



Plotting Your Assembly Story

by Alexis O'Neill

As an author, you work hard to craft your story. Your book has a beginning, middle and end. The first page is a grabber, the scenes in the middle move the story forward and build to the climax, and the ending is satisfying. At the core of your story is your main character who is different at the end of the story than at the beginning.

You'll use these same skills when you create the story that you'll share in school assemblies. Here's how.

Big Picture: Before you think of props and PowerPoint, you need to think about the Big Picture: *What is the point of your assembly?* What do you want kids and teachers to walk away with? If you don't know what you're trying to accomplish, it will be impossible to measure your success.

Educators talk about "measurable outcomes." For example, "As a result of this assembly, students will be so motivated to read that the library circulation statistics for the month following my visit will be higher than in the month prior to my visit." "As a result of this assembly, the majority of students will be able to name or draw five animals found in a woodland forest." "As a result of this assembly, students will express on a survey a favorable attitude toward revising their own stories."

Beginning: A "First Page" in EducationSpeak is called an "Anticipatory Set." This is a short activity or prompt that focuses kids' attention before the actual program begins. This might be clapping, singing, chanting, showing a series of slides wordlessly.

Next, give the audience a quick overview of why they are there and what you're going to share during your time with them. For example, I say to the younger kids, "I'm going to show you how to play with words and how to read and write with your whole body." For the older kids, I add, ". . . and by the time you walk out of the room, you'll have writing tips that you can use right away in the classroom."

Then segue into "scenes" that form the middle of your

assembly story.

Middle: Think in terms of the magic threes. What three "scenes" can you create that will best support your Big Picture assembly goal? You might build scenes around becoming a writer (writing process, revision, rejection), being a writer (acceptance, the publishing process, the final product), books (what's special about your books?) Or if you are a content expert, share the research process, (finding information, evaluating sources, piecing the research into an interesting story). Your core message is demonstrated in this segment. It's also where you can change "scenes" to adapt to specific audiences.

End: Just prior to the end comes the climax to your assembly story. This high point might involve bringing kids onstage, showing something spectacular on the screen, or engaging the entire audience in an activity. This is what the kids will remember most when they walk out the door. It will be what most of their drawings and thank you letters will depict. So, just as in a novel, you'll want to end very soon after the climax so that the long tail of falling action doesn't cancel all that you've been building toward. This is not the place to have a Q & A with the audience. If you must take questions in a large group, do it at the end of the middle section, but keep your ending solid. In your "good-bye" to the audience, quickly summarize any main points that you want them to remember, then get off the stage.

Denouement: In a novel, the main character is changed in some way by the end of the story. How has your audience changed as a result of your assembly? Will your assembly story become a bestseller? With careful crafting and proper plotting, it can be!

Alexis O'Neill, Ph.D., is the author of THE RECESS QUEEN and other popular books for children. She has been an elementary school teacher, a teacher of teachers, and a museum educator. She is much in-demand as a school visit presenter and helps other authors create and deliver quality programs to schools. You can contact her at Info2@schoolvisitexperts.com or visit her at www.alexisoneill.com.