



# Derek Burrows

Tradition Bearer - Storyteller - Musician - Educator

**This is based on a workshop called "Telling Stories from Other Cultures".**

We are all tradition bearers. We all come from somewhere and all have a cultural tradition. Do we bear only our own tradition or do we bear the tradition of others? As we search for more information about stories and look at more folktales we reach out to other cultures for new material. Do we help these cultures by telling their stories in their language, are we honoring their traditions? Do we use their stories and change it for our own use and maybe end up not understanding much about it in the process? Sometimes telling the stories of other cultures is important so that the people of other cultures can have access to these stories. How do we do them justice?

**Here are some questions I ask to think about this issue.**

\*How do we bring out the flavor of the culture?

\*What do we need to know about the culture to have the story work effectively?

\*What do we need to do to understand how people think in the culture?

\*Why is it important to know this information?

Some of the problems we face in telling stories are understanding attitudes in the culture e.g. the role of children in the culture, how they are treated, how they behave generally, punished, taught etc.

\*How holidays are viewed, celebrations, humor, deaths, birth

\*Use of language, attitudes, foods

**Here are some other questions I feel important to ask when learning a new story.**

- \*How do you feel about this story?
- \*What do you feel in the most important thing in the story?
- \*What makes you uncomfortable when you hear or read or tell this story?
- \*What do you think this story is about?
- \*Why do you think this story is told?
- \*What can you do to understand more about the story, culture?
- \*Is it important to tell this story from the culture? If you decide it is important what do you think will allow you to be most effective in transmitting it?

### **Some do's about storytelling**

- \*Do research, find variants of the folktale read anthropological journals
- \*Ask permission of the teller who you learned the story from.
- \*Try to talk to someone from the culture dialect and accent
- \*Explain to the audience something about the story why you tell it. Sometimes stories are told to explain attitudes, reveal dark things.
- \*Find a voice for the story, think of descriptions of the terrain, words from the tradition to give a feeling of the place and the people
- \*Learn to pronounce the words so they are comfortable

### **Some of my don'ts about storytelling**

- \*Do not re-write the story because you don't understand it or like it the way it is.
- \*Don't memorize the story. Learn it using the images in the story and your own words.

## Learning to Tell a Story

1. Read the story and like it. It's important to feel something for the story in order to give it the energy it deserves. Sometimes you have to read it a few times to get a sense of it, but allow yourself to trust what you feel.
2. In first learning to tell the story, learn the sequence of the story. Children and adults can draw or write down the sequence to help them remember it.
3. Find the conflicts in the story. What actions motivate the characters and cause conflicts? Conflicts within a story help the movement of that story and exploring these conflicts and their resolution helps us understand the story better.
4. Examine the emotions in the story. What do the characters feel or what do we think they feel and why do we think it? This exploration can help in the re-telling. How do we feel about the characters? Do we relate to their actions? How do they mirror our actions and emotions? We often connect to characters through our emotions so understanding the emotions of the story characters will make for more effective storytelling.
5. Try re-telling the story using the information you have gained about it. Think of your own emotions in relationship to the character, for e.g. how do you feel when there is a conflict and it is resolved, how would you solve the conflicts in this story?
6. Find other versions of the story to examine how the story has been changed. Many of the current versions have been re-worked for the "Politically Correct" climate and may have lost the cultural context and flavor of the story. Reading other versions can be helpful in understanding why the story was told originally, and instructive as to how different cultures interpret and change stories to fit their needs.

7. Explore the meaning of the story. Many stories have a moral and obvious ending. However, look at the actions of the characters in the story and use these as a jumping off point for critical thinking. Asking questions about the actions and feelings of the events in the story can lead to dynamic discussion.

<http://derekburrows.com>

[derek@derekburrows.com](mailto:derek@derekburrows.com)

617-983-9184