

Story Boxes:

looking beyond the
book,
thinking inside the
box

presented by

Wolf Trap Master Teaching Artist

Amanda Layton

Whiteman



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Goal and Objectives

Workshop Description:

Learn how creating a box full of found objects, simple construction, and a little imagination can facilitate dance, theatrical, and creative experiences. Participants will discover how story boxes, while utilizing a variety of learning styles and intelligences, help to facilitate emergent literacy skills and enhance children's learning in the classroom.

This workshop is designed to give educators one more tool to enrich and extend children's learning. Participants will gain the confidence to conceptualize and create a box that will help bring children's literature *off the page* while addressing the different learning styles, or multiple intelligences, in the classroom. My ultimate goal is to ignite a way of thinking that will allow the teacher to see the book beyond the page and bring it to life with a creative arts experience.

Goal:

To model the conceptualization and creation of story boxes based on children's literature while demonstrating how early childhood professionals can create an enhanced sensory experience in the classroom.

Objectives:

Participants will:

- *Explore the connection between literature and creative arts experiences.
- *Generate ideas for new story boxes based on the multiple learning styles of children.
- *Observe and participate in dance and drama experiences that easily lend themselves to story boxes:
 - Storytelling
 - Dramatic Role Play
 - Movement Exploration
 - Movement Sequencing and Recall

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Introduction

A story box is so much more than a cardboard box filled with objects; it is a creative experience waiting to happen. These boxes hold all possibilities. They bring literary characters to life, inspire choreographic masterpieces, and facilitate elaborate storytelling. Inspired by children's literature, the story box allows you to extend learning beyond the page and bring a multi-sensory experience into the classroom. The story box, in conjunction with literature, becomes a visual and tactile aid in opening up the creative and cognitive sides of young students.

Coffee Can Theatre

The story box is an adaptation of Wolf Trap Artist Michael Littman's Coffee Can theatre, in which a simple coffee can was transformed into a magical container of small objects that were elements of a story. Here is a piece of history!

Coffee Can Stories

Purpose:

- Children will increase their attention span as they become anxious to see what new items will appear from inside the coffee can.
- Children will develop prediction and critical thinking skills while they look and listen for what comes next as the story unfolds
- At the outcome of this experience, children will associate objects with words, begin to predict the outcome of stories, and learn to use props for storytelling and drama.

Emergent Literacy Skills:

- Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Prediction
- Recall

Materials:

- An empty coffee can or other container with a lid
- Small objects or collection of small objects, such as seashells, buttons, or feathers (objects relating to stories)

Procedure:

Shake the coffee can. Ask the children if they can guess what's in the coffee can. Now open the coffee can and show them what is in it – the seashell, the autumn leaf, the button, or whatever. Bring it out slowly, demonstrating by your action that this is a magic object. Examine the object together and discuss its color, texture, size and shape.

Say to the children:

Do you know what's in here? It's a button. What color is this button? Is it a round button or a square button? Do you know how this button got into the coffee can?

Then, begin to tell a story about it. As you tell the story, incorporate the children's ideas about what happened to the object. Use leading questions to draw the children into the storytelling process. You can make the story with a few sentences long, or extend it to two or three minutes.

Say to the children:

This button belonged to a little girl from New York City. She had this button on her coat. Well, she fooled with it until one day it fell off and rolled into the street. Poor button. It cried. Do you know what happened next? Was it a grown-up or a child who found it in the street? And what did she do with it?

Once, in this coffee can.... (Make up your own story.)

Can you predict what will happen next....?

Coffee Can Stories (continued)

End the story with the reason why the object is now in the coffee can. Put the object back in the coffee can and put the coffee can away, until the next time you wish to do Coffee Can Stories.

Say to the children:

And that's the end of our story. What object goes back in the coffee can first?

Variations:

Select five or six real objects and make-up a story that uses all of them. Tell the story to the children, pulling the items out of the coffee can as they become part of the story. When the story is over, place the items back in the coffee can, one at a time. Some objects to use are paper clips, rubber bands, pencils, small furry animal toys, or whatever you have that will fit in the coffee can. Eye-catching items such as dollhouse furniture add to the magic of this storytelling approach.

Tell a familiar story using the coffee can. For example, the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" can be told with simple, small, cut-out puppets, construction paper furniture, and small dishes. The children can help you make the scenery and characters. Then place the props in the coffee can and tell the story, pulling out items as needed. Once the bears have left, take a small doll from behind your back and introduce Goldilocks. Have her look into the coffee can and ask the children to guess what she sees.

Say to the children:

Once upon a time, there lived three bears in this (box or basket). Oh, look, here comes Papa Bear now. "Where's my porridge?" he says. Mama Bear is coming out now and here are the three bowls... a big bowl, a medium size bowl, and a small bowl. But where is Baby Bear? Do you think he's in the (box, can)? (Look inside.) I don't see him. Jose, come and look. Do you see Baby Bear? You do?! Please take him out. The three bears began to eat and Papa Bear said.... (Continue with story.)

What do you think Goldilocks sees in there? (Take items out as you tell the rest of the story.)

It's time for the bears and Goldilocks to go back to the story coffee can. What did we take out last?

New Vocabulary Words

- Coffee can
- Container
- Predict

Things to Consider When Creating a Story Box

Any box/container will work when creating your story box, although size and shape are dictated by the size of the objects inside. Most importantly, the items inside should remain hidden from view, allowing their reveal to become part of the ritual. Keeping the contents of the box a mystery helps to create suspense and interest.

Outside the Box:

Decorating the outside of the box can be as simple as a photocopied picture from a book or as elaborate as you'd like to imagine. Visual clues on the outside, hinting at the theme or characters inside, become the first lesson. When introducing a new box I might ask, "*What do you think might be inside?*" or "*Can anyone guess who is living inside my box? What was your clue?*" Making predictions and connecting the symbol on the outside with the theme or story inside is a great way to become acquainted with a new story.

Introduction to a new story box:

Materials: A box decorated to hint at a theme or story
Small objects and props inside

Procedure: Introducing the box to the children, ask them what they see on the outside. Elicit ideas about what might be inside the box. *What do you see on the outside of the box? What do you think might live inside here? Why do you think that? What do you think it might look like?*

If introducing a box with a picture of a farm on the front for example, consider asking the children to not only answer you verbally, but to show you how they move.

Think in your mind (don't say it out loud!) one farm animal you might find inside our farm box. Can you show us how your animal might move? How does it sound?

This becomes a great guessing game for the children to play and allows for practice of predicting and associating symbols with objects and ideas.

Inside the box:

When searching for items to put inside the box, be flexible. Children are forgiving if the doll inside doesn't exactly match the character from the book. They are happy to call a piece of green construction paper grass, if you establish it as such. Their ability to substitute your symbol of grass for that of the savannah setting in your story comes naturally...it only requires a little imagination!

Where to Find Story Box Props

Your backyard: Nature's bounty makes for wonderful themed boxes. Fall themed boxes filled with leaves, acorns, and pine cones, or spring boxes with flower, seeds and dirt are great accompaniments to your seasonal literature.

The thrift store or garage sales: Nothing beats a trip to your local thrift store to dig through other people's junk! Any thrift store usually has small, inexpensive dolls, stuffed animals, and knick knacks that work great for story props.

Dollar Store or craft supply stores: Although craft stores can be somewhat expensive, sales and coupons can help with those must-have items.

Your own basement/garage/attic: What's better than someone else's junk? ...Your own! Don't forget about your son's beanie baby collection, or the many little fast food toys that collect dust around the house. They often make for wonderful representations of characters or movement phrases.

Photocopies or pictures: When all else fails, photocopy. Simply copy pictures from magazines, books, or print images online. With a little lamination and a stick glued to the back, you've created easy puppet characters.

Selecting a Book to Use with Story Boxes

The physical construction of the story box is rather easy, but more difficult can be choosing a book that inspires a box. Some books may be more appropriate than others when it comes to engaging children in creative drama and dance experiences.

Look for books that have:

- Repeated Dialogue or Phrases
- A Clear Sequence of Events
- Words that Inspire Movement
- An Interesting Setting or Environment
- Animals as Characters

Books that inspire storytelling and dramatic role-play:

Books that inspire drama experiences will often have several defined characters with repeated actions or dialogue, an easy to follow sequence of events, and a clear beginning, middle and end.

Are You My Mother, The Very Busy Spider and *We're Going on a Lion Hunt* are great examples of books that allow children to actively participate in role playing. All three have repetitive dialogue that allows an opportunity to be active participant in telling and retelling the story, either as a class or individually.

Story Box – *Going on a Lion Hunt* by David Axtell

<u>Materials:</u>	Box decorated with pictures of scene/characters from the story. 2 girls, a lion, green felt (grass), blue paper (lake), brown paper (swamp), foam cave
<u>Procedure:</u>	Introduce the story as you pull out the characters from the box. Bring out the older sister; <i>We're going on a lion hunt. We're going to catch a big one.</i> Bring out the little sister; <i>We're not scared, we've been here before.</i> Bring out the grass, lake, swamp, and cave repeating the character's dialogue in between. Cue the class for participation in dialogue and hand gestures for the phrases (<i>We can't go over it, we can't go under it, we can't go around it, we must go through it</i>) When the story sequence is finished, ask the children to remember what order the objects came out of the box. <i>Who came out of the box first? Who came out second? What did we see third? Etc...</i>

Books that Inspire Dance Experiences:

Books full of verbs, descriptive movement quality words, and animals or insects, such as *Quick as a Cricket* work wonderfully for dance and movement sequencing experiences.

Story Box – *Quick as a Cricket* by Leo Lionni

Materials:

Box decorated with pictures of scene/characters from the story.

Picture or props from story plus other things that move quickly and slowly (ex. bee, snail, bulldozer, rocket ship)

Procedure:

As the characters from the story come out of the box:

- *Does this animal/insect move quickly like the cricket or slowly like the snail?*
 - *Can you show me how it moves?*
 - *Can your bumblebee move even quicker?*
 - *Can your bee move while not making a single sound?*
 - *Who can move their bee without touching or flying into any other bee in the room?*
- Use your eyes!*

After a little movement exploration has occurred and you've established a movement identity for several objects pulled from the box, ask the class to try it as a sequence.

- *Can you remember the first character that was pulled from the box and how it moved?*
- *What was the second?*
- *Can we try them all without any talking?* Use the visuals from the box to cue the children in the sequence.

After the sequencing has been practiced, add musical accompaniment. Explain to the children they've created a quick and slow dance and in this dance, they use their bodies, not their voices! If time allows, divide the class into a performing group and an audience group, taking turns observing and performing.

Extending the Concept

Story boxes are great ways to extend your lesson plans. After examining the obvious incarnation of a book into a box, try taking it to the next level. Look at ways to pull out more abstract concepts and deeper exploration of the literature. Consider the different learning styles in your classroom...can a story box engage a child's thinking in a new way? How might sensory experiences, for example textures or smells, be incorporated in the story box?

Story Box-Character Exploration

***Honk!: The Story of a Prima Swanerina* by Elizabeth Duncan Edwards**

Materials:

- Mimi's Box decorated to represent the character
- Things Mimi would like: ballet shoes, classical music CD
- Picture of a ballet dancer
- A feather

Procedure:

Mimi's Box, based on ***Honk!: The Story of a Prima Swanerina*** by Pamela Duncan Edwards, is a lesson on character development and a great way to extend the text.

This is Mimi's own box! She collected a few very important things inside. What do you think she might have put inside? What do you think Mimi likes? Why do you think so?

Explore the props inside the box. Play Mimi's music.

- *How does this music make you feel?*
- *How would you move to Mimi's music?*
- *How do you think Mimi would dance to this music?*
- *Can you make the same shape as the picture of the dancer?*
- *Can you walk on your tip toes like the dancer?*
- *Mimi left us a feather... can you float like a feather?*

Leave the box out for the children to continue to explore. Can they find/draw/add to the box things they think Mimi might like? The items in the box helped the children bring the character to life and off the page, sparking their imaginations, connecting with the character, and keeping them engaged with the literature.

Themed boxes work well as tools to support your already existing curriculum.

- Collect fall items from the playground
- Nature walk and collect objects to add to a spring box
- Create a new story with the characters and props inside a box, challenging the students to develop their own tale.
- Explore movement and create a phrase based on objects you've collected.
 - *Can you float to the ground like the leaves?*
 - *Who can make their bodies small and round like the acorn?*
 - *How would your acorn move?*
 - Develop a dance based on your box of gathered objects.

Literacy Connections

Early Childhood domains addressed in this workshop include:

Cognitive skills: Learning through active participation, individual learning styles, using imagination to extend learning and critical thinking,

Language and Literacy: Asking and answering questions, associating symbols with words and ideas, storytelling, prediction, following directions, and sequencing and recall.

Motor/Physical: Awareness of body in space, moving while holding objects, self-regulation, and small and large muscle coordination.

Age-appropriate developmental concepts:

Body awareness

Vocabulary development and descriptive word usage to extend language

Force and energy quality

Speed and tempo

Making predictions

Spatial relationships (under, over, beside, next to)

Steady Beat

Common Core Standards

Literacy Standards:

Standard K.RL.2

With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details.

Standard K.W.8

With guidance and support from adults, recall information from experiences or gather information from provided sources to answer a question.

Great Books for Story Boxes

Drama Boxes

Axtell, David. We're Going on a Lion Hunt. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2007.

Carle, Eric. The Very Busy Spider. New York: Philomel Books, 1989.

Colandro, Lucille. There was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Bat! New York: Scholastic Books, 2002.

Fleming, Denise. Lunch. New York: Scholastic Trade, 1993.

Kimmel, Eric A. Anansi and the Moss-Covered Rock. New York: Holiday House, 1988.

Lionni, Leo. Swimmy. New York: Dragonfly Books, 1973.

*Moving while holding objects, sequencing and recall, storytelling, dramatic play, rhythm, steady beat; addressing visual/spatial, musical and kinesthetic learning styles.

Dance and Movement Boxes

Carle, Eric. Little Cloud. New York: Puffin Books, 1996.

Ehlert, Lois. Waiting for Wings. Orlando: Harcourt, 2001.

Jenkins, Steve and Robin Page. Move! Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Partridge, Elizabeth. Moon Glowing. New York: Dutton Children's Books, 2002.

Wood, Audrey. Quick as a Cricket. Swindon, England: Child's Play International, 1997.

*Energy quality, body awareness, speed and tempo, spatial awareness, gross motor skills, sequencing and recall; addressing kinesthetic, visual and musical learning styles.

Extending the Concept

Cain, Janan. The Way I Feel. New York: Scholastic, 2001

Edwards, Elizabeth Duncan. Honk!: The Story of a Prima Swanerina. New York: Hyperion Books, 1998.

Ehlert, Lois. Growing Vegetable Soup. San Diego: Harcourt, 1987.

Frasier, Debra. Out of the Ocean. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998.

Willems, Mo. Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus. New York, Hyperion Books for Children, 2003.

*Making predictions, sorting and categorizing, extending the concept, social/emotional development, character development; addressing visual/spatial, musical, and kinesthetic learning styles.

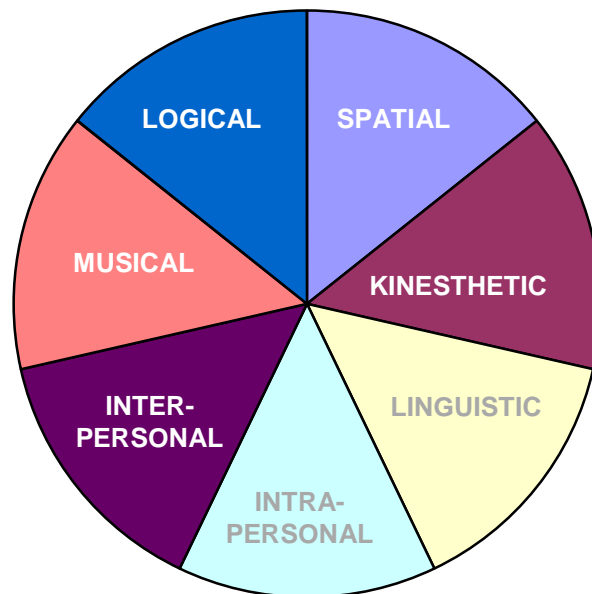
Multi-Sensory Learning

Story boxes are a great way to engage young learners in a multi-sensory learning experience. The term “multi-sensory” is used to describe any activity that uses two or more sensory systems at the same time to take in information.

Lawrence Baines, author of Teacher’s Guide to Multisensory Learning describes the benefits of multi-sensory experiences by saying, “*When students invoke more than one sense, simultaneously or over a period of time, they tend to interact with the material more intensely and thereby retain what they have learned for longer periods of time.*”

Studies in the way we learn have been happening for decades. Leading researcher Howard Gardner coined the theory of multiple intelligences in his 1983 book, “*Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences.*”

Gardner suggests that we all possess varying levels of different types of intelligence.



When using a story box to enhance literature, ask yourself how you can also use the theory of multiple intelligences to enliven your lessons.

Group Worksheet

As a group, select a story box and corresponding book. Explore the items inside your box.

Using the questions below as a guide, create a short creative experience based on your book. Use the story box and props provided, or talk us through your own adaption and story box idea. Be prepared to present/teach your experience.

Within your group, use the book and story box you have selected to address the following questions:

1. At first look, does this book/box inspire:

- A dance experience?
- Interactive storytelling?
- Dramatic role-playing scenario?

2. List the main characters and identifying features/characteristics of each:

-
-
-

3. Identify key verbs and action words from the story/characters:

-
-
-
-

4. From the answers to the above questions, how can children translate the story characters or elements into movement?

-
-
-

Bibliography/Works Cited

Baines, Lawrence. Teachers Guide to Multi-Sensory Learning: Improving Literacy by Engaging the Senses. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2008.

Gardner, Howard. Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligence. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1993.

Online Resources for Workshop Materials

We're delighted to provide you with some additional online resources to support the techniques you learned with Amanda.

An **iTunes playlist** has been created of all the music referenced in Amanda's handout. The iTunes playlist is:

<http://tinyurl.com/cyklss>

[PLEASE NOTE: You won't be able to view this list unless you've downloaded iTunes and created a (free) account.]

A "**bookshelf**" for Amanda's workshop has been created (containing all the books referenced in her handout) on **GoodReads.com**. GoodReads is a social book-sharing and review site where we are building dynamic book lists for educators' reference. If you click on a book in the list, it will show you several links to sites where you can purchase that book if you wish. You may find the shelf at:

<http://tinyurl.com/cunxjy>

Also, several prior workshop participants have requested photos of Amanda's story boxes to help refresh their memories – and to inspire ideas for new story boxes of their own. We listened and have created a whole gallery of story box photos on a Flickr account, which can be viewed at:

<http://tinyurl.com/d96qyu>

We welcome your feedback on all of these extra resources, as we continue to explore ways to add value to Wolf Trap professional development experiences. If you have trouble using any of these websites, please feel free to contact the Education Department at education@wolftrap.org or at 703-255-1933. Thank you for attending the Story Boxes Professional Development Workshop, and we hope to see you again at future Wolf Trap workshops and events!

Presenter's Biography

Amanda Layton has been a Wolf Trap Teaching Artist for three years, having achieved Master Teaching Artist status in 2008. Teaching dance in Northern Virginia for the past ten years, Amanda's credits include choreographer for the Reston Community Center's *Young Actors' Theatre* program, teaching artist with Falls Church's *Creative Cauldron*, assistant director of the NoVa Center for Dance and Theater, and director of a youth modern dance company known now as *GroundShare Arts Alliance*. This youth company was founded to cultivate the potential of young performers as artists and collaborators in the creative process, while providing professional-level performance experiences.

Amanda holds a BFA in Dance and a BA degree in Integrated Studies with a specialization in Dance Therapy from George Mason University. While at GMU, Amanda traveled to Santiago, Cuba to perform with the Afro-Cuban company, *Cutumba Ballet Folklorica*. After graduation, she co-founded a modern dance company, *Anomosmotion*. In September, with the support of friends and students, Amanda began her latest venture...co-founding the creative arts collaborative, *Reston Artistree*. *Artistree* offers a community for artist of all disciplines to teach, explore and create.

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Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts leverages the power of the performing arts to provide early childhood educators with high-quality professional development to create joyful, active learning experiences for young children.

Through professional Teaching Artists, Wolf Trap Institute delivers customized, in-class professional development to early childhood educators using proven, arts-based strategies that reach across curricula and support development in key areas like language, literacy, math, science, and social-emotional skills. Wolf Trap Institute works through a nationwide network of affiliate organizations and partners that together impact nearly 100,000 children, educators, and families each year.

Wolf Trap Institute is the flagship education program of Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization that produces and presents a full range of performance and education programs in the Greater Washington, DC area and nationally.

The Wolf Trap Institute offers a variety of services including:

Classroom Residencies that bring professional performing artists – musicians, dancers, actors, or puppeteers trained in the Institute model as Wolf Trap Teaching Artists – into early childhood classrooms to provide innovative and effective arts-integrated strategies that align with curriculum objectives and support children’s development.

Professional Development Workshops for teachers are designed to provide age-appropriate performing arts strategies that are linked to early childhood curricular learning outcomes.

Family Involvement Workshops offer parents and caregivers of young children an introduction to performing arts activities that can be employed at home, in the car, and even in line at the grocery store.

For more information about the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, please visit: wolftrap.org/Education.aspx, or call 703.255.1933 or 1.800.404.8461.

Join education.wolftrap.org, Wolf Trap’s free online resource for educators featuring the best in early childhood arts education.