

STORY VINES AND READERS THEATRE: GETTING STARTED

Marlene McKay



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INTRODUCTION

Today's classrooms consist of a wide range of learners. Teachers welcome the challenges of meeting the needs of all learners and developing a supportive, cooperative, inclusive learning community. Story vines and readers theatre are two learning strategies that engage all learners in meaningful literacy learning and provide success. They involve collaboration and cooperation. Students work together to support each other and to problem solve with story and text.

Developing story vines and readers theatre performances requires a series of complex learning tasks. The processes involved in both these strategies are congruent with current and relevant educational theories. The theory of social constructivism, credited to Lev Vygotsky (1934, 1978), the gradual release theory (Pearson and Gallagher 1983), and Cambourne's (1988) eight conditions for learning underlie the success of both story vines and readers theatre. The social constructivist theory of learning posits that learners create or construct knowledge in social situations rather than simply receive knowledge from others. This theory also promotes the idea that learning is grounded in language and that meaning making is a social event. Pearson and Gallagher's theory of gradual release suggests that children will learn from the modelling of others with guided practice and feedback. The ultimate goal of learning is independence, but in order for that to occur, there must be modelling, practice with feedback, and scaffolding for the learners. Cambourne's eight conditions for learning are also key to the success of readers theatre and story vines. Student engagement, along with immersion in language and literacy, demonstrations, expectations of success, increased student responsibility, increased student employment, approximations, and feedback, are essential conditions in both story vines and readers theatre that make them successful instructional approaches.

Sample Pages

Both strategies require modelling, setting of criteria, planning and preparation, performance, and reflection and celebration. Both involve much conversation about text, story, author techniques, strategies, literary elements, character, sequence, and events – all the components of text students should think about and explore. Both require students to engage in meaningful contexts and to spend time with the text, rereading, discussing, and analyzing for a purpose. These kinds of activities slow down the process of reading text and therefore help students to understand how texts are constructed and how they work. This helps them to become more skilled readers.

The final performance outcome of story vines and readers theatre differs. Story vines focus on the student's oral presentation of the story or the content, guided and supported by the use of visuals. Readers theatre performances focus on effective and expressive reading of text with the use of minimal props and costumes.

The learning outcomes, goals, and objectives achieved by using story vines and readers theatre with students are similar. Students build confidence in reading, speaking, and presenting in public. They also develop poise. Story vines and readers theatre contribute to the development of a deeper understanding of text and reading strategies, making students more proficient and fluent readers. Both learning strategies lend themselves to many extensions of other language arts learning opportunities. They engage students in critical thinking, problem solving, and cooperative and collaborative learning.

Story vines and readers theatre bring text to life. They make reading and learning fun!

THE BENEFITS OF USING STORY VINES

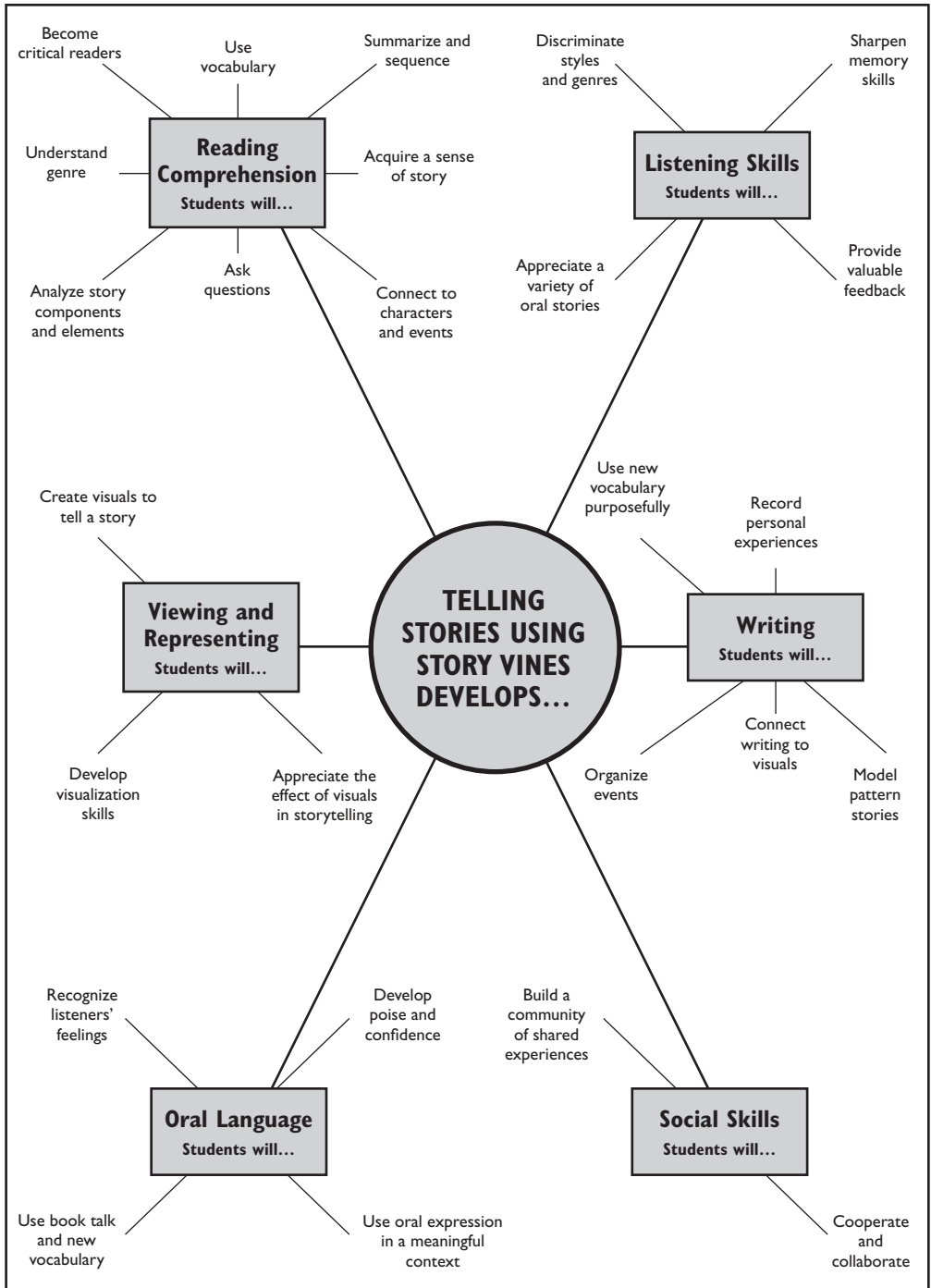


FIGURE 1: Benefits of story vines

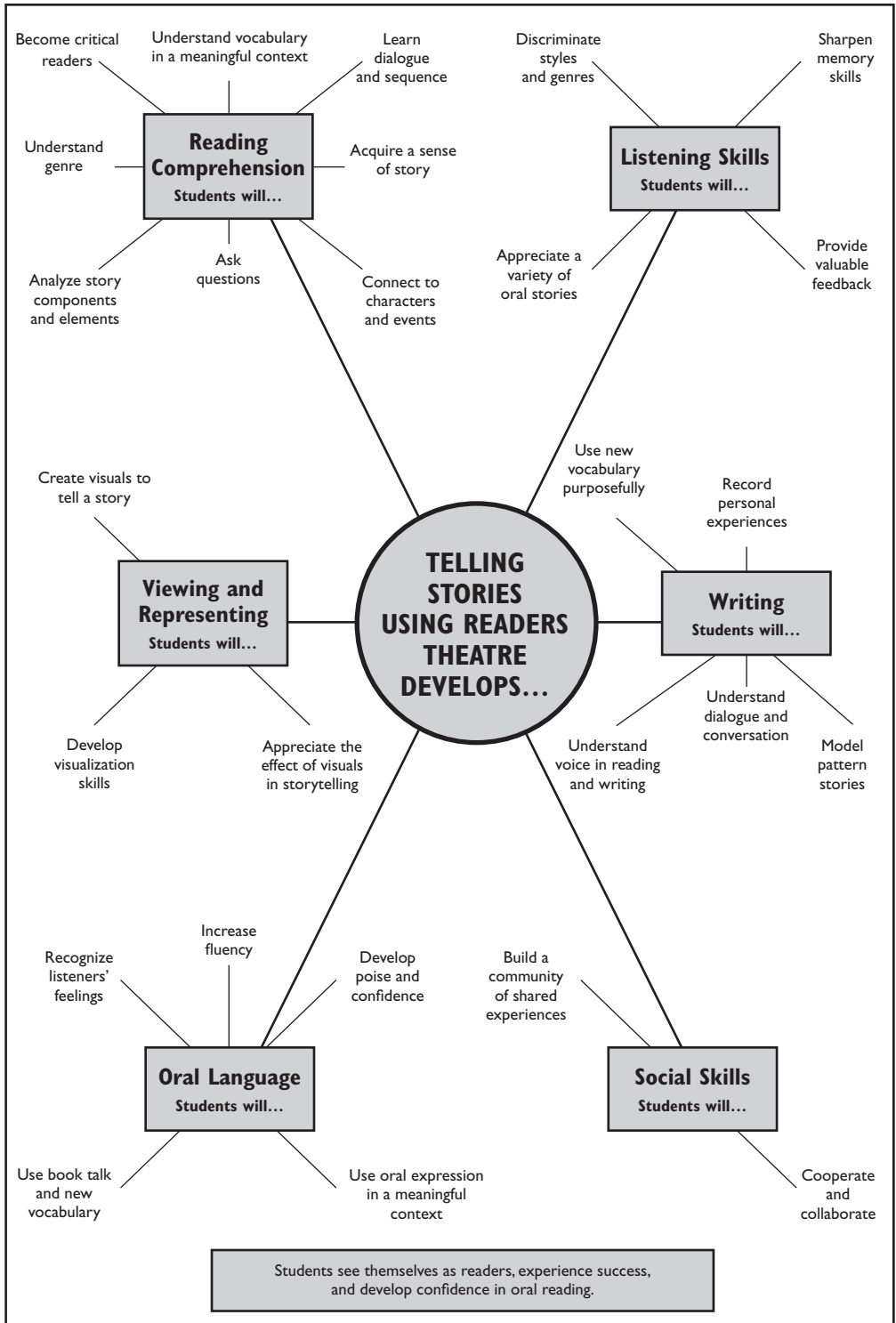


FIGURE 13: Benefits of readers theatre