

COURAGEOUS STORYTELLING: Inspired by The Snow Queen

*"The Way you express yourself is the way you experience things."
Tomas Transtromer, Nobel Poet Laureate*

A six part storytelling project in the Hans Christian Anderson School*, NY
Facilitated by Laura Simms. Supported by the Hans Christian Andersen Storytelling
Center with a grant from The Traveler's Foundation

*"That story by the way was the best story of my life!"
Angel Gadsen, Grade 4*

ABOUT THE PROJECT A six session storytelling project in the Hans Christian Anderson school with 24 fourth graders facilitated by storyteller Laura Simms. The story of The Snow Queen was told over five sessions. In each session, young people learned about storytelling, story listening, story making and their inherent courage. They explored storied image drenched ways of expressing the richness of their own lives. Their conversations practiced skills of good storytellers as they created personal heroic journeys. With the help of animal helpers, each child (the hero or heroine of their own story) overcame obstacles to return home with new courage and inspiration.

ABOUT THE STORY **The Snow Queen** was originally published in seven parts in December 1845. ** It is the longest and most complicated of Andersen's stories. The entire tale, a heroic epic, introduces children (and adults) to the consequences of evil and greed in the world and the antidote of friendship and bravery to overcome its' devastating power. The tale is a journey of a girl motivated by love and deepest friendship to courageously find and liberate her friend whose heart has been frozen. Her companions along the way are those moved by her bravery and sincerity, animals who know what we humans cannot know, and wise women. The story begins before the journey, giving us context for the existence of harmful perception and intention. The story ends with a friendship transformed into enduring love. Like every fairytale we the listeners are taken from the world we know, on a voyage into other realms, and safely back again, transformed. The story also travels from the city of Copenhagen in Denmark north through Lappland and Finland into an icy realm beyond our world.

*The school was originally named in honor of Hans Christian Andersen, although NYC misspelled it "Anderson", the school has since changed its name, to PS 242 – The Young Diplomats Magnet Academy, but remains housed in the "Hans Christian Andersen Complex"

*ANDERSEN, HANS CHRISTIAN *THE COMPLETE FAIRY TALES & STORIES*
Translated by Erik. C. Haugaard, Doubleday Books, New York 1974 pp.234-262

ABOUT HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

A short summary of Hans Christian Andersen's life story was of interest to the class. They had never heard of him. They did not realize that their school was named after a famous author who wrote many of the stories they were familiar with from Disney movies. When I explained how Andersen had a hard time in school, and became a famous writer, they were fascinated. They loved that he, like the children in the tale, and many of them born in other countries, heard stories from his grandmother.

ABOUT STORYTELLING:

Storytelling is unique in our world today. The oral performance of a story is a reciprocal event that takes place in the present between listeners and a teller of tales. What makes storytelling so potent is the way that each listener responds to the story as it is being told. Each person imagines the story in a unique and vivid way. Each listener literally becomes the story they are hearing; they are making an internal journey that prepares them for the outer journey we make in our lives. The journey took each listener from a place where things are safe and beautiful in childhood, through great obstacles, to success and love as adults.

The best way to generate future storytellers, communicators, empathetic and courageous young people is to immerse them in listening, imagining, giving voice to meaningful thoughts and feelings, sharing wakeful silences and engaging in creative conversation. The school day is packed with activities that leave little time for reflection or expression from the heart. Rushing through learning often leaves young people parched internally. Pieces of their personal stories that need healing or transformation become buried. It can be the cause for distress, behavioral problems or apathy. Deep Involvement in great stories, followed by exploring images and sharing personal narratives is an antidote. It allows youth to access innate resources of intelligence and resilience. The natural intelligence that awakens in young people exposed to storytelling produces the capacity to focus, to absorb what is being taught, to make meaning in relationship to one's life, and stokes up the fires of zeal to know more. Ultimately storytelling, whether youth are truly hearing a story or creating and telling their own tales, is an act of refreshment and inspiration. It creates the climate for the courage to live one's life without shame or hesitation.

**DETAILED REPORT OF THE COURAGEOUS STORY
OF THE SNOW QUEEN**

Written by Laura Simms
With the help of Sandra Silveira

*"I love the magical story of the Snow Queen. Every time you tell me a story I get so attracted to it, I actually feel like I am in it.
Fatoumata Diallo*

Throughout the sessions children participated by retelling pieces of the story after they heard it; as well as their own stories reflected by the actions unfolding in the tale they were hearing. The following report outlines the activities of each session and culminates with the benefits of the project:

*"Thank you for telling us an interesting story. I hope I see you next year.
And thank you for giving us tips to be a great storyteller.
Now I know I can be who ever I want to be."
Naminata Senserly*

PREPARATION:

Preparation for the project included: correspondence with one of the two teachers in the classroom; and study of the tale of the Snow Queen preparing a written document of sections edited for the classroom. The teacher appreciated having a storyteller visit her students. Given the reality of the length of classes, complicated schedules and a winter of snowstorms, it took months to make the arrangement. I began in January 2105 and finished in early March. I sent initial ideas to the teacher. She was pleased with the initial plan for four sessions. In the end, I added two extra sessions. Sandra Bettencourt, a graduate student in Education from Antioch University, accompanied me to document the process. Sandra attended four of the six visits.

I divided the tale into five sections so that we could listen to a part each visit. The slowing down of involvement increases inquisitiveness and longing; as well as allowing students to become aware of the elements of a story that makes it worth hearing. That is how one becomes a good storyteller.

"I live in the city and have a fire escape. I felt like the story happened out my own window."

"My grandmother told me stories in Puerto Rico. But that grandmother should have told Kai not to follow the Snow Queen."

THE SIX SESSIONS

*"When we come to the end of the Story we shall know more than we do now." HCA **

DAY ONE: A Circle for Introductions-

- a. We went around from student to student in order to hear everyone's name and something about where they were born.
- b. I introduced the idea of 'weather reports.' The children each described how they felt that day, as if they were the weather itself: from a rainy day, to sunshine, to foggy skies or a storm is brewing, they began the practice of expressing feelings in a group that were personal and did not cause them to expose their mood. It was generating trust and care.
- c. I discussed what we were going to do and something about HCA and the story of the Snow Queen.

The Telling of the first two parts of the story:

... starting with the description of the evil mirror loved by a wicked Troll. The breaking of the mirror occurred because of the bullying of young trolls who tried to carry it up to Heaven and cause angels to see evil instead of good. I continued to the part of the story where the boy Kai attached himself to the sled of the Snow Queen and was taken far away. As I described the two children's friendship, and their love for each other; playing on a small porch outside of windows all summer and fall and spring, I asked if they had best friends. A small flurry of responses interrupted the

narrative as everyone talked about friends. They relaxed recognizing that their associations and personal memory were to be part of the story.

When two of the splinters from the Trolls' mirror entered into the heart and eye of the boy Kai, you could have heard a pin drop. Someone, with head down, feeling the inevitable called out, "Oh No." The splinters began to freeze his heart. It made him see and say terrible things even to his best friend Gerda.

The Kids personally related to the story. We had a short conversation about bullying; about losing one's sense of care for others.

STORYTELLING ACTIVITIES:

*I have a fire escape. I sit with my mother in the summertime.
It's easy for me to imagine where they sat." Alicia*

POSING QUESTIONS THAT MATTER As a way of instigating trusted participation I asked 4 QUESTIONS that would encourage giving voice to their own stories.

QUESTION 1 - ___If you could say anything to any of the characters, what would you say?

Naminata: I would tell Kai that no matter how much in danger you are, never forget your friends and who you grew up with.

Lusfreidy: I would tell Gerda, "keep on trying to find Kai"

Tayla: Kai, you better wake up soon!

Alicia: I would tell the Queen to be nice and let Kai out of the palace.

Giana: Kai should had never attached his sleigh to the Queen's.

Anthony: Gerda, try your best to find him.

Dennis: Gerda, don't give up hope.

Angel: Kai should never call someone ugly.

Cheick: Don't touch baby trolls!

Dreyvon: Kai, never talk to strangers.

Jalynn: To Gerda, I say that sometimes things change people when they touch what they are not supposed to.

Fatoumata: Gerda, don't give up!

Khalil: To the Queen - she shouldn't touch other people or take what's not hers.

Bryce: Gerda, Kai is always in your heart.

Darryl: I would tell the Queen to be good.

Setto: I would tell the Queen to let Kai go back to his family.

Kaiden: Gerda, you will get to your friend.

Other comments: " I would talk to the Queen about how it feels to hurt someone"; " I would tell Kai not to stare at the window deeply"; "If Kai didn't stare at the window his heart would not be frozen, he wouldn't have hurt Gerda, he wouldn't be with snow Queen now".

Question 2 - What image from the story was strongest for you?

Kaiden: When Kai looked into the Queen's eyes and fell asleep.

Setto: Kai looking out the window.

Darryl: The Queen looking into Kai's eyes from out the window.

Bryce: When Kai attached his sleigh to the Queen's sleigh.

Khalil: When Kai looked into the Queen's eyes on the sleigh.

Fatoumata: Kai says Gerda looks like a frog after the glass entered his eye.

Jalynn: When Gerda throws her red shoes into the river.

Dreyvon: Kai looking out the window.

Cheick: Kai looking out the window, deeply.

Angel: When Kai hooked his sleigh to the Queen's.

Anthony: The Little trolls stealing the mirror.

Dennis: Kai attaching his sleigh and riding fast.

Setto: ... the winter...

Giana: Grandma telling the story in the house.

Alicia: When the glass enters Kai's eye.

Tayla: Kai saw the Queen out the window.

Lusfreidy: I saw the Queen coming down from the sky in a sleigh.

Naminata: I saw everything. The Queen was out the window.

Question 3 - What are your possible predictions for the story?

- Gerda will reach the Queen's castle.
- Gerda will be in the castle and ask the Queen to take her instead of Kai.
- It will be hard for Gerda to find Kai going down the river.
- Gerda will ask the Queen to give back her friend.
- She might not find him again.
- The Queen might become nice and unfreeze.
- Gerda will find them and talk to the Queen about using her powers.

Question 4 – Did the story remind you of anything?

- When I was out sleighing with my dad.
- When I was in Florida, it was snowing, I saw roses.
- When I was on a sleigh going down fast.
- Where I live there's a football court ..
- Me and my brother.
- When my grandmother told me a story.

Storytelling Intention - To be focused into a great story is to have feelings for the characters and situations; to connect with one's own emotions privately. Each individual responded with individual associations, and with diverse imagined landscapes from their own experience. This process of participatory listening is the first step in building a good storyteller. It creates a 'lived' template for actively modeling a respectful and dignified sense of oneself. They become all the characters, good and bad, internally experiencing the causes of consequences of actions without being blamed or lectured.

It was obvious from classroom activities that I witnessed by coming earlier that they were being taught to listen to content only, when reading. Their task was to make evaluations, to answer specific questions and focus on lessons. During the listening, there was time for making personal connection to the story, and have deeper reflections. The second teacher remarked after the first day that he loved their being allowed to imagine, feel and find personal relevance in the story being heard. "We don't have time for that," he pointed out.

Laura's Notes - I left them wanting to know what was going to happen next, feeling their own feelings about bullying and injustice, and the importance of deep bonds of friendship.

DAY TWO: WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?:

Because of winter storms, the class was postponed for several days.. When I walked into a classroom we were happy to see one another. One boy ran up to me and said, "I have been drawing pictures of the Snow Queen at home at night." They immediately wanted to dive back into the story.. They wanted to know what happened to Kai and to Gerda. Their teacher said they talked about every day.

CIRCLE :

We went around the circle again, sharing a second weather report. My arrival interrupted a lesson on Natural Disasters. During the weather report many children seemed tired. Finally I asked if they were touched by the lesson; fearful of sudden disasters. At first, no one said a word or moved. Then, a boy remarked that it made him afraid. I left space for this reflection in the aftermath of their lesson. They had been answering questions about the difference between tornado and earthquakes, but no one asked about the internal feelings or possible past experiences of sudden change. Many of them were from families that had fled from war or natural disasters.

THE STORY CONTINUED:

The story began where Kai was taken by the Snow Queen; his sitting on the feet of the Snow Queen in her sled as his heart was grew colder. Then, how Gerda set out to find him. She climbed in a boat that carried her to an old woman's garden in the summer away from spring,. She was a kind of good witch who was not really evil, but lonely. The tale tells how Gerda forgot her journey, tricked by the comfort of the old woman, until she saw a blooming rose that reminded her of her own heart and Kai. Her conversation with flowers and help from a bird ended our session.

CHOOSING A MAGIC ANIMAL -

I asked each child to choose an animal that had a magic power. As we went around the room repeating the names of the animals, deciding what the animal was able to do, it was as if I could see the children forming the animal in their visualizing mind. The name of the animal repeated took on feeling and shape. **Words were embodied by imagination and feeling. Their hands moved in natural gesture to bring the creature to life.** Our last animal naming was a child saying their animal and everyone repeating the name of the animal as it was stated by the one who owned this creature and its power. (3)

Laura's notes - In order to be a good storyteller, words have to arise naturally, not from recitation of memorized text, but a living out of the events, the landscape, the characters. Voice and emotion and timing arise from embodied engagement, and not from memorization. Our story of the

Snow Queen was outwardly about a courageous girl, driven by love for a friend, to go way out of her familiar world to not only find him, but open his heart again. She had faith in his inherent goodness, regardless of what had taken place. Our process of engagement in the classroom was an inner replica of the journey. We were reinvigorating our imaginations and expressiveness. This process is a mirror of opening the heart and rebuilding a bridge in disrepair that reconnects children to their own self respect capacity to listen to each other, and flexibility of mind.

SANDRA'S NOTES:

■ **How do you feel today?**

Annoyed (3 students); Bored (3 students); Tired (3 students); Happy (7 students); a bit upset (1 student); Sleepy (1 student).

■ **What do we know about Gerda?**

- That she is a brave caring girl;
- That she will find her friend;
- That she never give up;
- That she loved her friend;
- That she didn't care what he said about her . She knew he didn't mean it.

After telling the Story, parts II and III:

■ **What animals helped Gerda? Choose one animal that you could be.**

■ **Think about your animal. Can you look at your animal? If it had a magic power, what would it be?**

Naminata – White Bird – Speed Reading
Fatoumata – White Horse – can tell stories from the past into the future
Jalynn – Fox - Camouflage
Kaiden – Cheetah – Running Invisibly
Anthony – Black Horse - Fly
Darryl – Wood pecker – pick wood very fast
Bryce – White Horse – X Ray Vision
Khalil – Falcon, the faster bird in the world – Super Speed
Giana – Blue Bird - Shrink
Angel – Bobcat – Can disappear
Cheick – Cheetah - Invisibility
Dennis – Snake - indestructible
Jamileth - White Owl – Hear from far away
Tayla – Eagle – Can talk

Alicia – Lion – Talk and roar, speed
Lusfreidy – Snow Bear – Laser Eyes

■ **What was the difference between listening to the story and watching a movie?**

- Angel: "It felt that I was dosing off, but I knew all that was going on.
- It was relaxing."
- Fatoumata: "The sounds were scary"
- "I thought I was somewhere else in a different place and time".

DAY III. PART THREE:

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES WITH OBSTACLES AND INCREASED COURAGE:

The third class was extremely difficult. Not only had there been another snow storm postponing the continuity of our work, but I witnessed something distressing. I came upon them in the auditorium having a dance class. The young dance teacher was criticizing them and demanding their attention. As she told them how awful they were, they shut down. They seemed frozen. I left the room. I met them again in the hallway walking in stifled quiet back to their room. One of the teachers stopped them at the door. He said, "You didn't like that class did you?" I saw their shoulders relax. They were obviously thrilled that they might have a chance to respond to what was definitely a "bullying" incident provoked by an inexperienced dance teacher. They called out, "We didn't like it." The teacher stiffening said, loudly "I did. I thought she was great." The kids were rushed to their seats, each time a child raised his or her hand to speak, the teacher silenced them with a lecture about how they should listen to him. Fifteen minutes of my session was used for a lecture.

The kids were tired, and hurt. Instead of racing into the story and the activity I planned, I had them doing physical storytelling activities trying to use their energy. Then I engaged them in the personal storytelling technique of "council" using a talking stick. They sat in a circle. They were reluctant to express how they felt at first. I am sure they were fearful of speaking out. But each person took the talking object and said something that seemed to bring us back into some sense of relaxation and attention. By the end, they seemed returned to their ability to focus and enjoy what we were doing.

I encouraged the teacher to sit in the circle. He said he was upset because they had not obeyed him. I reminded him gently that in a council one does not speak about others, only about oneself. He slowly adjusted. He also came back to a sense of relaxation. He said "I am a cloudy day." I was impressed with the great compassion of the children. They nodded empathetically and looked at him kindly. Then we entered the story.

THE STORY CONTINUED:

I then told about Gerda escaping the autumn garden of forgetting and arriving at a castle before winter. She expected to find Kai, but instead was in palace. She was given a carriage and horses with beautiful clothing so she could continue her quest. It only occurred to me later that this section was in some way like their own experience. Someone offered her what they thought was the best way to travel in a conspicuous adorned carriage. In that carriage *"that shone like a jewel in the forest"* she was attacked by a band of robbers. The attack was brutal. They listened, a bit like wilted flowers being watered. I did not want to leave them with the attack and quickly moved to the part of the story where the robber girl took pity on Gerda (her heart was moved by the girls' story). The robber girl planned to let her tied up reindeer carry Gerda north to where the birds had explained she could find Kai.

Laura's notes: There was little time to move into anything significant because of the situation in their classroom. I had them repeat their power animals and its power. We talked a bit about what difficult situation they were in in their personal stories, they were developing, in order to give context to the story they would create. (4)

Sandra's Notes:

"As you started to tell another part of the story I could feel that the children were anxious and as if in desperate need for that magic moment of being transported to that magic place where all is safe. One of the deep and highest moments seemed to me that was when you said something like "***There are things that we each have to do alone...***" The look in the children's eyes was of something between relief and disappointment...priceless."

Question #1 - If you were in trouble and you could call up your spirit animal...

Choose a landscape, where would you be?

Mountain, snow, haunted house, forest, river, at the bank (Setto), outer space, North Pole, African Savannah, North India (Naminata), at the zoo, Paris, Atlanta, Greece, London, in a desert in Jamaica, in a bush.

Question #2 - Imagine that there was one boy and a girl and they were in a certain place. What was the trouble?

- Naminata - She lost her cat.
- Angel - They were looking for his parents and they were lost.
- In London, undercover, he was looking for a Ruby that his uncle lost. Security caught him on camera.
- A boy lost his beloved dog when he entered a forest in Greece.
- A girl and her family went on a trip to Jamaica and she got lost.

Question #3 - Join a partner, imagine and tell your story to each other.

Choosing a partner, each child told their partner about their animal and its power, where they lived, and the problem that took place.

Question #4 - Use your spirit animal to help you. How can this power help in that difficulty?

- Angel - The boy can call the bobcat's power of running fast and find his parents.
- Outer space in Mars the boy can't breathe so his animal's power can give him the possibility to breathe again.

Question #5 - How do you call your animal?

- With an app (but under water that wouldn't be possible it seems)
- Anthony - call his name 3 times
- Alicia – I'm in the woods and a bear attacked so I would whistle and call the eagle
- I would wear a blue necklace and say the magic words that opens a special portal and then the horse could mimic

Question #6 - Write where you were, the setting, your issue or problem, until the magic power appeared. (Think of Gerda - how did the reindeer help her?)

Storyteller's intention - I was trying to have them create a story piece by piece of their own to tell and share where they had imaginary and powerful help. Each time a child works with this imagined element, they gain an indirect way to express their own innate integrity and power. Working with partners helps to take words out of our own mind to share with others. That is one of the basic foundations for storytelling.

DAY FOUR: AN EXTRA SESSION -

Storms caused endless postponements. So I decided to just come in and try to jump start their own stories. I brought a beautiful cloth from India, and a bag of cultural animal amulets to stimulate their creative thoughts about how they could wear or carry power objects to remind them of their animals presence. It was also an offering of something beautiful that could inspire positive images.

As we waited for several of the kids to come back from gym when I did arrive, I sat with a small group of girls. I asked them what it was like to listen to a story:

*"It was different. I was not listening. I was the story," said Naminata
"I saw it all like it was happening." Fatoumata*

When all were together I attempted to do an exercise with them that was preparation for storytelling: a mirror activity. But they were restless. I felt it was not helpful to ignore their state by demanding attention. So instead I asked if they would just like to hear another part of the tale. They agreed and quickly settled onto the rug in the middle of the room.

CIRCLE:

We went around in the circle to talk about what they would make their animal objects out of. It was not an easy circle, not because of interest, but because several of the boys were distracted and emotional. I asked what had happened. One of the boys had been attacked in the lunchroom. There was a lot of concern. Everyone had seen it. One boy broke down and started crying. The teacher took him out. We all continued, but this event touched everyone. It was like having a wound in the room.

I showed them the amulets. They loved seeing the objects. We passed some of them around carefully.

THE STORY CONTINUES:

I told another piece of the story after complimenting them on their amulet choice. The piece of the story I told was the encounter with The Robber Girl. The help of birds who said they knew where Kai was; and the reindeer who had been tied up now freed who could take her to find him up North; and the transformation of the Robber Girl who had feelings for Gerda. The robber girl decided to help her, rather than harm her. Listening brought solace back to the group.

Then I told the story of the part of the tale - the journey on the back of the reindeer; trying to use description to offer more detailed imagery for their minds. I left them with the visits to the old woman in Lapland, and the magic woman in Finland and her gift to Gerda. *"A greater power to help her and protect her from danger."*

Storyteller intention - By having them retell a piece of the tale, they were practicing the storytelling itself. I think it was then that I decided not to create a

demand that they become storytellers having a full story, but rather kids deeply engaged in creativity and personal response and communication.

DAY FIVE

CIRCLE:

We went around and each child talked about having had a week off – a holiday from school. They each seemed to have had some time rest and restore themselves.

THE STORY

Finishing the Story - I told the rest of the SNOW QUEEN story. They spent time reviewing their story particulars in pairs. I expected to return in two days to engage in the storytelling where they would put the story they were creating together. However, the class was postponed again. Again, for two weeks.

I prepared a document that had questions which each child could answer that might make more simple the completion of the story so we could work on storytelling techniques.

DAY SIX our last session

DRAWING

We placed markers and paper on each desk so they could create pictures for their stories. However, children dwindled back in slowly from another class and we spent at least fifteen minutes of our time talking about what they might draw.

I saw the forms on the kids desks. Some had filled out parts, most not.

I gathered them in a circle on the floor and spent the last half hour with three of the kid, with the input of everyone, completing their stories. By example we were exploring what was needed to make a story cohesive. We talked about the various ways in which I brought a story to life.

It was about what makes a story worth telling. Rather than focusing on the usual inadequate ideas of memorizing, deciding how to move form the outside, it was a process of beautiful exploration of what it feels like to tell a story and be heard.

I wished that I had hours with them so that each child would have uncovered an important story and been able to tell it. I think I did not take into account the potential problems that arose. And that although the main teacher is wonderful, she has too much to do to be involved.

"In summary I think it was a fabulous program. The children needed imaginative involvement, expression and a chance to share courageous stories together."

Mr. J, teacher

THE OUTLINE FOR COURAGEOUS STORIES:

A child lived in a certain place
Each child had an animal friend, like a dream or spirit animal.
They held, kept safe or wore an amulet that reminded them of the animal.
That animal had a special power that could come to the aid of the child
Each child had a way to call the animal to them: a sound, a song, or a gesture
The each described a dilemma that the heroine or hero was confronted with
The heart of the story was how the animal came to the rescue.
The piece of the story that we did not have time to construct: then, having this power and how it worked how could they help to save a friend when in trouble.

SANDRA'S OBSERVATIONS Including Three of the Stories

Setto's story read by Laura.

Laura retold the story in a way that reconstructed the images of Setto's story from the form he had filled out. When any detail was missing Laura asked Setto to describe something or add a detail; Then in a new telling Laura integrated his details.

During the process and while Laura was helping Setto find his story, the other children looked at Setto surprised. He was a very quiet boy who stuttered when he spoke. Even Setto seemed surprised and proud He was so happy to hear his story being told by Laura.

One child asked: - Did the boy have parents?

Setto: - "Yes, his father died when the boy was born. Peregrin falcon's power comes from the spirit of his father."

Child: How did the father give the boy the power?

Setto: Before he died, in a dream.

Setto's tale was about a boy who lived alone with his mother who had a powerful helper animal, the peregrine falcon. It gave the boy the power to run quickly. Once the boy was kidnapped. His animal was able to find him and bring him home.

Naminata's story:

Naminata was the opposite of Setto. She could not stop inventing ideas for her story. She sat up gesturing and giving voices to characters.

She began in Atlanta's uptown where Nick M. had a little pet bird. One day they went downtown, although her mother said that they shouldn't. The pet's special power was to read minds and to be able to know what would happen in the future. " She described a terrible part of town that Nick was told to never go to and how he disobeyed and went there. The animal could not tell the future, unless one was telling the truth.

Laura asked for details such: Who was the kidnapper? Where does he live? Naminata added these details into the story. Then, She called out the animal's power with three words repeated and asked the class to repeat the words, just as Laura had done during the storytelling. Brave! Brave! Brave!

And when she said the word brave when being brave herself then the animal would catch the message. "If Nick wasn't brave the animal wouldn't come. "

When details seem to get too complicated or too many, Laura says "Let's keep it simple".

With the help of the class we formed a story in which Nick became brave and called on the animal who warned him of danger. At the last minute, he was able to get out of a terrible situation and return home safely. The class cheered.

Angel's story:

James surprised us all. He sat up tall and gathered the attention of the whole room.

"There was a boy named James who lived with his father and mother. They lived in the woods in a house. Bobcat was his magic animal. His mother gave Bobcat to him. One day when the boy went to put the trash outside, a guy chased him and the boy ran. The boy ran into the forest. The boy had a bobcat amulet with a red button. When he pressed it the Bobcat came and punched the man in the face. Then James went back inside the house. The kidnapper was arrested soon after that. "

Laura mentions how great it was to hear Angel using different voices while he was telling the story.

One child asked: - What was the point of the story?

Angel: - To help people be aware of dangers like when other people can hurt you.

Laura: - Where did you keep your amulet?

Angel: - In my neck, on a golden string.

Laura thanked Angel and the others for listening and helping.

. She said, "It takes time for a "Story to be baked, like a cake".

She asked, "How was the house in the woods? What was the kidnapper's motives?"

As more details were added by Laura and Angel, together the story unfolded: James' mother had a magic power within herself. They lived in the woods because they liked quiet. The mother gave the boy a silver amulet and she gave the powers to the Bobcat. One day when the Bobcat was asleep, the boy went out to put the trash outside. The kidnapper wanted the amulet so that he could get the power. The boy ran and called for the Bobcat. It raced out of the house fast and bit the kidnapper in the butt. Kidnapper ran and was

arrested the next day. James sent the amulet to a foster home to help other children in the world.

Sandra's Observations:

I found the rearranging and retelling of the stories very healing, as if Laura was helping to put separated and hurt pieces inside the children together: soothing their individual processes. The children's faces expressed happiness, relief, and contentment. All the children wanted to go through the process. They were waiting for their turns in expectation. Maybe this could still be done. Something feels like stayed in that classroom unfinished, like hanging in the air.

CLOSURE:

Time seemed to always pass far too quickly. I was not accustomed to the reality of 45 minutes sessions that were always shorter. The children presented beautiful thank you notes to Sandra and I. We said our goodbyes. I was planning a final go around in the circle, but there was not time. The teachers thanked me and each said they would try to continue the process with the kids into the rest of the year.

Laura's CLOSING LETTER TO THE CLASS

Dear class of best listeners, great storytellers and big hearts,

I loved spending time with you. I wish I had more time to be with you. It was very beautiful to get to know each of you. It was obvious that each one of you has a strong and complicated and important story to tell of your own. You listened with a beauty that I will never forget. If you want to work on your stories more, I will be happy to read them and write to you about them. Also I had an idea. Once you have written the story pieces about how you were helped from a problem or danger by your animal spirit, then you can write another piece of the story about you helped a friend.

If you like, I can send you another form about how to write the pieces of the story. Writing a story is not easy. No writer just sits down and creates a story. Everyone works the way you have. They have pieces and ideas, characters, places and obstacle. Then they start to write (as you were doing with me) the details of what happened, and what the reader or listener needs to know in order to follow what is happening.

I can send you more forms to help you move forward. Also, I apologize (particularly to Sheik) that you did not have time to work with colored markers and make your amulet picture and name of animal in card. The time always seemed to go tooooooo fast.

Please never forget that each one of you is very special. I loved your stories!!!!

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROGRAM AND NEXT YEAR

I am very grateful for the opportunity of bringing an Andersen story into the Hans Christian Anderson School. It is important for our young people to explore ways in which they can become youth storytellers retelling his tales and stories inspired by Andersen. Many beneficial things took place. I am sure the each child had a very strong sense of storytelling and how wonderful it is. In our world today there are few activities that promote deep learning and self-respect in such a potent and meaningful way.

What was a surprise in the classroom at present was how the Core Standards have made changes. Storytelling addresses and supports the Standards in very significant ways. I did however feel the pressure and difficulty of having short sessions in a very long and mentally demanding day for students and teachers.

For next year, I suggest that the program takes place in the auditorium. We need to be removed from confines of the classroom. I will ask if I can use two back to back sessions. We can then complete the tasks and spend more time developing storytelling skills. Since storytelling is so personal, having 24 kids (although with absentees we usually had about 18) it would be best to give more time to their process.

THE NEXT TWO YEARS: Through the generous funding of Traveler’s Foundation I am able to return to the Anderson School for two more years. My intention for the next year is to design a project where the whole school becomes familiar with Andersen. I envision offering an auditorium program of several stories and the short film about Andersen so they can know about the author whose name is on their school. I would like to then prepare a single short Andersen story for each fourth grade class. They will learn to tell that story, and what it meant to them in a Storytelling Festival as a culmination of the program.

With further funds, we could accomplish the following: We could document the process of learning to be an Andersen storyteller in the school for younger children; and I could conduct a repeated Snow Queen Courageous Story Program-with more sessions - where a book of stories would be made and illustrated by students. It would include their stories. In both situations we could have “traveling storytellers moving from class to class” sharing their tales.

“Thank you for being here. I hope you come back next year!”

“ I got attached to it!”

“P. S. I like the Snow Queen.” Tayla

Laura Simms, March 26, 2015

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