

# A Simplified Guide to Storytelling for Students of All Ages

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*Author of*

**The Total Physical Response in the First Year**  
English, Spanish or French.

I would like to share with you my successful experience with storytelling. To illustrate, I am using the very first story called the *Hungry Dog* that appears in the marvelous books called **TPR Storytelling** by Todd McKay. The pattern will also work for Blaine Ray's **Look, I Can Talk** books or stories that you create yourself.

## Step 1

TPR the words that will appear in the *Hungry Dog* story. Here is a simple TPR pattern to help your students internalize the story's vocabulary fast, without stress and with long-term retention:

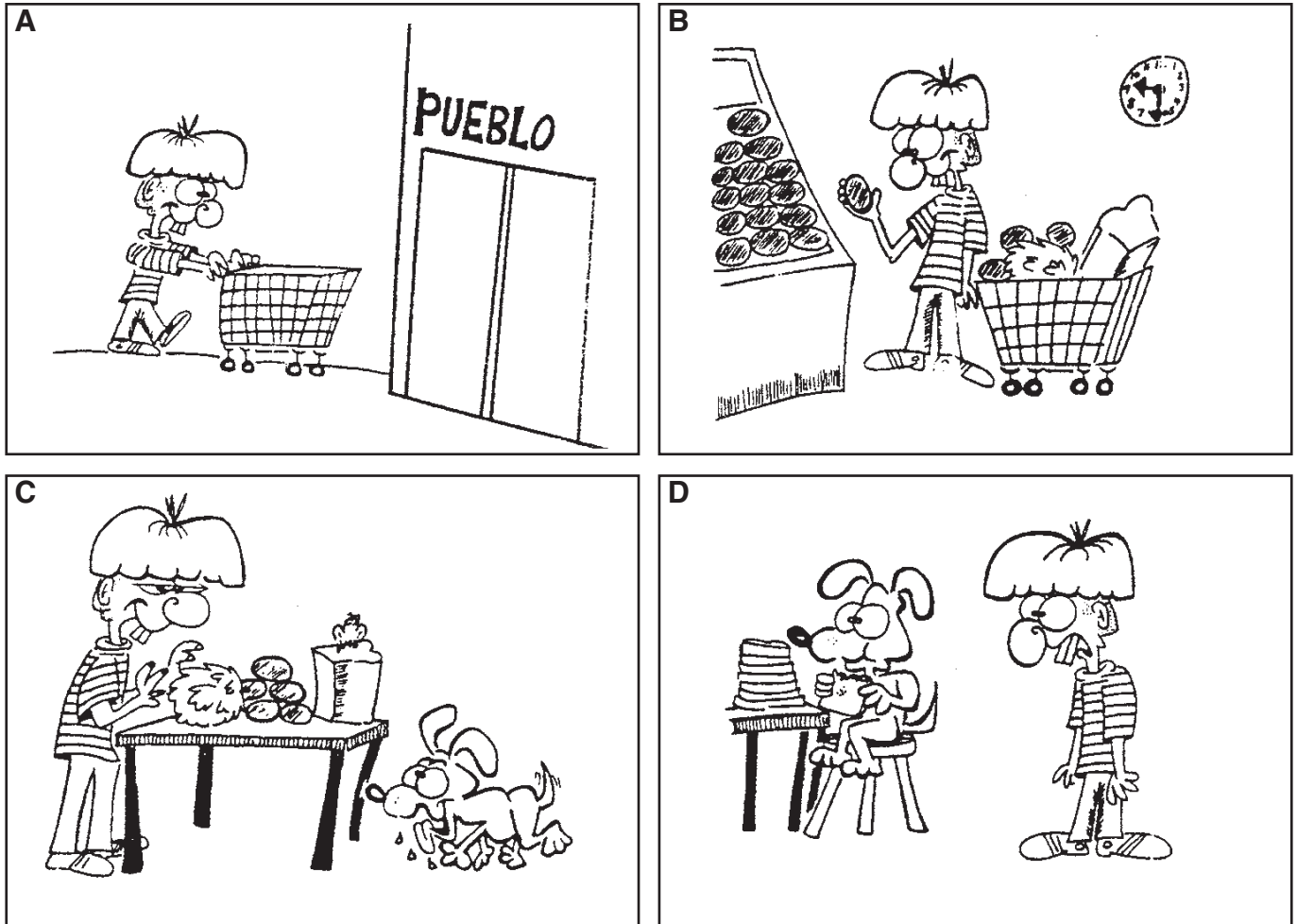
- |   |   |    |   |
|---|---|----|---|
| 1 | Stand up.   | 7  | Point to the salad.<br>Pick up the salad.<br>Put down the salad.              |
| 2 | Sit down.   |    |   |
| 3 | Point to the door.<br>Go to the door.   | 8  | Point to the bread.<br>Pick up a piece of bread<br>Put down a piece of bread. |
| 4 | Point to the table.<br>Go to the table.   | 9  | Turn and look at the door.<br>Point to the door.<br>Run to the door.          |
| 5 | Point to a piece of paper.<br>Pick up the piece of paper.<br>Put down the piece of paper. | 10 | Turn and look at the dog.<br>Point to the dog.<br>Run to the dog.             |
| 6 | Point to a potato.<br>Pick up the potato.<br>Put down the potato.                         | 11 | Turn and look at the table.<br>Run to the table.                              |

*Footnote 1:* For a solid understanding of how TPR works, I recommend that you read James J. Asher's **Learning Another Language Through Actions** and Ramiro Garcia's **Instructor's Notebook: How to apply TPR for best results**. It is helpful also to view the demonstration videos described at the end of this article and show one of them to your students at the very first meeting of the class.

## Step 2

Now your students, of all ages including adults, are ready to hear you tell a short story about the *Hungry Dog* pointing to each picture below as you talk.

I recommend that you do not read the story but tell the story in a conversational tone as you look and point to each picture. It is not necessary that you tell the story exactly as it appears in the book. What matters is that the story sounds natural. Remember, you are telling the story, not reading it.



Here is my version of the story:

Eugene pushes a shopping cart into the supermarket, Pueblo. He looks at a potato and puts it into his shopping cart. It is 9:30 in the morning. When he gets home, he puts everything on the kitchen table. The dog comes running to the table. Eugene is shocked because the dog sits on a stool and eats a piece of bread.

Notice that in the TPR experience, your students have not heard some of the words in the story such as “shopping cart,” “supermarket,” “9:30 in the morning,” “kitchen,” or “stool.” It is OK because they have enough vocabulary together with the picture to discern the meaning.

*Footnote 2:* Just to show you that the possibilities are endless, here are other details of the story I could have used: Eugene has a funny haircut. He has big eyes and is wearing a striped shirt. He is pushing a shopping cart into the supermarket.

### Step 3

Now you have some interesting options. One possibility is to tell the story a second time, this time adding some gestures (See McKay's **Teacher's Guidebook** for a list of gestures or order his demonstration video by going to [www.tpr-world.com](http://www.tpr-world.com))

Another possibility is to dramatize the story with your students, each of whom take a different role. You narrate the story and your students act out their parts.

Still another possibility is to give a simple true-false test to assess understanding such as:

1. The boy's name is Eugene.
2. He is going into a drug store.
3. He puts a potato into his shopping cart.
4. He puts everything on the kitchen table.
5. His dog's name is Fido.

Yet another possibility is to describe each frame, but out of sequence. The student's task is to decide which frame you are describing: A, B, C, or D.

Another option is this: Tell the story again, but leave out a word that the student must fill in. Select a student whose hand is up. Example:

1. The boy's name is \_\_\_\_\_
2. He is going to the \_\_\_\_\_
3. He buys \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
4. When he returns home, he puts everything on \_\_\_\_\_
5. When he returns home, the \_\_\_\_\_ runs to greet him.

### Step 4

Now your students have a chance to talk. Looking at the four-panel pictures on a transparency or in their book, ask your students to sit in pairs and tell the story to each other while looking at the pictures for guidance.

### Step 5

Ask for volunteers who are willing to stand up and tell the story to the class. Select a student whose hand is up. Some students will be ready and eager; others are not yet ready, but given more time, eventually everyone will feel comfortable telling the story.

## Step 6

Now for some fun and creativity from your students. In McKay's books, there are four empty panels in the section called **Your Version**. Ask your students to draw their version of the story with as many changes as they wish. They can use stick figures if they want to. McKay recommends you play Baroque or Mozart music while they draw. This seems to help them concentrate and be quiet while they draw.

I recommend that you circulate and fill in any new vocabulary that students would like to use in their stories but have not yet experienced.

Finally, each of your students gets a chance to describe their version of the story. Get ready for entertainment that no professional comedy writer could dream up.

## Step 7

Your students are ready successfully to do the exercises in their books: Fill-in and True-False

## Step 8

The entire class writes another version of the story with each student contributing a sentence. As each student utters a sentence in the target language, you write it on the chalkboard and your students follow along by writing in their notebooks. Notice that without an announcement or fuss, we have made a quiet, graceful transition into reading and writing. I would recommend that you not mention reading and writing. If you do, you now alarm the student's left brain with, "Oh, oh! This is something new. I don't know how to read and write in Spanish. This will probably be difficult. I can't do it!"

Another option here is to have each student draw, in four empty frames, the collective version of the story that the class created. Collect the stories drawn and written by each student. Take them home and study them to find the best versions.

In the next meeting, show the class some of the best versions created by their classmates. Read them and praise their efforts. You may want to return one story to the author and ask the student to read aloud his or her version. Continue doing this. Do not return all the stories at once.

## Step 9

It is test time. One option is to select a test from Todd McKay's **TPR Storytelling Test Packet** or from Blaine Ray's **Teacher's Guidebook for Look, I Can Talk**.

Another option: You create a simple story from the vocabulary your students have now acquired. In four empty panels, ask your students to draw a picture in each frame to illustrate each part of the story.

There you have all the secrets for success that I have discovered. If you have found some tips and tricks that I missed about storytelling, please share them with me by e-mail. I appreciate it. I welcome your comments and suggestions.

*Editor's note—*

### **Risks of teaching to the left brain**

Most traditional approaches to language learning start on the left side of the brain by asking students to speak on cue in the very first meeting of the class with a request such as, "Listen and repeat after me." After all, the language is transparent to the teacher. It seems reasonable that it will also be transparent to the student if they only, "Pay attention. Listen and repeat after me."

The left brain strategy does not work. Eventually, 95 percent of the students lose interest. Asking students, especially beginners, to produce utterances in an alien language on cue is “brain antagonistic” instruction with high stress, slow-motion learning word-by-word, and resistance to storing the material in memory. All of our research shows that it takes a special preparation on the right side of the brain with TPR to get your students ready for speaking, reading and writing.

Here is another stressful left brain approach to learning: Asking students to **memorize** anything will require multiple trials because the left brain does not like novelty if there is any risk of harm or if the information is perceived as a lie. For example, if the instructor asserts that “This is a **reshal**; this is a **murra**; and this is a **taula**,” the left brain erases that strange vocabulary in the alien language almost before students stand to leave the class. The reason: The student’s left brain concludes: “Only one person in this room believes those assertions to be true; thirty other people know that ‘This is a man, this is a woman and that is a table.’”

The left brain is a gatekeeper to keep us safe and sane by doing what is familiar. “Better to be safe than sorry.” “Stick with the tried and the true.” There is safety in being a “creature of habit.” Since the mission of “school” is to change people, and teachers are agents of the school, it is not surprising that the student’s left brain is suspicious and skeptical.

To insure success with anything novel such as new vocabulary or a new grammatical structure, I recommend playing to the right brain so that your students and you can enjoy “brain compatible” instruction with powerful techniques such as TPR followed by storytelling, games, skits, and songs. For full details of the amazing left and right brain, see James J. Asher’s books listed below and on the following pages.

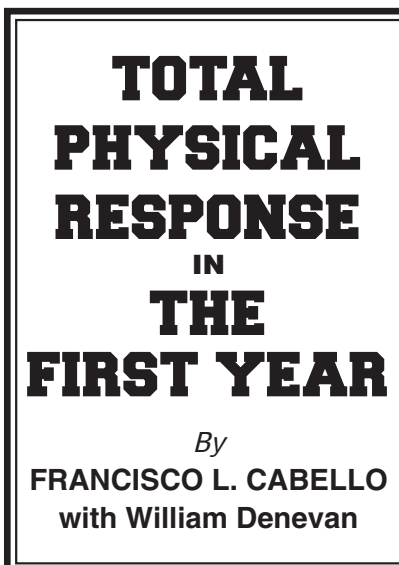
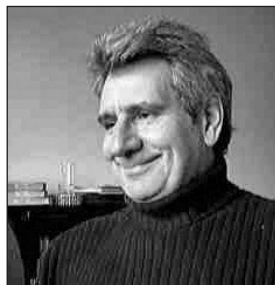
### Recommended follow-up reading

- Asher, James J. (2003). **Learning Another Language Through Actions** (6th edition). Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Asher, James J. (2002). **Brainswitching: Learning on the right side of the brain**. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Asher, James J. (2000). **The Super School: Teaching on the right side of the brain**. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Cabello, Francisco (2004). **TPR in First Year English**. (Also available in Spanish and French). Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Christopherson, Joan. (2005). **A Language Classroom That Works for High-Speed Learning!** Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Garcia, Ramiro. (2001). **Instructor’s Notebook: How to apply TPR for best results** (4th edition). Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- McKay, Todd. (2004). **TPR Storytelling** (Available in English, Spanish or French). Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Ray, Blaine. (2005). **Look, I Can Talk** series (Available in English, Spanish, French or German). Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Schessler, Eric. (1999). **English Grammar through Actions: How to TPR 50 grammatical features in English**. (Also available in Spanish or French). Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Seely, Contee and Elizabeth Romijn. (2002) **TPR is More than Commands — At All Levels**. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Silver, Stephen. (2003). **Listen and Perform** series (Available in English, Spanish or French). Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.
- Silver, Stephen. (1986). **The Command Book: How to TPR 2,000 vocabulary items in any language**. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, Inc.

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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Francisco Cabello'.

Francisco Cabello, Ph.D.

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Research published in the International Review of Applied Linguistics, Volume III/4, 1965. "The Strategy of the Total Physical Response: An Application to Learning Japanese."

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Research published in The Modern Language Journal, Vol. LVIII, No. 1-2, Jan-Feb 1974. "Learning A Second Language Through Commands: The Second field Test."

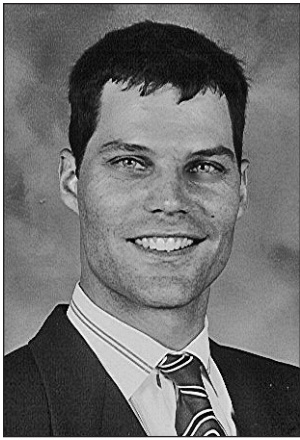
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Research published in The Modern Language Journal, Vol. LVI, No. 3, March, 1972. "Children's First Language as a Model for Second Language Learning."

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