ACT OUT AN ORIGINAL STORY

"Storytelling is play in narrative form ... fantasy play and storytelling are never far apart” Vivian Paley

A visit with most preschoolers confirms their status as world-class story-tellers. While the story may not always be true or follow a traditional narrative structure, capturing children’s stories and acting them out can be a great way to engage early literacy and confirm children’s identities as story-makers - even those who can’t yet write in the traditional way!

Step 1 - Tell a New Story
First, a child tells – or dictates – his or her story to a grown-up (or older child) who acts as a scribe, editor, and initial audience.

• Often the grown-up will need to ask for clarification on a confusing point. ‘I don’t understand. How many babies were there?’ Or she might pause in her scribing to simply appreciate the story. With little qualification, all topics, true and untrue, are welcome!

• For the sake of later acting out the story, the story length is usually held to one page. Children may find they like to revisit a set of characters or have new adventures with the same idea.

• The grown-up then rereads aloud what the child has written, to offer the opportunity for revisions.

Note: The scribe may choose to stay as close to the storyteller’s original words as possible or may choose to “lightly edit” grammar. I prefer the accuracy of the child’s voice - but other goals may take priority!

Step 2: Act it Out
The classroom procedure is set up with a taped off rectangle in the center that acts as a stage around which the children sit. It might be useful to create a space at home for this as well.

• The grown-up first reads the story out loud to the audience to alert the listeners and actors to the plot.

• The child who was the story maker then decides who will play each part. The players enter the stage space and the grown-up then reads the story aloud again as the children step into their roles.

• Though the grown-up serves as director and producer, offering suggestions to foster dramatic interpretation, such as ‘How can you show us that the monster surprised you?’, expectations of dramatic performance are casual. Re-read the story again and allow for children to try out a new way of doing their part.

• Thank the story maker and the players for their work. Invite another child to share a story.

The link below is a video of a typical classroom experience with Story Acting with a Pre-K student in Boston: https://vimeo.com/197214721

Adapted from Boston College framework and Vivian Paley’s Story Acting Pedagogy