



DECOLONISING EDUCATION FOR PEACE IN AFRICA (SALONE DEPA)

# A TEACHER'S HANDBOOK ON STORYTELLING



**DECOLONIZING EDUCATION  
FOR PEACE IN AFRICA**

**SALONE DEPA PROJECT**

**A TEACHER'S  
HANDBOOK ON  
STORYTELLING**



**DEPA**



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# Foreword

In 2021, a UK based Sierra Leonean expert in traditional African storytelling was commissioned by the Salone DEPA Project, sponsored by the Open University's (OU) Decolonising Education for Peace in Africa (DEPA ) project, based in the UK, to undertake a storytelling project in Sierra Leone. He led a one-week long training workshop with fourteen (14) community-based teachers in Kamakwie, northern Sierra Leone. This was followed by a two weeks intensive practical storytelling session in two villages (Kadeli and Kamakone), involving community people and the teachers trained by the project in each of the villages.

Coupled with a formal report writing on the project, details of the storytelling sessions were recorded, transcribed and, in turn, uploaded on the OU website for both local and international consumption. Months later, follow-up impact assessment interviews (IAI) were conducted by the UK based pioneering team in collaboration with the local coordinating body based at the University of Sierra Leone (USL), Fourah Bay College (FBC), Freetown. This exercise was intended to ascertain how far the knowledge gained by the trained teachers were cascaded, as a beacon, for conflict resolution among community members for peace education, and reducing the burden of social, economic and political discrimination against women and other marginalised groups in society..

Against the backdrop of the above, the idea was borne to develop a training/teaching manual, with the view of having a hands-on reference document for teachers and community leaders on the use of storytelling as a core, revived, methodology for teaching in schools and informal educational settings. It goes with the understanding that storytelling, as an approach to teaching, facilitates mutual and easier understanding of concepts taught across subject areas, to engage the learners' full cooperation and participation in their own teaching and learning process, given that storytelling is a participatory activity.

The manual was piloted in the same Kamakwie community, the headquarter town for Karene District, in March 2024, in the bid to collaboratively fine tune its contents and authenticate its usefulness for the intended purpose. This was essential to ensure that the draft document would become part of discussions, reflections and resolutions with teachers for whom it is primarily meant, and who will be involved in preparing lessons, interfacing with pupils and in the process delivering lessons.

The contents herein are concerted efforts that represent the beginning of a journey of discussion. As any literary writer knows, these are perfectibles that will be enhanced, improved and revised as the art becomes more commonly re-used and exposed. Certainly, storytelling plays a part in communication strategies to effectively manage classrooms, capture learners' attention, and have them easily discern knowledge imparted to them. This underscores the invaluable nature of this work.

**- Alusine Roberts**

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# INTRODUCTION

This handbook for teachers was inspired by the Sierra Leone Decolonizing Peace for Education (Salone DEPA) research project (DEPA). The DEPA project was sponsored by the Open University and supported by the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. The project aimed at generating data using the bottom-up approach. All of the participants were mainly from the marginalized, local community of artists, dancers, teachers, and storytellers. The data that was gathered from these activities were meant to contribute immensely to the production of open educational resources and teaching materials for peace education curricula not only in Sierra Leone but also across Africa for both the informal and formal levels. The Salone DEPA project was done in three phases; being:

- Traditional oral storytelling,
- Performing arts
- Visual media arts.

The project developed a storytelling methodology employing mixed methods - qualitative, ethnographic, personal interviews, cross-content analysis, and arts-based approaches to collect data from village/ community people and leaders, teachers, and youth groups through: the storytelling project – that included individual oral stories (folk, mythological, traditional, problem, dilemma, ghost stories, and Ananse/ Anancy/ Nancy stories), alongside real-life histories/ stories – e.g., bad leadership/ laws, inheritance, resource exploitation, environmental damage, gender inequality, etc. This artistic data was recorded and collected in written form and through the medium of film.

This handbook is the outcome of an extended work, specifically focusing on the oral storytelling research. It was a collaborative work with a group of twenty-one teachers and two villages in Kamakwie town, Karene district, in Sierra Leone. The two villages were Kamakoni and

Kadeli. The teachers spent a total of three weeks on the research, during which they underwent training, in the form of workshops spanning five days per village. The team of teachers and their trainer covered five common areas of conflict common within many communities. These areas are:

- Leadership,
- Inter-generational relationships
- Inheritance
- Gender equality
- Environment

The elders of the villages gathered every evening over the five days to tell stories relating to each topic. The teachers then facilitated the discussions by asking the villagers various questions, to assist in analyzing each story. The findings from these discussions were audio-recorded for referencing purposes during the research process. From the experiences we gathered from the teachers throughout the process, they requested that a tool be provided to support their ongoing activities, and to also train other teachers across Sierra Leone in the use and art of storytelling.



Hence, this manual -A Teacher's Handbook for Storytelling - was born. It is a collaborative work designed to support the delivery of curricula subjects in an exciting and creative way in the classroom using storytelling.

Before ever proceeding, it would serve us well if we can define what a typical story is. To remind readers for that matter, a story is a narrative or an event that is narrated or explained to an audience (listeners and or readers), of one or more individuals. Storytelling therefore is the art of (re)telling (reporting or explaining) a story (an event, a happening or occurrence).

Storytelling is a powerful teaching methodology used by teachers to enhance their effectiveness in the classroom. By integrating storytelling into their teaching practices, educators can fully engage students, enhance comprehension, build empathy, maintain peace and create a memorable learning environment. There are different categories of stories that teachers can draw inspiration from;

### **These include:**

- Trickster stories**
- Stories about the origin of things**
- Spiritual stories**
- Ghost or Genie stories**
- Test or competition stories**
- Moral lesson stories**
- Mythological stories**
- Traditional folk stories**
- Dilemma stories**



Though many of these stories can overlap in their interpretations, it is up to the teller to choose which specific story best conveys the message being relayed. For example, the popular story of why the spider has a tiny waistline could be a moral lesson bearing on greed and selfishness. At the same time, it is considered to be a traditional folktale in Sierra Leone. We can therefore appreciate that stories can adapt to various and multiple interpretations.

# Now let's explore



*Storytelling training session*

Here are some practical strategies that teachers can use to incorporate storytelling into their teaching;

These strategies can be divided into four areas, to help teachers prepare their storytelling activities with much clarity. **The four areas include: Teacher's narratives, student's narratives, cross-curricular narratives and digital narratives.**

## GROUP 1 : TEACHER'S NARRATIVES

This first aspect focuses on how teachers can prepare stories prior to them coming into the classroom. Teachers must consider carefully which story or stories to tell. Here are a few categories of stories to consider.

### 1. Personal Narratives:

Teachers can start by sharing personal stories or experiences related to the topic being taught. This can help create a connection between the students and their environment as well as their own experiences, and therefore make the learning experience more relatable.

#### *Examples:*

If teaching a history lesson, a teacher might share a personal story about how a historical event impacted their family or community. If told in the “past tense”, the same story could be used to teach that aspect of grammar – i.e. tenses in English.

#### **Thoughts to consider:**

- When did the event take place?
- Where did it happen?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- Did the event affect peaceful co-existence?
- How was it resolved?

Responses to such questions teaches exactly how a story is normally told and the pertinent elements explored concerning any event. Similarly, for the English lesson, the concept of “past tense” as opposed to the “present tense” and any other tense form can be captured well by the students/ pupils, just as the teaching can be well channeled for better and easy comprehension of a concept.

If it is a math lesson, a teacher can share stories about what certain numbers mean in his or her life. The teacher could share the number of siblings she or he has.

## Thoughts to consider:

- How does that impact the amount of money they all contribute to take care of family matters?
- What were the common conflicts that have been coming up as a result of the number of siblings?
- How were they resolved? (method is indicated)
- Would it have been smoother or better with a smaller or larger number of siblings?



In a geography class, the class could focus on the area, a town or country that the teacher comes from, or has visited.

## Some questions to consider may include:

- What were the experiences encountered?
- How has these experiences impacted his/her life to make him/her the teacher he/she is today?
- What is the landscape like?
- How has it affected him/her?
- What is the population?
- What makes the place peaceful and what are the things that trigger conflicts?

Always remember that sharing personal stories help the students relate with you, the teacher, and connect relatively easily to the concept or subject being taught.

## 2. Traditional and Fictional Stories:

These are stories derived or related to tradition, having traditional values, normally communicated from ancestors to descendants using words only. Fictional stories are made-up or invented or imaginary stories.

Traditional and fictional stories, whether adapted from literature or created by the teacher, can be used to illustrate concepts, moral lessons, or complex ideas. Teachers can select age-appropriate books or short stories that align with the curriculum and use them as a basis for discussions and activities.

For example, a science teacher could use a traditional or fictional story to explain a scientific concept, making it easier for students to grasp the idea in a real-world context.

There are numerous stories about how things came to be the way they are. One such popular story in West Africa is how the spider got his tiny waistline. Another is how the tortoise got a cracked shell. Another is how the moon lost its brightness. Still another is why there is a solar eclipse. These stories can provide broad based ideas for discussions on science, animals, the environment, conflicts, reasoning and more.



The story below is an example of a typical African traditional and fictional story:



*One day, the tortoise was invited to a party in the sky by a group of pigeons. The pigeons were kind enough to give a feather each to tortoise, since he had no wings to fly and was too heavy to be carried up to the sky. Eventually, tortoise could fly using all the colourful feathers attached to his short arms and his shell. But when they got to the party, tortoise tricked all the birds, by pretending that all the food was his alone. He changed his name to Mr. “All-for-You.” Therefore, any time the waiters brought in food and announced that the food and drinks were All-For-You, tortoise would jump and declare the food his. He would eat all without sharing with the birds that invited him, and helped him get to the party. Eventually, the birds got angry and plucked all their beautiful feathers back from tortoise. Tortoise was left with no option but to jump from the sky. He passed all the planets as he fell through space to return home to earth. Since he did not have wings to support his bulky and heavy stomach, he crashed to earth and cracked his shell. It was Bra Anansi who came and patched up his shell. Thus it is said that Anansi did the first plastic surgery, on tortoise! Tortoise was left with a lot of patches and stitches. Though Anansi did not do a very good job, he nonetheless did it, saving his friend.*

You can see numerous ideas in such a story for discussions on astronomy, biology, cunning, greed, friendship and trust, conflict and resolution etc.

### **Some activities to consider:**

- Tortoise and the pigeons flew to many planets along their way.
- They could have perched on each planet and explored what they found and experienced there.

### **Questions to consider:**

- How did tortoise betray the pigeons?
- How do you think the pigeons felt?
- How was it resolved?
- Were the pigeons justified to take back their feathers from tortoise?
- 
- What else could they have done apart from taking back their feathers?

### **Moral Lessons Learnt:**

- Unity and love among the birds
- Selfishness on the part of Mr. Tortoise
- Greed on the part of Mr. Tortoise and the danger/ negative repercussion it attracts
- Unity is strength that can lead to victory/ success



There are many other stories that can be used in similar ways. Normally, we use stories to teach moral lessons to children or argue a point or a case among elders. We use proverbs as well as songs to attract empathy and sometimes challenge the intellect of others. But in these stories, there is science, geography, history, biology, health issues, and well-being, etc.

### 3. Incorporating Visual Aids:

Visual arts are normally intended to be appreciated or perceived primarily by sight, such as photography, drawing, painting, film making and so on. Stories are also told through such media, and once skillfully utilized in the classroom, the interest of the learners will be captured, as play-way is key to their physical and psycho-social development and even their educational progress.

Moreover, these are tangible teaching and learning aids, which supplement oral storytelling. Also, visual arts cater for self-learning, which has its own obvious advantages.

How many of you teachers remember being told about amoeba and spirogyra and snow on the Swiss alps, but was none the wiser because you had never actually seen any pictures of these things? Most people have no idea of what snow feels like in tropical environments. Visual storytelling can be fun and can aid quick interpretation of moods and feelings.



## GROUP 2: STUDENT'S NARRATIVES

### 1. Encouraging Student Storytelling:

Teachers can motivate students to become storytellers themselves. This can involve giving assignments and/or classroom tasks, where students are asked to tell or write and share their own stories related to the topic being studied. Teachers can encourage students to engage their parents, older siblings, uncles and aunts and grandparents to teach them folk tales that relate to the subject taught. This has the advantage of helping a number of parents develop more interest in their child's learning. Moreover, the students themselves are made to explore outside the classroom for knowledge and pertinent skills needed for their own educational enhancement and/or improvement.

*For example, if the parent is a trader:*

- They can share math stories about counting money, costs and taking stock of products and not getting cheated by customers and other traders.
- A student may share their experience of a day in the market with their parent.
- The teacher can guide the student on how to relate the story to the subject in class.

### Questions to consider:

- What potential conflicts or issues can arise in such situations?
- What did the student observe about how the parent resolves issues with customers?

Student storytelling can also take the form of presentations, role-plays, or creative projects that allow them to express their understanding in the form of a narrative.

**Example:** A creative project could focus around what makes a good footballer. The starting point could be for the teacher to give pointers to what makes a good story, say by responding to the 5W (what? who?, when? where? ,and why?) questions, whenever narrating an incident, in order to be apt, precise, and organized.

**These pointers include:**

- Call and response to capture attention.
- Adding exaggerated drama and conflicts, or to end the narrative in suspense, so as to keep the audience longing for more.
- Using songs and/ or musical instruments.
- The use of eye contact and gesticulations, including exaggerated hand movements are useful in order to ensure sustained audience attention.
- The various ways the voice can be used to create suspense and evoke emotion and immediate feedback.



The teacher can divide the class into groups and direct them in their respective groups to examine some of the different characteristics that makes a good footballer.

*They could examine characteristics such as:*

- Diet
- Discipline, Group Genetics
- Geographical surrounding
- Access to training fields Education
- Family support or lack thereof



They could investigate how all of these factors affect the process of becoming a good footballer. What were the various challenges and conflicts the footballer faced and how did he resolve them?

The students can then piece up the narratives from each group's findings to make one story that captures various aspects of the footballer's life.



## GROUP 3: CROSS-CURRICULAR NARRATIVES

### 1. Connecting Across Subjects:

Stories can be used to bridge different subjects and create interdisciplinary connections. For instance, a history teacher might collaborate with an English teacher to analyze historical fiction that aligns with the time period being studied. This approach helps students see how storytelling can cut across various disciplines. The geography teacher might collaborate with a maths teacher to analyze a story about the value of pepper in a certain geographical location.

The story of the King who would only allow his daughter to marry a man who can eat a bag of pepper without flinching could be a great example here. It provides the basis for different levels of discussion.

#### **A few maths, agriculture and geography reference questions to discuss could be:**

- Where was the pepper grown?
- Where is the land located and what did it cost?
- What is the cost of transporting pepper from the farm to the King's palace?
- What would be the profit margins?
- Who are the key historical players in the production of pepper in those areas?
- What are the various obstacles or hazards involved in producing the pepper?
- How much do such hazards cost the farmer if they happen?
- By how much does this cost affect the profit margin?

The issue of land can be quite contentious in many places. Issues of ownership, for example, can be of serious consequence if not well handled.

## **Land ownership issues:**

- Could lead to the farmer losing all of their crops.
- The potential of cattle grazing on the farm and destroying the crop.
- Could mean limited access to water for the crops and so competition for water could easily lead to conflicts.

## **Questions this raises:**

- How can you make sure to avoid conflicts on the land?
- What are the financial costs of land issue conflicts?

There are moral and gender questions too;

- How do women and girls feel about land ownership?
- Do women input into or give consent to land ownership and its use?

This can open the discussion on gender parity.

Overall, cross-curricula storytelling session can help students to understand the contribution each subject makes towards making their community work cohesively.

## **2. Using Storytelling as a Memory Aid:**

Mnemonics, acronyms, and other memory techniques that involve storytelling can help students retain information more effectively. Teachers can create memorable stories or rhymes to help students remember complex concepts, formulas, or historical timelines. In African stories, there are numerous tools like repetition, rhythm, call and response, songs, literary languages like, onomatopoeia, similes, etc. that can all help students to retain information.

*An example of one popular story is a musical one about the boy who dug up yam and left it to dry in the sun, but a cow ate the yam. The boy cried to the cow to give back the yam that the soil gave to him. The cow gave the boy milk. A thirsty hunter drank the milk. The boy cried to the hunter to give back the milk, which he got from the cow, who ate his yam, the yam that he got from the soil. The hunter gave the boy a cloth. A groom took the clothes for his wedding. The boy cried to the groom to return his cloth, which he got from the hunter, who drank his milk, which he got from the cow, who ate his yam, which he got from the soil. The groom gave the boy gold and the boy becomes rich and could buy all those things he lost.*

The story can continue with more items being given to the boy as he loses another along the way. The test is for the students to remember and recount each item backwards in the song.

An example of Mnemonics could be to be able to recall the colours of the rainbow, you could use the acronym **ROYGIBIV - red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet.**

**Repetition** is another important memory aid, especially when it is in the form of a musical call and response.

### **3. Fostering Critical Thinking:**

Teachers can use stories to prompt critical thinking and analysis. A story can present conflicting viewpoints or ambiguous situations. Students can then be encouraged to think critically, consider different perspectives, and engage in discussions that deepen their understanding of complex issues.

For example, *in Sierra Leone there is a story about four brothers with various skills who went to rescue the King's daughter captured by an underwater Genie. The four brothers--each used his gifted skills to help rescue and take away the princess, and, in turn, kill the genie while saving their own lives. One was a sniper, another a thief, another an excellent driver, and the other a fixer.*

The listeners, at the end, can then discuss which of the four brothers should be the one to eventually marry the princess, based on the merit of their various skills.

Another point to consider in this story is the gender/ power balance.

Should the girl have the chance to choose which of the four brothers she would prefer to marry?



### **Example: A Story about the Baboon**

*For forty years, a baboon never laughed, cried, or broke its cage, where it was kept to run away into the bush.*

*One day, a man in tatters broke the mystery by talking in whispers to the baboon. First, in low tones, he disclosed that he was a teacher, which made the baboon burst into laughter for the first time in four decades, just because he had seen the condition of a teacher, who is supposed to be an important personality in society.*

*Next, he whispered into the ears of the baboon disclosing how meagre his salary was, which made the baboon to burst into tears – sobbing bitterly.*

*Finally, he also whispered into the animal's ear, promising to take him to the Teacher Training Skills College (T.T.S.C), which made the baboon to break the cage and run away, because he did not want to go to T.T. S. C. and later become a teacher.*

*This sent the entire hall into a thunderous laughter and an uncontrollable round of applause for a while.*

#### 4. Celebrating Cultural Diversity:

Through storytelling, teachers can expose students to a diverse range of cultural narratives and perspectives.

This can help foster;

- Empathy,
- Understanding, and showing respect for different cultures,
- Promoting inclusiveness in the classroom.

Teachers can introduce stories from other cultures and tribes. They can share stories that illustrate cultural cohesion and the benefits thereof. Students can discuss the various advantages and disadvantages of cultural diversity and how they can take advantage of it to make their own community a better place. A teacher can use this to address cultural discrimination and tribalism.



## 5. Interactive Storytelling Activities:

Of course, every storytelling activity has this feature. Therefore, incorporating interactive storytelling activities, such as story mapping, story sequencing, or story retelling, can actively engage students in the learning process. These activities can cater to different learning styles and help reinforce comprehension and retentiveness.

### *Story Mapping:*

- Use the classroom as the setting where the story takes place.
- Identify the characters, plot, various settings, problems, and solution. This can prompt students to carefully note and learn the important details of the story.
- It can also be like a factory production line with the different components of the story spread out and sequenced for closer analysis.
- Identify each segment of the story; discuss how they could relate to different subjects in the school curriculum.
- You may ask the students to analyse how different subjects relate to each other.

### *Story Retelling:*

The teacher or a student tells a story and the rest of the class volunteer to retell the same story in their own way, mainly to suit the situation they find themselves in.

- This is a great way to encourage good and effective communication and listening.
- It also encourages the use of various languages and means of expression. Students can use singing, musical instruments, mime, acting, etc. This promotes confidence as students can use the best and strongest tools of communication they possess.

- Importantly, story retelling can encourage students to express themselves fully and give the story their own unique flavour and interpretation.

## 6. Encouraging Reflection and Expression:

After hearing or reading a story, teachers can facilitate reflection exercises where students can express their memorable thoughts, emotions, and interpretations. This can help students develop their communication skills and emotional intelligence, while engaging with the material. Put the students in groups to allow them to discuss their feelings.

Questions you may ask the students:

- How do you feel about this topic?
- Can you draw a picture expressing how you feel?
- What could they have done differently?
- Would you do the same thing
- How would you improve the situation?
- What creative ideas do you have to add to the story to make it better?



## GROUP 4: DIGITAL STORYTELLING TOOLS AND PLATFORMS

Today the use of multimedia is a powerful and effective means to create immersive and interactive storytelling experiences. These tools can allow students to create their own digital stories, incorporating multimedia elements such as audio, video, and images to enhance their narratives.

There are various ways to achieve this:

- Use mobile phones to film segments of the story being told by students.
- Students can choose a specific setting or backdrop to enhance the narrative. For example, telling a story about a monster could be set in a forest background.
- After filming a segment or full story the students can watch themselves back on screen for entertainment and reflection.
- Teacher can encourage feedback from other students about how the story was presented in the film for peer-to-peer learning.

Example questions for peer-to-peer learning might be;

- How did the backdrop or setting enhance the subject of the story?
- Was the posture of the student storyteller appropriate and convincing enough?
- How could their posture be improved?
- How appropriate was the facial expression and voice in conveying emotions?

Audio recording is also effective to engage listeners. WhatsApp is probably the most popular audio dissemination medium for every student these days.

For further research, you can visit the internet, libraries, and/ or have an interactive resource development session with fellow teachers, individual or groups of community people, and even smart, intelligent students to share ideas.





**Cross section of coordinators,  
facilitators and trainees**

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