

Pourquoi Stories

Explaining Why

Definition Link <http://www.uwstout.edu/lib/irs/folktale.htm>

Students write a story explaining a natural phenomenon. They may use internet images/resources to gather information and/or to illustrate their stories.

Objectives

- Students will read/listen to a number of pourquoi stories to learn the basic story elements
- Students will create an original story explaining why something in the world is the way it is
- Students will select an internet image to use as a basis for their own story.

Lesson 1

Pourquoi is French for why, and pourquoi stories are the genre of tales that explain why something in the natural world is the way it is. (See “Definition Link” for an internet site explaining pourquoi tales.) Creation myths are a part of this genre. There are many stories that fall in this category. See the bibliography for a suggested list of books to have for independent reading or teacher read-alouds.

Write “pourquoi” on the board and ask for a volunteer to read the word. Accept all attempts and then explain that it is a French word and it is pronounced /poor-kwa’/. Ask if anyone knows what it means or explain that it means “why.” Tell the students that you are beginning a study of pourquoi stories--stories that explain why something in the world is that way. I generally start with a simple book (see the list of First Start books) because it has a fairly transparent story structure, but I make sure to read several of Rudyard Kipling’s Just So Stories at times during this unit to enjoy the language of his writing.

Brainstorming

The purpose for this exercise is to get the children thinking about the many different animals there are in the world. Have children write the alphabet, one letter at the beginning of each line, in a column. Challenge them to think of at least one animal for each letter of the alphabet. Give students 10 minutes or more to work on their lists. When the energy is dwindling and children are struggling to come up with some letter ideas, allow them to add other animals to the letters that are “easy.” You may want to generate a partial list on a chart which can be added to by the children at

another time. It is interesting to check for any letters for which most children thought of the same animal, or the hard and easy letters--and the impossible ones. Check the resources list for internet connections for the impossible letters. There are animals for every letter!

After you have made animal alphabet lists, have students think about the animals on their lists and what characteristics make them unique--the lion's mane, the elephant's trunk, the zebra's stripes, etc. Have children work in cooperative groups to make a list of Pourquoi Tales titles: Why the Zebra Has Stripes, Why Does the Lion Have a Mane? Choose one title to use as a mini-lesson and write a group story. Use the story chart to remind students of the elements they should include in their stories. Also, discuss the use of descriptive language and dialog to enhance stories.

Once you have written a sample story, allow children to choose a title from the class chart, an animal from their alphabet list, or an animal from a resource link. Use internet resources, and print materials to research the chosen animals, so children can include accurate facts in their stories.

As stories are completed, have children edit for content and for conventions, then word process their final stories, leaving space for illustrations. You may want to do some explorations of ethnic art work to give more punch to your illustrations. African animal stories can make use of African designs, art styles, etc., for instance.