

ARTS LEARNING ACTIVITY

Story Works' Glenda Bonin Presents *A Story to Tell: The Tailor and His Coat*

Long ago in Russia, there was a poor tailor who spent his life making fine garments for others. He seldom had the time or energy to make new clothes for himself. One day, he noticed his old coat had to be replaced because it was all worn out. He took a bolt of good fabric and made himself a brand new coat.

He wore that coat, and wore that coat, and wore that coat until - like the coat before it - it was all worn out. He liked the coat, so instead of throwing it away, he took it apart to make a jacket. He was able to wear that jacket even more than he had worn the coat. He wore it, and wore it and wore it until it was all worn out.



The tailor looked at the jacket and decided he could make something else with what was left. So, he took the jacket apart and made a fine vest. He wore that vest every day. He wore it, and wore it and wore it until it was all worn out.



When he examined the worn out vest, he saw that he could still make something from what was left. He took the vest apart and made a cap to keep his head warm. He liked the way he looked in that cap, so he wore it often. He wore it and wore it and wore it until, like everything he had made before, it was all worn out.



When he took the cap apart, he discovered he had just enough to make a bow tie. He never had a bow tie before - he considered them to be sort of silly. But when he put on that tie, he thought he looked handsome in it, so he wore it and wore it and wore it until it was all worn out.



He was about to throw the worn out tie away when he took a look at what was left. He saw he had enough to make a nice cloth button. He sewed that button on his trousers to hold his suspenders. The tailor wore that button, and wore it and wore it until it was all worn out.



As he turned the worn out button over in his hand, he was surprised to see he had enough left to make. . . .

(NOTE: Let the audience members guess, and then tell them the answer.)

A STORY!



The very story I just told to you, and a story I hope you like enough to share with someone else.

Story Background and Educational Connections

"The Tailor and His Coat" gives teachers opportunities to explore MATH, GEOGRAPHY, SOCIAL STUDIES, VISUAL ART, RECYCLING, SPEAKING and WRITING connections with students. It is one of the best stories I have found for K through 8 classroom use, since it can be easily adjusted to different levels of learning.

I first saw this story in a picture book at the library in the early 80s. Since then, I have encountered many different titles and variations of the tale. The origin of this story seems to be a Yiddish folksong first translated into English by Gene Bluestein. Nancy Schimmel adapted her story from this translation and details in her book, *Just Enough to Make a Story* (Sisters' Choice Books, third edition, 1992), how she developed her story from the song. Several years ago, I found the tale again under the title, "The Old Coat," in *Stories to Play With* by Hiroko Fujita (August House Publishers, 1999). I was enchanted with her suggested use of a prop in the telling of the tale.

After using Hiroko Fujita's instructions on how to make the prop, I discovered that the story and prop are ideal for teachers wishing to reinforce MATH concepts (sequential learning and fractions) in the classroom. ***To make the prop, simply draw the coat on one side of the paper and continue to fold the paper in half for each subsequent item (jacket, vest, hat, bow tie and button). The final section is, of course, left blank for "the story."***

By mentioning Russia as the setting for the story, students are primed to find out about GEOGRAPHY and SOCIAL STUDIES when that country is being studied in the classroom.



A connection to RECYCLING is easily introduced through this story about the tailor, and I have used this tale to encourage kids to make their own prop (VISUAL ART and MATH) starting with some other object (car, wedding dress, building, fur coat, etc.) to create a new story of their own. I am constantly amazed by the way students eagerly explore recycling possibilities from the material remaining after an object is no longer usable.

When I work in schools, "The Tailor and His Coat" is a great way to encourage public SPEAKING skills. It is impossible for youngsters to forget how the story progresses, since they can see the next smallest item on the back of the prop before showing it to the audience. This works for every age group, and is a useful tool for students who are reluctant to speak in front of a group. When using this prop, students tend to focus on the story, thereby making the experience positive.



Finally, when youngsters are encouraged to create a story from a different point of view using the "bones" of this tale, they must call upon their imaginations and use WRITING skills to record what they have created. This exercise provides students with the added benefit of using new vocabulary words as they record and share their stories.

Whether you are a teacher, librarian or storyteller, I believe you will enjoy working with the tailor story and this prop. From experience, I know how well the tale appeals to a wide age-range of listeners. I have found that older students do not embrace the use of constant repetition with the same enthusiasm as K through 4th graders. As a result, I simply change the repetitive pattern a bit when I present this story to students older than 11 years of age.

Helpful Links

Here are some interesting approaches and different versions of the tailor story I found on the Internet.

<http://www.foxtalesint.com/Stories/TheLongLeatherCoat>

http://www.healingstory.org/treasure/just_enough/just_enough.html

<http://haikufarm.blogspot.com/2010/01/in-which-i-share-story-gift-tailors.html>

Suggested Books

The following books will be helpful if you are interested in learning more about using this story in the classroom.

- Hiroko Fujita (Adapted & Edited by Fran Stallings). *Stories to Play With: Kids' Tales Told with Puppets, Paper, Toys, and Imagination*. ISBN 0-87483553-4. August House Publishers, Little Rock, AR, 1999.
- Margaret Read MacDonald. *Three Minute Tales: Stories From Around the World to Tell or Read When Time is Short*. ISBN 0-87483-728-6. August House Publishers, Little Rock, AR, 2004.
- Nancy Schimmel. *Just Enough to Make a Story*. ISBN 0-932164-03-X. Sisters' Choice Books and Recordings, Berkeley, CA, 1992.

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Glenda Bonin is a Teaching Artist on the Nevada Arts Council's Artist-in-Residence Roster.

Glenda Bonin
Story Works Group
1830 E. Broadway #124-233
Tucson, AZ 85719-5966
www.storyworksgroup.com



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