

Let Me Help You

Sell Your Homework

12-Week Course of Study:

*24 Ways to Write
Stories for Kids*

Lesson 6

**BIBLE
PLANT AND PICK UP**

By Professor Dick Bohrer, M.Sc., M.A.

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Bible-related Stories

Talk about walking on thin ice! He who writes stories drawn from Scripture must tread
LIGHTLY.

We sing about finding “joy, real joy, wonderful joy” by letting Jesus come into our heart and then we write ponderous prose for our little ones—if we write for them at all. Bible stories retold should capture the wonder, the joy that our Father God intended when He gave them to us.

Amy Carmichael has buried two sentences in her book, GOLD CORD, (I've been reading a chapter each morning to make myself tender for the things of God). Those sentences speak of this:

I search for words
Like jewels, or stars,
Or flowers,
But I cannot find them.
I wish I could,
For this book may fall
Into the hands of someone

Who has been hindered
From caring to know Him
By the dull and formal trapping
Which our dull and formal thoughts
Have laid upon Him—
Strange disguise
For such a radiance.

Viewpoint is so important in retelling Bible stories. Does it do violence to the Word of God to tell Jacob's story from Jacob's point of view? Or Rachel's? Or Rebecca's? Or Laban's?

God tells Jacob's story from the viewpoint of an ever-present Friend who sees all and knows all.

But we must be so careful in giving only what the Bible gives. Don't embellish His Word. Be true in your telling and don't create incidents that were never there. Invent only ones that probably were.

Some writers have had the Lord Jesus as a child turning stones into bluebirds. Don't! Ever!

Do tell your story excitedly. Your enthusiasm will show through the

words you choose. Write simply but don't "write down," assuming that little ones are stupid and need EVERYTHING explained. You can tell this chronologically or start at some exciting point and use the flashback technique to give needed information that may have occurred earlier.

You could begin Jacob's story as he is selecting a stone for his pillow in the dark splendor of a Middle Eastern night. He is bone weary from running, and at this point you can weave in why.

Come back quickly and move on or you may find your audience has moved on. Children want NOW books that help them relive what happened right this very moment NOW.

Write with love—love for children and love for God's Word. And pray that the Lord will help that love to show through.

The following story comes from the first few verses of Judges 1. Not only do most Christians overlook Judges as a book but they consider the incidents of Judges merely minor historical glitches in the history of an ancient people.

King Adoni-Bezek lived. He terrorized Palestine worse than Genghis Khan. He stormed palaces and captured kings.

Read my "King-Spoiler," a chapter of a book in progress I'm writing. I used the "problem and solution" structure we'll get to in Lesson Seven.

KING-SPOILER

(Unusual hook to attract interest)

"Hot mud on a pair, Cookie," the butler called to me from the doorway. He thought he was so cute. Why couldn't he just say that His Majesty wanted me to make him more gravy on two biscuits instead of being so silly.

(Tell the problem)

Today was no day to be silly. His Majesty was in conference trying to decide what to do with all the kings he'd captured his last trip out. He goes out every so often and fights battles everywhere.

(Give background)

He has this habit of bringing the kings he captures back to the palace. If he'd only put them in the prison house, I wouldn't have to cook specially for them. But when he puts them right under his nose in the palace dining room—well, I can't just give them slops!

(More identity)

Our king's name is Adoni-Bezek. He's king of Jerusalem. The butler calls him "Had-Any-Bees-Wax" out here in the kitchen. He wouldn't dare call him that to his face. He'd get his head chopped off.

(Restate the problem)

Well, let me tell you what's going on today. Like I said, Beez is in conference. He has to decide what to do with all those kings. Why, he's got seventy of them hanging around now.

Of course, they're all wondering what he's going to do with them—and I've got to know, too. After all, I've got to plan the menus around here and I've got to know how many mouths I'm going to have to feed.

(Pick up the action)

The butler keeps coming out to get more food. The king is a nibbler. Whenever he has to think, he has to eat. This way I keep up on the news, too.

I asked the butler, "What's he thinking now?"

"Oh, he's a mean one, old Beez is," he said.

"Mean? How mean?"

(Tell how they're trying to solve the problem)

"I found out why he doesn't want to keep those kings in prison."

"Why?"

"He wants to use them as ornaments around the palace so all his other enemies will know how great he is. They'll be all the more afraid of him." He peeled an orange as he talked.

"Why would anyone be afraid of ornaments?" I asked him.

"Well, Cookie, he—"

"Don't call me Cookie!" I said sharply.

"Of course you're Cookie," he said. "You're the cook, ain't you?"

"Go on," I said with a sigh. I knew he'd never change. "What's he going to do then?"

"He wants to shame them. He's

trying to think of a way to spoil their honor so that no one will ever want them for kings again."

(Hero's suggestions—7 attempts to solve the problem: #1)

"Well, why doesn't he just call them funny names? You know—like Pie Face and Mule Ears and—"

"Naw," the butler said, "he doesn't just want to make fun of them. He wants them to suffer."

"Why suffer?"

"Well, they're prisoners, ain't they?" he said. "Oh, oh, there's the bell. He's ringing for me. Got any more fruit? He wants some fruit."

I gave him a bowl of oranges to take in and then I sat down to think. How could our king spoil the honor of his prisoners and still keep them for ornaments in the palace?

I went to the door and listened to what was going on out in the dining room. The king and his advisers were all in there talking. I could tell they weren't getting anywhere.

I went back into my kitchen. Now what would I do if I were Adoni-Bezek, I said to myself.

I stirred my gravy. I turned the roast around over my fire and then I got out my knife and a piece of cloth. I had onions to peel, and I knew I'd have to wipe my eyes. Sometimes, when it gets too bad, I bite the cloth. That seems to help, too.

"What could he do?" I mumbled through my tears.

(#2)

“If he cut off their heads, they’d be dead and their suffering would be over. And then Beez would send all of us out to dig holes to bury them in. And I’d have to make up lunch baskets for all of the diggers.”

I piled the onions I’d peeled in a big dish.

(#3)

“If he put out their eyes,” I said with a shudder, “they’d be blind and someone else would have to lead them around. That would be too much work for the palace servants.”

I scooped the peelings into a bucket and got out some more onions.

(#4)

He could cut off their ears. That would make them suffer, and they’d end up looking silly.

“That’s it!” I said out loud.

“What’s it?” the butler said, coming up behind me.

“I’ve got the answer,” I said. “Old Beez could cut off their ears. They’d look silly and they couldn’t hear so well.”

“He’s already thought of that,” butler said. “He doesn’t think that would be much punishment for enemies.”

(#5)

“Then let him cut out their

tongues!”

“Naw. Then he wouldn’t have the pleasure of hearing them moan and groan about their miseries.”

(#6)

“Cut off their hands.”

“Who’d feed them?”

(#7)

“Cut off their feet.”

“Who’d carry them around?”:

I shook my head. It was too big a thing for me.

“Oh, oh, there’s the bell.” He scooted out the door. He was back in a minute.

“He’s thought of the answer and he wants a big feast cooked up to help him celebrate,” he said.

My eyes grew wide. “What’s he gonna do?”

(Solution)

Butler leaned close to me to talk softly in my ear. “He’s going to cut off their thumbs and their big toes.”

(Reaction)

“Is that all?”

“It’s enough,” the butler said. “When they eat, they’ll have to shovel the food into their mouths because they’ll have no thumb to help them pick it up. They’ll have to bend over and eat like dogs do.”

“But why the toes?”

“Then they won’t be able to get up and walk. You can’t walk with your

big toes cut off. They'll crawl around under his table more like dogs than ever."

I smiled.

"Pretty clever," I said. "Who wants a dog for a king? Old Beez is pretty clever."

(Sudden unexpected threat #1)

"Old Who?"

A big sound came roaring from the doorway. His Majesty was standing there listening to us talk. I know I turned white.

"Oh, yes, sir. I mean, no, sir. Right away, sir. Coming up, sir." I felt my head. It was still on my shoulders, but I didn't know for how long.

But the butler put a drumstick in Beez's hand, and he turned back into the dining room without another word.

"Whew!" I said to butler. "That was close."

Well, they did just that. They cut off the big toes and the thumbs of all those kings. It was hilarious to see those once-royal monarchs crawling around under the tables on their knees.

They had to eat off the floor because they couldn't pick their food up without thumbs. We all nearly died laughing.

(Sudden unexpected threat #2)

And then we heard a trumpet sound alarm!

We flew to the windows and

looked out.

Soldiers were running everywhere. I called out to one and asked him what was going on.

"The Israelites are coming!" He shouted back.

I turned and sagged down to the floor. All the starch had gone out of me. The Israelites!

We'd heard about how they crossed the Red Sea. But that was forty years ago. Then, a few weeks back, they cropped up again down-country by the Jordan River. There are millions of them!

They crossed the river and destroyed Jericho and Ai and . . . and now they're HERE!

I looked around the hall. His Majesty was gone and so were all his attendants. Even butler was gone—gone out to fight against those Israelites.

The only ones left with me were the spoiled kings who crowded around me, wanting to know my news.

None of them could stand up to look out the window.

I had to tell them.

(10 more unexpected results)
(#3, 4, 5, 6, 7)

It wasn't long until it was all over. Those Israelites can really fight! They killed ten thousand of our troops.

They caught old Bees Wax and his band of attendants and brought him

and the ones they didn't kill back here to Jerusalem—back to *our* royal city—and they captured it.

Our soldiers just melted away like butter under a hot knife.

(#8, 9)

They broke into the palace and found all the kings and me.

They decided not to kill me when they found out I was the royal cook. They wanted me to cook for them.

(#10, 11)

But that Adoni-Bezek! They cut off his thumbs and his big toes just like he'd done to the kings he'd captured.

Well, he didn't last long. He died here in Jerusalem. Starved, probably.

Too proud to eat like a dog, I guess.

(#12)

And me? I'm out of a job. I couldn't learn to cook kosher.

Say, if you ever hear of someone who'd like some "hot mud on a pair," why, you just let me know.

Okay?

###

Let's look at the King James Version text from which this story was "taken."

Judges 1:1-8:

1. Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, Who

shall go up for us against the Canaanites first, to fight against them?

2. And the LORD said, Judah shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand.

3. And Judah said unto Simeon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I likewise will go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him.

4. And Judah went up; and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand: and they slew of them in Bezek ten thousand men.

5. And they found Adoni-bezek in Bezek: and they fought against him, and they slew the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

6. But Adoni-Bezek fled; and they pursued after him, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his great toes.

7. And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me. And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

8. Now the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire.

In my story I assume that a king would have a cook and a butler. The king of Egypt had them in the days of Joseph. I assume the cook would be

curious about the king's affairs and would be an observer of those affairs. He was there on the scene reporting what the Scriptures tell us.

The distinctive of this story is the assumption that they thought and thought before they struck on the idea of severing thumbs and toes as a means of humbling enemy kings.

I could have gone into the application that Satan is the King-spoiler who does his best to spoil the testimony of us who are "kings-in-training." We'll rule cities some day!

And Satan will get his punishment eternally and will be "spoiled" himself. But this is too advanced a thought for youngsters. ("Young Ambassador" magazine out of Back to the Bible, Lincoln, Nebraska, published my article on this story in the February 1969 issue. It was called, "Everybody Has an Enemy.")

I've updated Adoni-bezek's story, creating people I know were there. I've not included any item that was not reasonably there. The story's weakness, perhaps, is that I've told it from an earthly rather than from a heavenly perspective as it was originally written.

As an aside, I've kept pulling from my background all through this story. The "hot mud on a pair" business came from soda jerk days when it was used to describe a chocolate sundae. And my sister used to call me "Pie Face."

Now let's talk about point of view.

Beginning writers usually go for the hero. They give his first and last name

immediately: "Leilani Stumpf, resplendent in her mauve evening gown, stood contemplatively by the balustrade, gazing out at the lush, green magnolia trees." It sounds so stilted and overwritten.

It's true that the first one mentioned owns the story. He/she is the hero. But it is seldom necessary to give both names, and it's never called for to begin the story with them.

You do want to mention on the first page all the characters who will appear in the story—at least all the principal ones—but you don't have to name them all if there are more than four or five. And, certainly, you don't have to give their last names.

You can write, "As she stood on the porch looking at the flowers in the magnolia trees, Leilani was conscious that she had just put a run in her stocking."

In "King-Spoiler" I took a minor character, the cook, and let him be the viewpoint character. He was not a doer. He made no decisions. He fought no battles. He simply observed and reported what everyone else was doing.

We knew no more than he did. We saw no more than he saw. We surmised no more than he. This is what the viewpoint character does to a story. He limits what we're told to what he knows.

Your dilemma will be in deciding which character to choose. Your more experienced writers will go for a minor character and let him narrate all

he sees and hears. Some go outside the story and have an omniscient narrator who knows what everyone is doing and thinking and who tells all.

The skill comes in not giving more information than the narrator knows, when that narrator is a part of the story. **One of the interesting steps in pre-planning a story is to decide which character will narrate.**

The minor character viewpoint is useful when the hero doesn't know his own limitations. He is also able to see the end from the beginning realistically. He has nothing at stake and so he can be more objective. **Your problem will be to give the minor character enough of a part for him to have a reason to be present in every scene.**

When the hero is the narrator, he may on occasion tell things without understanding their significance. Eventually he comes to realize what the reader has known all along.

Your task with viewpoint is to wrap yourself so thoroughly in your narrator that you authentically see and hear what he sees and hears.

How does he react to people?

Let him react the way you react. But you'll have to make adjustments if he's a year-old frog and you're a middle-aged housewife.

Other writers have Bible-related stories out in the market.

SISTER YESSA'S STORY by Karen Greenfield and illustrated by Claire Ewart. (San Francisco: A Laura

Geringer Book, an imprint of Harper-Collins Publishers, 1992.)

Yessa walks to her brother's house telling a story. The basic structure is a story within a story.

Animals follow her two by two as she tells how animals "when the world was very new" were distributed around the world as they fell off a turtle's back.

We find at book's end that Yessa is Noah's sister. The animals walk on the ark as rain begins to fall.

YOUR TURN: Of course, this story is foolish because we know Noah didn't have a sister. She certainly would have been on the ark unless she believed her story about the turtle and stayed behind when the door was shut. You could write a story about how God gathered the animals and brought them to the ark.

ONE LITTLE BAG adapted by Robert Baden from John 6:13 takes the youngster whose loaves and fish fed the thousands and develops the story from the time he left home that day. Sweetly told, it ends with "Goodbye, Master," Ben said softly. "I better get back to my parents. I hope I can see You again some day." It was printed in Clubhouse Magazine, Nov. 1977, a publication of Focus on the Family.

Many writers of stories for children find a far more ready market in the magazine trade than the book. Payment is immediate and publication is soon. With books, an advance on royalties often comes; but the publisher subtracts that advance from any future royalties that may come in from sales. Publication day is often 12 to 18

months later than the sale day.

DOES GOD HAVE A BIG TOE (Stories About Stories in the Bible) by Marc Gellman. (New York: Harper and Row, 1989.) This book contains 19 stories from 19 passages.

One, regarding the creatures before the flood, has them flying, flopping, creeping, crawling, slithering to find God so they could ask Him not to end the world.

Only the fish are perceptive enough to surmise that, since water is everywhere, God must be everywhere. The story ends with God saying, “But as for the fish, I will save all of them, because only they knew where to find God.”

MIRIAM’S WELL (Stories About Women in the Bible) by Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum, **THE STORY OF JOB** by Beverly Brodsky, **JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH** retold and illustrated by Warwick Hutton (Atheneum, 1983) can give an insight into how authors are handling

Bible stories and what ones appeal to secular editors.

A danger, of course, is to erode the reverence we should have for God’s Word. These stories are preserved for us by the Spirit of God. We don’t want to demean what God calls holy.

Yet, as mentioned above, the men and women of the Bible were normal, flesh-and-blood people. They were not all saints. They lived lives we can imagine. Things went on off stage that contributed to events on-stage. We just don’t want anyone to think less of the people of the Bible.

But there is plenty of room for Bible story books. We want our youngsters to know God’s Word; and, in their earlier years, Bible stories more than doctrine as such will reach their heart.

Think long and hard and pray much as you develop Bible-related stories for our young. The more you know of God’s Word the more you will be able to bring fresh insights out in your stories.

Let's Write

Plant-and-Pick-Up Stories

You simply plant your foot on the first page and pick it up on the last. It's

EASY!

It's a wonderful device because Plant-and-Pick-Up can be used on any level to tell a story.

In the "Bremontown Musicians" we saw Plant and Pick Up. At the start we were introduced to a donkey, a dog, a cat and a rooster. Each one, fearing for his life, was glad to join the gang and move to Bremontown. It is not until later in the story that we find each one plays a significant part in the chorus that scares out the thieves.

It's the donkey's kick, the dog's bite, the cat's scratching and the rooster's crowing that put the frights into the freaks and sent them packing for good.

Plant and Pick Up is frequently used in mystery stories where a simple instrument is mentioned in the opening section and it then becomes either the murder weapon itself or a means of solving the crime or mystery.

The question, "Are they friends?" in Lesson Four (Question and Answer) was picked up at the end of the story in

the climax and repeated with a far different answer.

With this lesson, begin writing for older youngsters. The intermediates and the juniors love a mystery. They love being fooled. They love a surprise.

The story, "Jack and the Beanstalk," mentions that Jack's mother is a poor widow, her husband having been carried off by a giant. That matter is dropped as we sell the cow, get the beans, cry out at Jack's wretchedness and throw the beans out the window.

We continue to overlook it as the vine grows into the sky and as Jack climbs up.

We overlook it when Jack steals the hen that lays the golden eggs, as well as when he takes the bags of gold.

It's when he steals the harp that we find the father and escape home. The story is all the more satisfying because it brings together what we

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planted and what we picked up.

We plant the kitty in “Dick Whittington and His Cat” and in return we get a treasure which, wisely invested, enables Dick to become “thrice lord mayor of London town.”

Plant and Pick Up stories often come in three parts. We plant in the introduction as the problem is introduced.

Here we mention the characters by name.

We tell the time.

We set the scene.

We intimate what kind of solution we need for our problem to be solved. We set that up with statements like, “If only Daddy would come! He would know what to do.”

We develop our story in the body and conclude it at the end by wrapping up all the details and by picking up what we planted.

My example story actually occurred in my home. My son’s accordion teacher announced that he was moving out of town and would no longer be available to give Joel lessons.

His few words produced waves in the family for we had grand ideas, Betty and I, that our son would some day be a fine performer. Oh, he’d only had a couple of lessons—but every virtuoso has to begin some time.

What would we do?

Well, I’d gotten my bachelor’s degree in music theory and I had taught the princess’s step-children to play the piano during my teaching stint in Ethiopia back in the 1940s.

So I got the—YOU do it—treatment.

I didn’t detect how unhappy Joel was until we started the lesson up in his room.

I happened to have a pen and paper at hand (so I could write down his assignments); but, when I saw the direction the lesson was taking, I decided to record what was going on.

Every excuse the rabbit utters from the middle of the first page to the end came out of my young eight-year-old’s mouth. Word for word!

How he could think up all those outrageous protests and excuses so fast—I’ll never know.

I could see, as I examined my notes later, that I was a total failure as an accordion teacher and as a disciplinarian.

And I could also see that there might be ammunition here for a story for kids. That was the excuse I gave myself because all my life I’ve eased my tensions by writing.

Hence, we have “Yeah But, the Rabbit.” I only tell the story of these origins to encourage you to keep a pen and paper or cassette recorder handy at all times. You might even buy a small recorder and stick it in your pocket with a tiny mike attached to your lapel.

You never know when an ordinary conversation will develop itself into a grand story.

But if you are anything like the rest of the world (and you know you are), come the magic moment and you won’t

have a pen and paper within ten miles.

The answer then is to try to memorize what's going on.

In your mind, select numbers one to ten and pin successive statements to each number.

Or you can do the letters of the alphabet and associate items with letters—like A is for apple, B is for bear. Then you pin a statement or event to that apple and that bear. Word associations are part of off-the-cuff speeches politicians and CEOs and social climbers make to help them recall at a moment's notice what they want to say.

You'll be surprised how much you can remember—even grocery lists—by associating them with Apple, Bear, Cat, Dog, Elephant, Frog, Goose, Hen, Island, Jackal, King . . .

Work on improving your memory. You never know when, as a writer-researcher, you'll need to work it and work it hard.

YEAH BUT, THE RABBIT

"Ah done caught you now, Rabbit," Mister Bear said, holding the poor rabbit up by the ears. "Ah done caught you snoopin' round mah holler log and you're gonna sing for mah supper in a saucepan, sure as ah got you here by the ears."

Yeah But squirmed, his feet kicking the air.

"I'll sing for your supper," he cried out, "if you'll play that squeezebox I came down here for to see today."

"So that's the reason you come down here snoopin'—you wants to see mah squeezebox, huh?"

"Yeah, but I really wants to learn to play it beautiful like you does, Mister Bear."

"You can't do that without lessons," Mister Bear said, putting the rabbit down as he patted his chest. "You needs a teacher—like me. Ah could learn anyone to play the squeezebox."

"You could?"

"Ah sure could."

"Yeah, but I bet you couldn't teach me."

"Couldn't teach you? Why, I could teach you how to fly."

(Plant the item)

"Yeah, but I bet you a hop, skip and a jump you couldn't teach me how to play that squeezebox."

"Ah accepts the challenge. Come into mah log."

Mister Bear led the way, holding the rabbit by one ear. **"What's your name, boy?"** he said.

"Yeah But."

"Yeah But? Is that a name?"

"Yeah, but not many rabbits have it."

Inside, Mister Bear made the rabbit sit in a chair.

"Here, put this over your head," the bear said as he held the squeezebox up by the straps.

The rabbit put up his arms.

"You should be glad you can get to learn music," Mister Bear said.

“Not every rabbit gets to take squeezebox lessons.”

“Yeah, but this belt chokes me,” Yeah But said, pulling at the strap across his shoulder. “Don’t it go any lower?”

“Well, here,” Mister Bear said. “Ah’ll loosen it for you a little bit.”

He leaned over and pulled on the buckle.

“Ouch!” Yeah But shouted. “You’re hurting me.”

“Oh, ah didn’t hurt you,” Bear said, fixing the straps. “There, is that better?”

“Yeah, but I’m hot.”

“It IS warm in here,” Mister Bear said. He got up and walked to the open end of the log, fanning the air as he went.

“Does that feel better?”

“Yeah, but my back hurts. You don’t know how it feels. I can’t play this thing. It hurts too much.”

“Oh, it doesn’t hurt,” Mister Bear said, loosening the straps. “If we make it too loose, the squeezebox will slip down to the floor.”

“Ouch!” Yeah But shouted as the squeezebox fell off his lap. “It just did. Oh, my toes. They hurt.”

“If you was sitting up straight, it wouldn’t have fallen,” the bear said, getting just a little bit mad. “Now are you goin’ to start playing?”

“Yeah, but my toes hurt.”

Yeah But pushed down on one of the buttons on the end of the squeezebox, but there was no sound.”

“Where’s the music?” he snapped.

“You got to push the buttons at both ends at once,” the bear said.

Yeah But pushed both sides to the middle all at once, and it made a loud screech.

“OUCH!”

“Now what’s the matter?” Mister Bear asked.

“It pinched my stomach.”

“Well, can’t you hold your stomach in?”

“Yeah, but then I can’t breathe. And, besides, my fingers hurt. Everything hurts. My back hurts, my toes hurt and my fingers hurt.”

“And mah ears hurt from all your complainin’, rabbit.” Mister Bear said, getting madder.

Yeah But doodled with his fingers on the squeezebox buttons, but still no sound came out.

“I asked you where the music is!” he shouted.

“Push both sides in at the same time.”

“They are in.”

“Then pull them out.”

“But it’s too hard,” Yeah But groaned.

“Pull!”

“I can’t. It’s too heavy.”

“Well, ah is getting’ tired of all your fussing. Are you gonna play it?”

“Yeah, but now I’ve got a runny nose.”

“Ah’m gonna give you one more minute to get to playin’ that

squeezebox.” Mister Bear was really mad now.

“Learn this whole thing in one minute?” Yeah But cried. “I can’t play it that fast.”

“You start playing!”

“But my toe. It hurts!”

“Play!”

“You’re getting me all hot,” Yeah But complained. “I can’t breathe. I’m too hot.”

“Are you gonna play?”

“Yeah, but my nose is running again.”

“Yeah but, yeah but, yeah but. All you say is yeah but. Now ah know why they call you Yeah But.”

“You do?”

“Yeah, but ah is getting’ so tired of tryin’ to teach you how to play this squeezebox that I’m not gonna do it. Ah’m getting’ out that saucepan right now and you’re gettin’ in it.”

“You mean you’re not gonna teach me?” Yeah But asked.

“Teach you? Ah couldn’t teach you how to fly.”

“Whoopee!” Yeah But shouted. “Then I win the bet.”

“Bet? What bet?” Mister Bear rubbed his head.

(Pick Up)

“You bet me a hop, skip and a jump that you could teach me how to play the squeezebox and you couldn’t do it.”

And with that, Yeah But slipped out of the squeezebox straps; and,

with a hop, skip and a jump, he ran out of the hollow log and disappeared into the forest.

“Now, just one minute!” Mister Bear shouted from the end of his log. “Now, just one minute!”

But by this time, Yeah But had run all the way home.

Notice that much of the dialect is achieved, not by spelling words phonetically, but by using bad grammar, contractions and slang like “gonna,” “ah” for “I” and “mah” for “my” along with “yeah.” The art is to suggest that every word is in dialect but to write as if very few of them are because, unless you know the dialect well, you shouldn’t use it. The reader shouldn’t have to puzzle out what your characters are talking about.

Obviously, high school girls talk differently from steel workers. Maiden aunts talk differently from fourth grade boys. Your ability to capture the difference is part of the craft you want to master.

You heighten that ability by being a careful listener—not only to what people say but how they say it. Listen for distinctive word choice, the broken sentence, the mid-sentence twist in thought to another subject.

Particularly get an ear for the speech of the age group you’re going to write for. Ask to be a teacher’s aide in Sunday School. Really get to know children.

Just one more note on pre-planning

because “plant and pick up” requires it.

You should know who your hero is before you start, and you should know what pickle he’s going to be in before you put him in it.

What prize is he after?

Who is going to be his main competition?

What is at stake?

What threat will keep him from his prize?

How will he rise out of failure to swat his ZZZZZZZZ-fly or escape to his home in the woods?

Then, as you get ready to write, sit at your computer and write down as quickly as you can all that you want to tell in the story. Get a condensed version from which you can expand or contract and refine. Then go take a shower and really think up your complications!

If you emerge with ideas that are all wet, you’ve got someone to blame—me.

The following books use the “Plant and Pick Up” structure.

THE PEARL by Helme Heine (New York: Atheneum, A Margaret K. McElderry Book, 1985).

Summary: Beaver finds a mussel in the lake and dreams it contains a pearl that will provoke all his animal friends into a frenzied search that will culminate in a great argument and conflagration.

He wakes to find his fears only a dream. But he remembers the lesson he has learned that selfishness corrupts

good friendships.

He returns to the mussel, throws it back in the lake and swims off to join his friends in play.

YOUR TURN: Following the Plant, this character dreams of the confusion that will follow when others find out. He learns a lesson from his dream and picks up and deals with what was planted. You don’t need a dream to have your hero learn a lesson.

RUN WITH THE WIND by Carolline Pitcher, pictures by Jane Chapman. (Waukesha, WI: Little Tiger Press, 1988.)

Summary: A mother horse reassures her young foal that soon he will be big enough to stay by himself and not even miss her.

The first sentence tells that one moonlit night, while the wind was howling at the door and the rain was drumming on the stable roof, a foal was born.

“You won’t think of me then,” the mare mother tells her foal of the time when he will run with the wind.

At the end, when he has run, she asks if he had thought of her.

“Well, maybe a little,” he says.

YOUR TURN: See the nice little twist the last sentence gives to the story? One character predicts to another what will happen in the future. When the future comes to pass, the first asks the second about the prediction. The second one admits that, well, yes, the prediction did come true, sort of. Also, anyone can tell anyone “You won’t remember me.” At the end, “Did you?” Answer: “A little. A lot.”

NIGHT OF THE MOON-JELLIES by Mark Shasha. (New York: Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1992.)

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: PLANT AND PICK-UP STORIES

Seven-year-old Mark puts pieces of sea glass and “something that felt like jelly” in a plastic bag with sea water as he walks along the beach to his Gram’s hot dog stand where he works.

“What is it, Gram?” he asks.

It’s a surprise for later, she says.

We watch as he works with the family through lunch and supper and as he and Gram go aboard a boat that night for a trip to sea.

Out where the sea glitters, he drops overboard the glittering moonjelly he picked up that morning.

YOUR TURN: Using this kind of story, you can use Plant and Pickup anywhere. Your hero finds something, goes through his day and returns to it at night.

Ruth Krauss in **THE GROWING STORY** (New York: Harper and Row, 1947) has written of a boy (never named) who observes in spring that everything is growing. His mother puts his warm clothes away as days get warmer. He despairs that he will ever grow until come winter when his mother takes down his warm clothes. He tries them on and finds that he has grown. The warm clothes provide the plant and pickup.

YOUR TURN: We’ve all had this experience. We’ve had it in school where we think we’ll never learn a difficult subject but find at the end of the term we know all about it. We think we’ll never make friends but find we’re invited to party after party.

RUN, LITTLE MONKEYS! RUN!

RUN! RUN! by Juliet Kepes. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.)

Cycle: The words “something yummy to eat” appear at the beginning and at the end.

Story: Three hungry leopards search for “something yummy to eat” and stalk monkeys who escape them three times, then for good.

The story ends with the leopards searching “for something yummy to eat/But something fat and lazy/or slow and silly./They’ve had enough of monkey tricks.”

YOUR TURN: Three of anything can search for “something yummy to eat.” Change those four words to “something with peanut butter” or “something not manna.” Remember how the Israelites loathed God’s bread.

Plant-and-pickup is your basic “red string” feature article where what is mentioned in the lead is picked up again at the end to tie the article together.

In our next lesson, we’ll study Frame and Flashback and Problem and Solution, marvelous methods for telling exciting stories—especially to juniors and middlers.

Are you writing stories to fit these lessons? Don’t just read for information. Read for inspiration and then write and write and write.

Professor Dick

Research Sheet

Title: _____

Author: _____

Publisher _____

Library of Congress Summary: _____

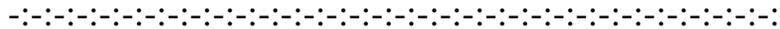
First Sentence _____

Bible Text Used _____

Structure of Story _____

Adherence/Departure from Text? Yes? ____ No? ____ Tell How _____

Synopsis _____



Title: _____

Author: _____

Publisher _____

Library of Congress Summary: _____

First Sentence _____

Bible Text Used _____

Structure of Story _____

Adherence/Departure from Text? Yes? ____ No? ____ Tell How _____

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