

## STORY SPINE

### Objectives:

- Learn the Story Spine and how it supports storytelling

### The task:

- Teach the class basic story spine! Often, I like to do this by picking a movie that everyone knows (Disney movies tend to work well). I'll write the story spine starters on the board (as detailed below) and reference it by pointing as we process. From there, I'll ask students to help me fill in the different parts of the story from the movie we know. For example, if we picked the Lion King, I might prompt like this: "Okay, great, we picked Lion King. The first part of the story spine helps us to identify who this story is about.. who is the lion king about? (student says: "Simba."). Okay, great.. Once upon a time there is a young lion cub named Simba. And every day... this next part helps the audience know what his every day life is like. So, what was his daily life like?"....
  - Once upon a time...
  - (And they loved... )
  - And every day...
  - Until one day...
  - And because of that...
  - And because of that...
  - And because of that...
  - Until finally...
  - And ever since that day...
- And the moral of the story is...

### Variations:

- Feel free to have more than three "And because of that's" in stories when appropriate. Three is a nice starting number, but if you need more, go for it!

### Leader Considerations and Assessment:

- This story spine serves as a general framework for most stories that we know and consume. There are exceptions to this, obviously, but as new students, this is the best way to conceptualize basic narratives.
- When teaching this, I often find it helpful to give several examples.

### Topics for Processing:

- Now that you know this model, can you see how this has been followed in many stories you know?

## STORY SPINE PRACTICE

### Objectives:

- Collaborating to co-create and build new stories with peers

### How to Play:

- Have students break into small groups to practice story spine. Often, I will have students create a story "one line at a time." This provides teachers with an opportunity to coach and encourage "re-dos" anytime the story gets off-track.

### Variations:

- Have students complete story spine stories one-word-at-a-time. This adds a new layer of challenge for students.
- Tell genre stories. Pick the genre ahead of time and tell a story that falls within that genre

- Tell a story one line at a time by passing a ball across the circle to indicate who will go next. This helps prevent pre-planning and encourages listening

### **Leader Considerations and Assessment:**

- It may help some groups to continue having a visual reference. If you split into groups, ensure that the groups can see the visual, or provide each group with their own visual.
- Some students may benefit from being verbally prompted with what comes next, especially when students are first practicing story spine. In this case, feel free to provide the first part of the sentence for students to cognitively frame this skill for them.

### **Troubleshooting:**

- **Disjointed stories:** It is often hard for new students to create a connected story when they're first practicing story spine. Students may struggle to listen to each other, and they may go off topic or add disjointed offers. Possible interventions:
  - Before a student adds something, have them repeat the entire line before, or part of the line before. This can help students flow more naturally.
  - Practice telling the “simplest story in the world” together without many specific details. This can help students really narrow down what the story is about. Then, practice telling the most complicated story in the world, where each person in the group adds a fact onto each story phase. (For example, when introducing who the story is about...each person would add a characteristic or a fact about the protagonist before moving to “and every day...”) Process with students which story worked better? Why? (Generally, the complicated story becomes really muddy and hard to follow very quickly. This can be a great way to point out the importance of making clear and concise offers. Specificity and details are great...but only when they add to the story in a meaningful way.
  - It is especially important in story telling for the “Because of that” line to be directly related to the line that came before. This can be tricky, as students will often add a second “because of that” in response to the initial “until one day,” rather than the “because of that” that came before. When this happens, encourage students to add something based on ALL the facts we have so far, and point out the information that they're missing, or how it seems a bit disjointed.
- **Difficulty tracking the story:** Some students may struggle holding this much verbal information. For those students, it may be helpful for the teacher to provide a re-cap before their turn. For example, the teacher may quickly run through the facts we have about the story so far, and then seed the student's line. So, they might say: “Okay, we know the story is about Sam the Turtle, and everyday Sam the turtle swims in the pond by his house. One day, though, that pond disappears, so he goes on a hike to try to find a new pond. Because he goes on this new hike, what happens next?”

### **Topics for Processing:**

- What stories work best? Which are hardest to follow? Why?