

# Children at the Well

## TIPS

- ❖ Placing the acquiring of storytelling skills “up-front” as the top priority is essential. This is foremost a storytelling project that is being done with an interfaith group, not an interfaith group that happens to be doing storytelling. The students were drawn to the project by their desire to learn the art of telling. They came to know, understand and appreciate each other (and their traditions) by way of the coaching and the stories.
- ❖ Sixth to ninth grade was a good age range for recruiting students. They are not yet involved in jobs, college applications, etc., yet have sufficient maturity and poise. This year, the coaches are thinking of calling upon returning tenth graders to assist and mentor the younger students.
- ❖ Having students apply to the project by writing letters gave us some good insights into them and firmed up their commitment to the project.
- ❖ Recruiting more students than we needed turned out well. We learned we need to expect that some will not follow through on their desire to participate.
- ❖ We found that choosing stories to share with an interfaith audience requires special considerations. Please see Storycoaching: “Guidelines for sharing stories with people of other faiths “
- ❖ Having storycoaches who were highly experienced in coaching youth tellers was a BIG plus!
- ❖ Using 4-way telephone conferencing to do our planning worked really well. We spoke once a week (1-1/2 hours) for several weeks while running the project.
- ❖ Sunday afternoon worked well as a time slot for coaching. We could literally find no other day or time for everyone to get together. We were fortunate to have the adults in the project be willing to commit to this weekend time.
- ❖ Gaps of several weeks between coaching sessions were problematic. We found that it’s important to plan to have sessions on consecutive weeks, whenever possible, to keep the momentum going.

- ❖ E-mailing students between coaching sessions was helpful. Many questions were answered, coaching advice was given in this manner, and a handy “paper trail” was formed. Just keep notes brief and to the point, and remember to ask for a quick email reply to indicate the message was received and read. If no reply email appears, a follow-up phone call will be necessary. Tell students and parents to expect a note between each session. And then be prepared to follow up and make sure everyone has the information they need.
- ❖ Some of our parents were from other countries, and were hesitant about their skills in English. Especially for them, but for all concerned, it’s important to keep communications clear and to the point, and to have things well planned from the outset. We had some wonderful assistance from an administrator in the Islamic school who could fill us in on family situations when needed. This kind of support can be invaluable. Keep in mind that it may be necessary to present any information you want to get across to the families several times, rather than just once. When in doubt, check to see if it’s been received.
- ❖ Making sure pictures are taken every step of the way is important. We were left wishing we had done more in this regard. We especially wished we had taken several really good group shots. If a photo-journalist comes to the sessions or performance, have a person assigned to them to ensure they are aware of your wishes. We did not (we were too busy with getting the performance underway) and we “lost out” on having a group picture in the paper.
- ❖ Publicity requires attention very early on in the project; contact newspapers (ask for articles, free ads for the performance, pictures), radio, TV etc. Having personal contact with someone in your local media can help.
- ❖ Getting organizations to sponsor the project is important. You especially want to approach the students’ schools and/or religious programs. In addition, consider local interfaith organizations, local storytelling groups, and the community at large. Ask for support, financial contributions if they are able, and to publicize with their membership. Consider whether the children can tell at some event the helping organizations may be running; Think about whether any of them can serve as a ready-made audience for rehearsals or for the main performance.
- ❖ Involving parents in the project makes a difference. The directors should plan to meet with parents (in a different room) while the first coaching session is taking place to

provide information, answer questions, and suggest ways that they can help (car pooling, taking pictures, choosing stories, listening uncritically to stories practiced at home, etc.) Although we didn't initially plan for this, we ended up doing it spontaneously, and quickly realized how valuable it was. We'll be sure to plan for it next time, to cover more bases and reach more parents.

- ❖ Giving parents the option to story share with each other while their children are being coached was a great idea! Parents met (in another room) several times and used Elisa Pearmain's [Doorway to the Soul: 52 Wisdom Tales from around the world](#) to share. We recruited a few parents to lead off the discussions. It was informal, interesting and fun. It was wonderful to see the stories "beget" stories in these sessions. Some simple snacks helped people feel welcome. Parents also appreciated being invited to the four visits by adults who shared on the role of story in their traditions. Many of them came.
- ❖ Recruiting others to help with all the components of the performance (programs, pot luck supper, etc.) is helpful. A service organization from the church at which our event was held took care of setting-up, warming, serving, clean-up). This was a wonderful bonus!
- ❖ Video or audio taping the program's a great idea. We had a sound person who spontaneously offered to do this. We gave the CDs to the students as gifts and are now using them for fundraising. Video would be great if it can be done unobtrusively. We have not decided whether to try this next time.
- ❖ Our teacher workshops were valuable in several ways. The teachers who nominated our students turned out to have a keen interest and storytelling skills of their own. Having the teachers share their storytelling gifts with each other was special. Many had favorite ways of telling, using stories in their work, and we loved hearing from each other. (See teacher workshop section for more information)
- ❖ Two major pieces of advice are mentioned by both Mary and Marni in their final reports:
  - 1) Providing the students with an opportunity to socialize and to bond with each other early on in the project, and
  - 2) Refining our methods of helping them to choose their stories (using one session to focus solely on this) so that serious coaching can begin sooner.