

# Kids learn from storytellers

## June Miles

HUMANS are amazing storytellers. Our consciousness affords us the opportunity to construct endless stories about our world. According to Oliver Sacks, a leading neurologist, "human beings are a storytelling species." We create stories by using memory and the trillion pieces of data we receive daily from our five senses to help make sense of the world around us. It stands to reason, then, that reading brings pleasure simply because we love a good story.

Reading helps develop the storyteller in all of us, someone who can weave a story to live by. When we read, we enhance our imaginative worlds. Writers use a symphonic orchestra of words through the instruments of metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, cacophony and so much more to tell their stories. Even reading nonfiction informs us of incidents as they occur or have occurred in the memory or experience of the storyteller. But as Rosalind Cartwright reminds us, "memory is never a precise duplicate of the original ... it is a continuing act of creation," thus nonfiction becomes a creative endeavor.

As educators, we support the importance of storytelling by reading good books. We know that students must be encouraged to read.

Education requires that we learn about other lives beyond our own — even protagonists and antagonists, whose action is measured according to the storyline and plot sequence created by its author. In addition, reading affects our attitudes toward others as well. In recent neurological studies,



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"reading makes us smarter and nicer" (Paul) and "reading literary fiction improves theory of mind" (Kidd and Castano), thus reading supports the telling of stories to enrich the mind.

One way to encourage student reading is by offering students time to read, time to embrace characters whose lives encourage, enrich, explain, explore and experience created worlds. Here at SCIS, we value reading time. During the first 15 minutes of English classes, students in grades 6-10 read silently. SCIS students embrace storytelling and, in turn, discover strength and courage from literary heroes and heroines. After all, larger-than-life characters remain in our hearts and minds long after we finish a great story.

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