from the book but from our 'selves'.

I arrived at the first school, brimming with confidence.

But storytelling at that school was challenging for me. I had never met the students before, and the teacher had left them alone with me. I waited and waited for the teacher to arrive and introduce me, while the students became more and more over-excited. What was she thinking of? She still didn't turn up, so I threw myself into the storytelling – and just about managed to keep the attention of a classroom full of lively young people.

It was the first time I had told a story in a classroom, and it wasn't even with my own students. Those students had never had a storyteller come into their class before. No wonder the energy was high!

Looking back, Geoff is amazed that I went on to become a storyteller after that baptism of fire.

Following that experience, I ran an end-of-day workshop on storytelling for a couple of colleagues in the language school where I was joint Director of Studies, and began experimenting with classroom storytelling. What I saw initially as an add-on skill quickly developed into a core aspect of my teaching.

Teacher – and student – storytelling and drama are the most effective ways I know of students developing their listening and speaking skills, critical thinking skills and creativity.

In 2004 I reduced my classroom teaching hours, and have worked as a freelance storyteller on a part-time basis alongside my teaching ever since. I tell stories with adults, teenagers and children of all ages from three years up.

Many people I work with are learning English in the UK, where I live, or in other parts of the world. Many others are English speakers who want to learn about different cultures through their traditional stories.

I'm very fortunate to run storytelling workshops with teachers working around the world. In this way, I have become fascinated by intercultural storytelling, and have learned many stories by listening to them being told by students and teachers from everywhere. You will notice this as you discover the stories I have retold in this book.

Storytelling to celebrate diversity has also led me to learn about multi-sensory storytelling with people who have learning difficulties, with people who have sensory impairments and people with other kinds of physical or mental difference.

Rhythm, sound, movement and touch enhance the storytelling I do: not only for those with special needs, but for *everyone*. Storytelling engages the whole person – mind, body and emotions – and these are inseparable from language and communication.

Opening this book may be your first step, or perhaps your storytelling journey is already well under way ...



david@davidheathfield.co.uk  
www.davidheathfield.co.uk

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