

The Value of Storytelling & Summer Camp

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It all starts with a story – “Let me tell you about the time...”

For me it started when I was a camper. I loved campfires most of all – our camp had a campfire program each night. We only went to camp for one week and five times over that week we would all sit around the campfire circle and sing the songs, watch the skits and listen to the stories.



The stories caught my imagination and took me away to another place. By the flickering light of the campfire I listened to the camp staff share their stories. I was in the mountains and the mining town when I first heard the story of *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*; I was on the island as they told about a shipwreck; I was caught by surprise when the twist came. Storytelling is magical and should be an important part of the camp experience.

When we want to pass on some of the history of our camps, do we write it down and then pass the sheets around to all the campers so they can read about ‘Chief’ or ‘the one that got away’? No. We share these experiences in the form of stories. We use oral tradition to pass on the feeling, the emotion and the gravitas of the experience. Stories that we hear last long after other camp memories have faded. Our time at camp is remembered and shared through stories. Your campers go home each summer and tell thousands of stories about camp.

Storytelling was once an integral part of many camp programs and somewhere along the line it has faded. Building a tradition of storytelling within your camp culture can add a wealth of benefits. Stories help to teach lessons and morals that simple instruction cannot. Stories are one of the best ways to help a message stay with campers and often times campers will continue to think about that story long after a simple message would have faded.

How do we create a tradition of storytelling in our camp settings? A few simple suggestions:

- 1. Start telling stories** – this sounds almost too simple, but if we don’t tell them we will not build that tradition
- 2. Tell, do not read** – very few stories have to be read word for word. Help your camp staff make a story their own, change it, adapt it and make it something that they will be remembered for. Reading is story-time, not storytelling.

3. Interact with the Audience – choose stories that can include the campers with sounds and actions. Repetition in stories helps with this. The best part about the counsellor who told, by memory, *The Shooting of Dan McGrew*, is that he had sounds and actions associated with each character which made the campers hang on each word with anticipation to be ready to do their job.

4. Make the resources available – books with short stories should be available ([Stories for the Campfire](#) – Hanson, Roemmich). Have your staff come to camp ready with a story and get them to tell them during training – this helps them with public speaking and helps you to find the amazing storytellers that you might not have known existed.

Storytelling is an art that can be learned. Storytelling needs to be encouraged at camp. Storytelling is what we do each day when we try to explain why a child should go to camp. How good are you at storytelling?