

Bringing Folktales to Life *Sharon Elswit*

Description: This is an interactive workshop demonstrating the relevance of Jewish folk stories for children, teens, and adults and showing how to interweave tales into programs and curriculum. Folktales are short, enduring, and advise the alienated. Strategies for coping and survival, for using cleverness and laughter to understand the world, show up in our heritage of tales from the past. Participants in this hands-on workshop will learn how to tell stories and creative ways to share and engage others in sharing them.

Sharon Elswit is the author of a series of bibliographic folklore guides, including *The Jewish Story Finder*, *East Asian Story Finder*, *Latin American Story Finder*, and forthcoming *Caribbean Story Finder*. She was a children's librarian for 35 years and currently runs literature enrichment programs in independent schools in New York City.

Why it matters - what stories that have lasted through generations have to offer us?

Wonder, comfort, teaching, laughter, argument, quiet reflection:

- Talk about relationships and struggles in a messy world – The Bride of Demons
- Characters: greed, weakness, and cruelty -The Wonderful Healing Leaves
- Alienated find ways to transform a situation – Never Afraid Again
- Even the schlemiels who try achieve competence -Two Tunes for Three Hundred Rubles
- Cleverness and twists of logic to escape – Innkeeper's Wise Daughter
- Personal identity and preservation of culture and celebration of resilience – Joel Ben Izzy, The Beggar King; Polish gentiles; H. C. Andersen

Where to find Jewish folktales in books and online? Try the resources listed below:

- *AJL Jewish Values Finder*, a database of Jewish books for children of all ages, searchable by title, author, subject and value:

http://jewishlibraries.org/content.php?page=Jewish_Values_Finder&bypassCookie=1

- *The Jewish Story Finder: A Guide to 668 Tales Listing Subjects and Sources* (McFarland, 2012) – Sharon Elswit
- For additional videos, databases, and podcasts, click on **Other Resources** and then **Resources for Jewish Folklore** at sharonelswit.com:
<https://www.sharonelswit.com/resources-2/resources-for-jewish-folklore/>

Which to choose? Stories you connect with; stories with a problem that matters to the people you are sharing the story with

Critical thinking activity: Compare story variants in small groups; consider Jewish tales from different countries and variants from other cultures

To read OR to tell? Consider illustrations, language appeal, and length : *Gershon's Monster* vs "The Water-Spirit;" *Og's Ark* vs. Og from *The Diamond Tree*; *Shrewd Todie*

Reading Aloud Tips:

- For all ages, PREREAD before sharing with a group for fluency as well as any content surprises.

Prereading activity:

- Show illustration or cover, if there is one, and ask children to post notes under these categories : *I See, I Think, I wonder*
- Pull object from story bag to introduce

Listening activity: Students raise arm when hearing something they can connect with their own experiences and understandings.

Follow-up activities:

- Make abstract collages with QR codes where each student explains the scene he/she has depicted in these secret pictures.
- Discuss what makes a hero in a folktale you like and apply qualities to biographical studies of real people.
- First-line video – improvisations
- Reader’s Theater
- Character stick puppets
- Create postcard to a character in the book or, for older students, one character writing to another.
- Write a newspaper article detailing an event in the story with a headline.
- **Kamishibai story card activity:** Divide story no one has heard into pieces on the back of large sheets of paper, which pairs of students then illustrate on the front side, knowing only their small part. Put the whole stack together and read to the class.

Telling:

Adapting stories:

Gender of characters – The Princess Who Wanted to See God

Endings – 2 Tunes for 300 Rubles

Shortening – I.B. Singer's The Golem

Adapting - Magic Spoon from Kimmel Jar of Fools collection is Stone Soup for Hanukkah

Activity: Telling in pairs with storyboard – not memorizing, own words

Websites for storytelling:

www.storynet.org

www.storyarts.org

www.storytellingarts.org

<http://www.timsheppard.co.uk/story/index.html>

<http://www.eldrbarry.net/roos/art.htm>

Books on Storytelling for Adults:

- *Storytelling: Process and Practice* by Norma J. Livo and Sandra A. Reitz. Libraries Unlimited, 1986. Nuts-and-bolts advice on storytelling. (See also *Storytelling Activities* by the same authors.)
- *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book* by Margaret Read MacDonald. August House, 1993. A how-to book for beginners.

- *The Storytelling Classroom: Applications Across the Curriculum* by Sherry Norfolk, Jane Stenson, and Diane Williams. Libraries Unlimited, 2006. Lesson plans and inspiration for K-8 teachers, librarians and storytellers.