
The Workshops

In each of their richly designed workshops, Janice Del Negro and Susan Klein managed to combine aspects of the practice, theory, sources, and culture of storytelling. The title of Del Negro's session, "Storycrafting: Retelling Traditional Tales," reflects only part of what she encompassed in her group session, which provided information on story structure, story ownership, the ethics of story "adoption," and issues of public domain and copyright. She also conveyed, via demonstration and group participation, some strategies for retelling folk tales and launched participants into an exercise of cooperative adaptation.

Del Negro's favorite slogan for novices is KISS, "Keep it simple, Stupid!"—i.e., when in doubt, keep your story short, concrete, and specific. She reviewed the typical compression of folktales, including a quickly introduced initial incident and selective set of characters, through a logical sequence of events with climax and efficient conclusion (no lingering on the wrap-up). Several of the groups that split up to shape their own versions of an urban legend came up with some splendidly bone-chilling tales situated in the Allerton Conference setting!

Klein's workshop, "Young Adults, Storytelling, and Rites of Passage," offered a tough-minded, open-hearted approach to teenage audiences. The key to telling stories to young adults is the attitude you bring with you, with emphasis on fearless affection, confidence, and a sense of humor. You can recognize and defuse potential troublemakers by engaging them and making strategic alliances before beginning the story. Her response to one potentially hostile challenge, "You better be good, b . . .," was quick, to the point, and non-judgmental: "Count on it." Carry yourself as if you take no prisoners and project your voice accordingly, without forgetting that loving adolescents lessens fear of them.

In addition to autobiographical stories, Klein told rite-of-passage folktales such as "Wood-Ash Stars" (included on her tape *Wisdom's Tribute*)

that focused on the subtle metamorphosis of adolescents from child to adult. For teenagers, story is “soul work, that hot fiery little thing that’s aching for attention.” Her view of the audience as co-creator (imaginatively, not literally; teens are embarrassed to participate in front of their peers) and her advice to get up and then get out of the story’s way served to de-emphasize the storyteller’s self-concern.

Both Klein and Del Negro reiterated the importance of including nothing that doesn’t move the story forward—including the storyteller’s ego. “It’s not about you, it’s about the story.” And it’s story that offers children, teenagers, and adults transformative power.

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