



ROYAL
COLLEGE
OF MUSIC
London



Engaging an audience: Storytelling

Activity Pack

RCM Sparks is the Royal College of Music's learning and participation programme.
To find out more and get involved visit www.rcm.ac.uk/sparks

The process of story-making and storytelling is integral in the professional life of a musician. Storytelling skills can be used in: teaching, introducing a piece of music or presenting a concert. Narrative skills can be used to create and deliver a performance, engage the public on any given theme, to tell the story of a composer/an instrument and so much more!

This resource will provide you with transferable skills that will enable you to create and perform a story, with exercises and templates that can be used time and time again when preparing for and delivering a performance, presentation or public engagement event.

You will be using instruments and information from the RCM Museum to create the sample story that will allow you to put your storytelling skills into practice.

Who?

Decide on what kind of audience you will be telling your story to: Children? Families? Adults? Musical/Non-musical/Mixed?

Think about what you want them to get out of your performance?

Where?

What context are you performing in? Theatre? Museum? Classroom? This will help you to visualize your context and space and craft your story accordingly.

Story Structure

Look at each of the instruments below from the RCM Museum and read the information provided. Choose one instrument for your story.



Discover

Sebastian Erard and the Shipwrecked Harp

Benjamin Flights Barrel Organ

Apollo and Pan: A musical competition

The Dancing Master's Pochette

Now place the information provided into a story structure. Use the following template which falls into four main story sections:

Introduction, Rising Action, Climax, Resolution.

Story Structure – Template

1. Introduction: Introduction of your chosen object and its context. For example: A Virginal in Elizabethan England.
2. Rising action: Introduction of any characters that come into the story. This is where the suspense starts to increase and the dramatic interaction begins! For example: The introduction of the characters depicted on the Virginal: King Midas and the Greek gods Pan and Apollo embroiled in a music competition.
3. Climax: This is greatest moment of tension and drama in the story. For example, the moment when King Midas is cursed by Apollo.
4. Resolution: This is the closing of the story. Finishing as you began, returning to the object having been on the journey of its story.



Create

- Now that you have placed the information into its relevant story section using the story template, re-write each story section in your own words. You can use the information provided as inspiration but only extract the parts that you think are the most interesting and will appeal to your audience. For example, if you are performing to children replace or remove any technical language, simplify or embellish descriptions to make them more dramatic and use imagery to add flair. As you re-write each section in your own words and add your own creativity into it, remember the following:

1. Keep sentences simple.

2. Start strong, you want your audience to be engaged from the outset! You might start by playing a tune

or a sound effect on your instrument.

You might start with some call and response or questions to the audience or an evocative opening line like Once upon a time or Did you know?...

3. Think about where your story is set, is it indoor or outdoor? In the present/past or future? Are there any changes of scene/temperature/landscape in the story?

TOP TIP: Invite your audience to join you in an imaginary time-machine to take them back in time or to a faraway land!

4. Close the story with a message or thought to leave your listeners with something poignant to remember that makes your story relevant, personal, timely and important to your audience.
5. Close the story with a message or thought to leave your listeners with something to remember!

Dramatic Interaction

When you are storytelling there is no 'fourth wall' between you and your audience members. You are constantly engaging and interacting with them as you perform your story. Dramatic interaction is what makes the story memorable, exciting, powerful. As musicians your instrument is your most powerful tool to bring this interaction to life.

Dramatic interaction in storytelling includes:

1. Interaction with the audience
2. Interaction with other members of your group if performing with others
3. Interaction with your instrument
4. Interaction with a prop/the performance space
5. Interaction using characterization

Take a different coloured pen and decide where you might use dramatic interaction in each section of your story and write these moments into your story structure.



Explore

- Take your instrument and try out your ideas. For example you may decide to:
 1. Play a piece on your instrument before the introduction as the audience enters the space to set the scene and create an atmosphere.
 2. Think about when and how you might use your instrument to bring to life the introduction of your chosen object in section one: You may demonstrate the kinds of music or dances the object might have played in its heyday or the kind of sounds it could produce or role it had in an important historic moment etc.
 3. Use your instrument when bringing characters, drama and dialogue into the story. For example, your instrument might represent one of the characters in the story it may be loud and boisterous or small and snappy and you can create comical sound effect or interact with other members of your group and their instruments as characters.
 4. Introduce audience interaction. This could be a call and response chat, dancing, sound effects or role play. You could place percussion instruments among the audience and invite audience members to create sound effects for you at particular moments in the story in order to create a storm, or circus or dance. Or you can invite an audience member onto the stage to pluck a string or take on a character or teach them a dance etc.

TOP TIP: If you don't have an instrument available think about how you can use song or body percussion instead!

- When you have listed your ideas try them out either alone, with friends or other performers to see how they work and if they need to be adapted.

Remember: if you want audience members to interact with you, you need to give them clear instructions! This can be daunting but it's worth it! Children tend to be keen to join in but it's good to have a back-up plan in case you have a quiet or shy audience.

Practice makes perfect!

- Rehearse your story to the mirror, a friend or find an opportunity to practice in front of an audience!
- Remember to prepare your space. Ensure that the objects behind and around you are relevant to the story context. Keep the space simple, inviting and uncluttered.
- Choose some props and costumes that are relevant to your story: a hat, a fan, an image of the object or composer you are talking about.
- Warm up your voice and body so that you use your full vocal range and use song if you enjoy singing, audiences love song! Warming up your body will free up your gestures and facial expression. Keep water nearby!
- Keep eye contact and a positive facial expression so that audiences can relax and feel uplifted.
- Wear something that suits your performance and that suits you! How we look is as important as what we say!