

Storytelling—Flannel board

Compiled from various sources by Inez Ramsey.

<http://raven.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/flannel1.htm>

Children love stories told with flannel board characters as visual accompaniment. They can use the figures and retell the story on their own. Flannel-graph stories hold attention fairly well if carefully prepared and executed. They are particularly helpful when story sequence, movement and relationships are important in the story. Stand up visuals like stick puppets can be also be used.

Guidelines for Telling Stories

1. Choose a simple story with a logical plot sequence. Avoid stories with many changes in setting or too many characters to be handled effectively. A chapter from a longer book may be adapted for use.

2. Write a simple script, visualizing in your head the action which will be depicted on the flannel board. Practice your script by reading through it several times until you know it well.

3. Develop a simple storyboard, if desired. On the storyboard sketch the visuals and the accompanying text.

4. Develop your visuals. Sometimes, figures can be copied directly from a picture book or from a simple coloring book. An opaque projector can be also be used, if the figures in the book are not too large. Pictures can be scanned in and reworked on a home computer. [Note: Copyright laws] Simple free hand sketches or cutouts can also be developed.

5. Practice your story with the accompanying visuals.

Be familiar with where and when you will put the figures on the board. The lesson manual should be of help with this. Practice at home first. Try practicing in front of a mirror. See what the scene looks like from the other side of the room; maybe your figures are squeezed too much together. Be aware of figures that will be needed more than once in the lesson. When you remove figures from the board at the end of one scene, have a place to put those that will not be used again. Have another place for the figure(s) that will be needed later. Get something on the board early in your lesson. If necessary, make a visual for this point. Visuals help get attention.

Practice placing figures correctly. Make use of the whole board, not one small corner of it. The very center of the board is not the most visually attractive place. Make use of the Thirds. Perspective demands that the larger figures are lower down the board than the smaller ones.

6. Number each figure in chronological order as they appear on the board.

Use a small table or area behind the flannel board to lay out your figures in the order in which they will appear in the story. Figures in sequence, may also be held in your lap. Keep them face down when not on the board as suspense helps keep attention. There should always be a figure on the board.

7. Maintain eye contact with your audience at all times.

Do not turn your back, if at all possible, to the children.

8. Use an expressive voice when talking to the children.

9. Assign a child "helper" to pick up figures that may fall from the board during the story.

Do not become upset or flustered if the figures do fall since this is a common occurrence.

Storytelling--Flannelboard

Materials for Flannel board

Self-adhering materials are felt, pellon (interfacing used in clothing construction), heavy flannel, blotters, pipe cleaners, light carpet, cotton, rough string and yarn, suede leather, velvet, yarn and similar knappy materials. Non-adhering materials such as poster board or construction paper, can be used. Back non-adhering materials with felt scraps, velcro tape, pellon or light sandpaper to provide adhesive qualities. Flimsy paper should be mounted on poster board so as to prevent buckling or bending. A good glue can be used for this purpose. To increase the life of poster board and similar types of materials, laminate the visuals with laminating film or clear contact paper.

Crayons, magic markers, liquid crayons and watercolors can be used to color your visuals. You may wish to make additional figures. e.g. word-strips. Use clear bold colours and lower case lettering. The words can be printed on heavy paper and backed with the leftover scraps you saved.

Easel. The board needs to be erected securely and a good solid easel is best. It should be constructed in such a way that the board 's height can be changed according to the teaching situation and whether you will teach standing up or sitting down. It should have a strong shelf which is large enough to hold all your flannelgraph figures. The easel should allow the flannelboard to lean back slightly. If it is too upright, the figures are more likely to fall off the cloth. If you travel about to teach, your easel should fold down for convenience.

Position. Make sure all children can see the board without discomfort. Avoid placing it in front of a window or bright light. If it is too high, the children will have sore necks looking up. If it is too low they will be unable to see past other children. Position it so you can use it most easily; some like to stand on the left, while others prefer the right. Do not stand in front of the board.

Storing Flannel Board Materials

Store your materials flat for use at another time. If your figures bleed (e. g. some color may rub off of pellon), place some tissue paper or waxed paper between the figures when storing. Include a copy of your script, or a copy of the book dramatized with your flannel board figures, just in case the book may be lost or checked out the next time you wish to do the story.

Making the Flannel Board

You can use felt or flannel to cover a display board for storytelling. Glue the felt or flannel with rubber cement to a sturdy, flat artist's portfolio which is lightweight and easily portable or a piece of board. Stretch the material around the board and glue to the back of the flannelboard, leaving at least a couple of inches of material on the back of the board. Remember not to work with rubber cement and aerosol paints in enclosed places since fumes can be deadly. Size of the board is your own personal choice. You may have to prop heavier boards with books or some other heavier objects if you try to prop the board on a chair. Light green, gray or blue material works well as a color for flannelboards. White shows soiling too quickly.

Other alternatives would be to use a chalkboard as a display device. Back sturdy, laminated paper figures with a small piece of magnet. Magnetic tape will stick to some types of chalkboards. You might also take a plain, 8 1/2 x 11 file folder and cover it with some types of cloth materials. These are flimsier but inexpensive to do. Children can handle these smaller flannelboards with flannelboard figures to retell stories themselves. Shoe box flannelboards are fun for children to work with. Take the top off a shoe box and cover the inside with felt or flannel. Use the box to store the flannelboard figures as well.