

Westbrook, R.B. (1991). *John Dewey and American democracy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

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Zipes, J. (1995). *Creative storytelling: Building community, changing lives*. New York: Routledge, 267 pp. (softcover).

This is a remarkable book, the best of the many books about storytelling that I have read. I write this as someone who has had ten years experience telling stories to young people in schools and elsewhere. Throughout these years, I always felt something was missing from what I was doing: I felt as if I was not actually preparing my audience to become storytellers in their own right. Had I been able to read a book like *Creative Storytelling*, I would have understood the accuracy of this feeling and I would have had the means to begin empowering those very listeners I seemed to be, in one sense, failing. Jack Zipes sets out with empowerment of the young person in mind; he has a programme and a clear sense of just what stories are and do. In writing about his activities as a storyteller, Zipes offers the reader not only tips on how to share stories with children and how to initiate their own storytelling, but also an introduction to literary genre and a clear sense of how a story functions to create community. The book deals with both practical and theoretical issues, and it does so without sentimentality or vagueness. Zipes's argument that storytelling can build an informed and critical citizenry and a cohesive community is presented with precision and informative examples.

Despite his disclaimer in the opening pages that he has written this book "not to instruct but to *share*," Zipes has written a deeply instructive book. The reader will find in these pages many games and creative activities to give young people the confidence to tell their own stories. In another sense, however, Zipes has written what he calls an "anti-manual" The experiences he shares in this book are those he has had working with children and adults over some 20 years. The activities and methods he describes are what he has picked up from others – "different critics, storytellers, teachers and children" – over the years.. The stories he tells in this book are those of classic tellers

such as Perrault, Grimm, and Aesop, and his own and others from more recent tellers. He also draws upon stories from several cultures. In all this, the notion of sharing is quite evident. Zipes practices what he preaches. What's more, his willingness to cut and paste aspects of several traditional stories into something new and his daring foray into new stories based on his own life or on science offer truly practical encouragement to the classroom teacher or the aspiring storyteller. Zipes gives of himself in this book in a manner rare in such studies or in academic discourse generally.

The practical suggestions outlined in the book take the reader from the beginnings, from encouraging young students to begin both to understand the stories of others and to tell their own, by working with "Little Red Riding Hood," a story Zipes knows as well as anybody (see his *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood*, 1993) to playing with science fiction motifs and themes, especially the mad scientist trope. Along the way, Zipes introduces children to various literary and oral types such as animal tales and fables, legends, myths, tall tales, utopian stories, and science fiction. One chapter dealt with creative dramatics and video, and his suggestions for filming the various stages of a story or a drama as it develops in a classroom setting are invaluable. He is interested in a number of things at once; encouraging children to tell their stories, developing a community within the classroom and the school, creating an understanding in children of the types of literature, questioning received opinion and traditional canons. His is not a guide to performance; rather it is a guide to action, social action informed by a belief in tolerance, peace, and genuine human interaction. Anyone who is familiar with Zipes's previous work will not be surprised to hear him encouraging a healthy scepticism of social norms. I cannot but admire his enterprise.

When Zipes speaks of his book as an anti-manual, he refers in part to his outspoken criticism of several aspects of our cultural and educational moment. He worries about "a trend toward rigid standardization of curricula in the name of cultural literacy" alluding to the likes of E.D. Hirsch, Allan Bloom, William Bennet, and Dinesh D'Souza (Hirsch's is the only name Zipes cites.). On the other hand, he decries "the commercialization of story telling," referring to the rise in the 1980s of the performer-storyteller who transformed "storytelling into a cult with mystical and religious overtones." Both the educators interested in cultural literacy and the storytellers who transform themselves into celebrities partake in what Zipes sees as a powerful ideological state apparatus (Zipes does not use Althusser's term, but it fits his argument nicely). Traditional fairy tales and those who pass them along enthusiastically are "concerned with minimizing the dangers threatening children." Rather than lead children in an exploration of how social and

familial abuses occur, many educators and storytellers focus on the happy ending these tales give children, encouraging the children to accept the way things are. Zipes's programme speaks out against this silence and silencing. Unlike neo-Jungian champions of storytelling such as Carlissa Pinkola Estes and Robert Bly, Zipes takes a clear view of story as neither bringing about utopia nor maintaining the status quo. For him, story is only as productive as the community from which it derives, a community willing to grow and change and question and constantly manoeuvre its individuals into positions in which they can expose the contradictions inherent within social institutions.

I have concentrated on Zipes's overall concerns and in doing so I have slighted both the stories he tells and the methods he gives for generating stories in classroom settings. The bulk of this book, however, consists of practical suggestions for putting storytelling into use in the classroom and of a variety of stories told with grace and wit. Zipes agrees with Kieran Egan: storytelling is a powerful method for teachers to use in teaching children not only about themselves, but also about such things as science, history, math, and geography. In other words, storytelling has relevance across the curriculum. Children are empowered to take learning into their own hands, so to speak. They discover their own ability to articulate concepts and ideas, which at the same time they learn to share with others their own personality. Zipes keeps returning to the notion of community, and the community created by storytellers is an open, honest, reciprocal community. The idea is a community without competition, violence, or exploitation. Such a community is devoutly to be wished, and Zipes's book keeps such a wish alive and strong.

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Paley, N. (1995). *Finding art's place: Experiments in contemporary art and culture*. New York: Routledge, 185 pp. (Softcover).

One of the most important questions raised by Nicholas Paley's book is "where does art education take place?" According to Paley, it happens in the