by | Judith Snyder



KEEP 'EM READING

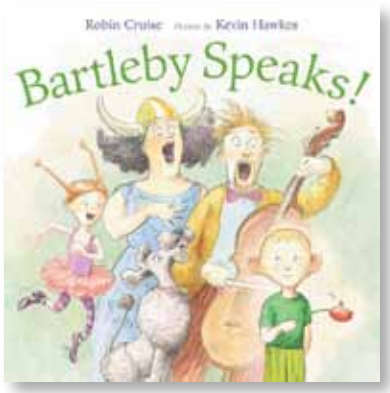
SPEAK TO ME

GRADES 1–5

Public speaking sends shivers down the spines of many adults when they stand before a group of peers. For children who haven't learned public speaking skills, standing before an audience can be terrifying. Though this discomfort seldom vanishes completely, even for the most gifted communicators, students can develop competency, composure, and confidence through learned skills and practice.

Integrating speaking practice throughout the years helps students learn to express their own ideas clearly, gain experience with listening, and contribute to the ideas of others. Public speaking then becomes a tool to communicate information in all content areas. Mix in various curriculum content by collaborating with classroom or specials teachers and you'll have a recipe for academic success.

Simple and fun exercises in public speaking during the elementary grades provide the scaffolding necessary to build confidence for longer presentations. Most of the suggested activities can be adapted for use in grades 1–5 by modifying duration or content.



Puppets and Picture Books

School is the first time many primary students speak to a group larger than their family. The classroom teacher introduces them to daily speaking opportunities during morning procedures or show-and-tell. The librarian can extend practice using picture books and puppets to broaden students' knowledge of the intricacies of informal speech.

In *Bartleby Speaks!* by Robin Cruise, students learn that the purpose of speaking is to communicate. This book can be a catalyst for a discussion about communication and the differences between quiet and talkative people.

When puppets speak, children listen. When children speak through puppets, the audience's attention is directed at the puppet, giving shy students an effective tool to use as they gradually become more proficient and comfortable with public speaking. Consider letting students use puppets in conversations that talk about picture books and easy nonfiction books. Students can share what they learned by speaking through the puppet, or they can create a dialogue between characters from two different books.

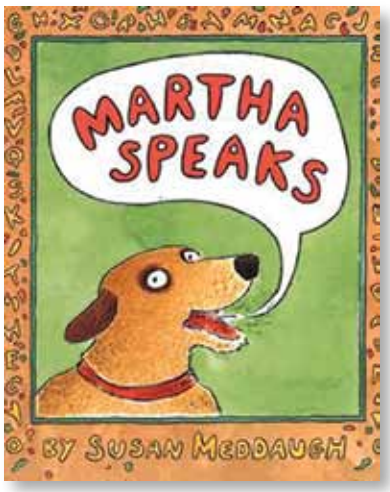
In *Martha Speaks* by Susan Meddaugh, the dog speaks too much and is often thoughtless in what she says. When Martha makes inappropriate comments about people in the book, it's funny, but when similar comments are made in real life, they can be hurtful. Martha's mistakes help children learn important lessons about being empathetic when talking to others.

Use puppets to practice kind language in conversations. Pair

students and provide a puppet for each group (use commercial puppets or make stick puppets using the template at *www.librarysparks.com*). Give students scenarios to act out (see Conversation Suggestions at *www.librarysparks.com*). Students take turns with the puppets to show the right way to speak in each situation.

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Did You Know?

This short and sweet exercise introduces your 100s section and simultaneously provides simple speaking practice. Put students in groups of three, and distribute a fact book (e.g., *Guinness Book of World Records, Weird But True*, etc.) to each group. Encourage groups to select one interesting fact for each person in the group to share orally with the entire class. Students can practice projecting their voices as you move the speaker farther away from the audience.

Reader's Theater

Reader's theater offers student speakers a safety net in the form of a printed script. Reading and oral fluency are enhanced during repeated practices. Many wonderful scripts based on popular picture books have appeared in past issues of *LibrarySparks*. Look for scripts buried in your professional collection as well, or check out the online resources from this month's Technology column (page 44). At the Reading A–Z website (*http://tinyurl.com/q6l9fqb*) you can find tips on how to use scripts and stage the play, as well as additional leveled scripts.

Intermediate students may choose to write their own script from a picture book or novel.

Artistic Point of View

Imagine a virtual field trip to an art museum where the characters in the paintings step into the room to tell stories about what is happening in the painting. This point-of-view exercise will stretch students' imaginations as they become the characters in the painting. By telling an invented story in first person about what has happened just prior to the scene in the painting or what will happen afterward, students learn to study facial expressions and body language to interpret possible thoughts.

Search for famous paintings in books, borrow prints from the art classroom or public library, and consult the Internet. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has almost 400,000 works available online (*www.metmuseum.org/collection*); the Art Institute of Chicago also has images available from its collections (*www.artic.edu/aic/collections*). Choose a painting depicting a person, and model a monologue for your class by posing as the painting's character and telling a story about the painting. Larger groups can use dialogue among characters to tell the story. The creative drama that ensues either begins or ends with the characters arranged in a tableau as shown in the painting.



Storytelling

Telling folktales helps students prepare for many types of public speaking. Let students choose a familiar folktale. Prepare a simple story map and plan mini lessons to guide students through Storytelling Speaking Techniques (see *www.librarysparks.com*). Tell the tale multiple times and include a practice video recording so that students can critique their own performances.

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Have students present their folktales to small groups of younger students in a festival atmosphere where the audience moves between storytelling stations in the library. Position three storytellers at each station and have the audience move to the next station after eight to ten minutes. This format allows the presenters to gain confidence and finesse with each presentation. See also Storytelling Magic (*LibrarySparks* March 2009 Web resources; *http://tinyurl.com/p6o3u8z*) for individual mini lessons on each speaking technique.

Poetry

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Reciting poetry gains popularity with the use of school video broadcasting. Collect a number of poetry anthologies (see suggestions at *www.librarysparks.com*) for students to use in selecting poems to recite from memory. Students can work individually or in groups of two to four. Review speaking techniques, if necessary. Video record polished pieces and post them on the school website, broadcast them during daily announcements, or set up a video loop on a monitor in a public space for visitor viewing. English-language learners can contribute poems in their native languages.

How To ...

Introduce the applied science books with a "how to" presentation. Choose books containing interesting projects or subjects to model this type of speech for the class. Then present a number of possible topics (e.g., how to care for a pet snake, make a peanut butter sandwich, or create a model airplane) before allowing students to choose books. If time is an issue, let groups of students work together on one topic, with the stipulation that each individual must contribute orally in the presentation.

Advertising New Books

Keeping teachers and students abreast of new books can be a daunting task during the busy year. Let intermediate students take on that part of your job while learning about advertising techniques and developing speaking skills. Share a list of advertising techniques (see *http://tinyurl.com/bz6gfsf* or *http://tinyurl.com/b3p8chr*) and have groups identify a current commercial that uses each method.

Student groups then read a new picture book together and choose one or two advertising techniques to incorporate into a commercial to promote the book. Video record the commercials and broadcast them in the library or to the entire school. Make the new books easily accessible on a special bookshelf.

More with New Books

Play a true-or-false game with unfamiliar picture books. Pair students and give each a picture book. By looking at the title and the cover, and before reading the books, the pair speculates on what each story is about. Students read both books together. They choose one book to summarize truthfully and create an invented summary for the other book. The pair works together to make both summaries sound credible by using voice inflection, pacing, and pausing for emphasis. Each partner tells one of the summaries, and, upon completion of both, the class votes on which is true and which is false.

Get Personal: Mini Memories

Memories of special moments can be easy fodder for speaking practice









For online article resources, visit www.librarysparks.com.

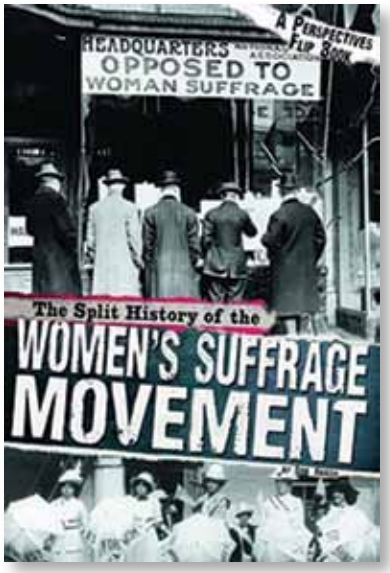


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and can evolve into writing projects. Duplicate the Memory Phrases handout (see *www.librarysparks.com*) to spark personal memories. Give students five to ten minutes to jot notes about a personal memory next to each phrase. Students choose one event to share with a partner. Then have students change partners and retell the same story, adding sensory details. Retell the story again with another partner, adding the setting. Regroup with the original partner and retell the modified story. Discuss the changes that occurred and how the changes improved the story. If time permits, let students write the stories.

Two Sides to Every Story

Make the past come alive by debating issues of a historical era being studied in the classroom. Collaborating with the classroom teacher to extend research will enrich understanding of the historical period. Groups will choose or be assigned a topic and a perspective. Each group will search for information to support the assigned perspective. The Split History series from Capstone Books includes



many interesting and divisive topics, including the US Civil War, women's suffrage, westward expansion, and the American Revolution. Each book contains two perspectives.

Pose questions for consideration (e.g., Should women be allowed to vote? Was the Westward Movement a good or bad idea?). Divide the class into teams and choose topics and perspectives. Team members divide the information among themselves to search for reasons to support the assigned perspective. The group comes together to compile and study the team information.

Set up two tables in the front of the room. Alternate between the two sides as information is presented to the audience. The listeners should take notes during the presentation. As a culminating activity, ask all students to write a paragraph stating their perspective and supporting it with information collected during the debate (for more on debate techniques, see Strengthen Your Core, p. 19).

Into the Future

Librarians have a unique opportunity to work with children over many years and watch them develop. Giving students multiple experiences with public speaking at each grade level builds students' confidence in their ability to express their own ideas and to collaborate with others. Over time, students can move toward longer and more involved presentations that use media and visual displays to enhance understanding.

Judith Snyder *is a seasoned teacher/librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of the Jump-Start Your Library series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from UpstartBooks (2008), and a picture book,* What Do You See? *(2009), from Odyssey Books.*