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"PUMPING VIDEO" AND OTHER STORYTELLING EXERCISES FOR TV-FLABBY MINDS

I've been a storyteller since the late 60's when I worked my way thru broadcast school at the University of Minnesota, directing summer camps, telling tales, and helping young people make primitive TV with the new portable reel to reel video equipment that just came out. For some reason I began the university program in international broadcast, but couldn't see how to connect that with young people. I switched to a regular educational TV sequence and began to explore how to make video more participatory for children -- to make it function like a storyteller connecting live and personally with the audience.

My first TV experience was a local children's show on a new PBS station in Austin, Minnesota. I told a story and 5-6 local children each week had the opportunity to be on, sharing their talents and interests. In 1974 when local children's TV began to disappear all over the country,I went back to school to get a teaching certificate, hoping to get into a classroom to use the portable video equipment many schools had already purchased, often without much idea of how to use. Along the way I had opportunity to start a participatory TV channel at Mpls Children's Health Center, and then about 1986 when I'd long since quit trying to think about international broadcast, I found myself, thanks to principal Mary Schepman, half-time at Longfellow International Elementary School. My job? Teaching young people to tell stories and to make video letters to exchange with other schools, often internationally.

Through all of this, I think because I was already a storyteller and educator (even at camp where I began telling stories, I considered myself an outdoor educator), I've ended up doing a lot of work with integration of storytelling, writing, TV viewing, videomaking, and critical thinking-viewing skills. I never wanted to just complain about TV, nor did I wish to ignore it or just whitewash the often negative effects of excessive viewing by children. Mostly I wanted to find ways to constructively make storytelling (and other communication forms we can control ourselves) most important in a world where TV watching has come to be number one.

In this paper I mainly want to share some of those ideas, but let me plow into the whole topic by allowing you to read (with his permission) a fairly recent indictment of popular TV by Dr. Harry Skornia, who in his time was one of the foremost U.S. advocates for education and broadcast reform. I read and was strongly influenced by Dr. Skornia's work in broadcast school in the 60's; then became a personal friend and colleague a few years ago when he as a very active retiree contacted my wife Elaine Wynne and I with congratulations for winning grand prize in the Tokyo Video Festival (helping elementary children share their stories across international boundaries via video letter exchange). Skornia had no formal connection to storytelling as "we" use it, but he has since fallen in love with its potential for stimulating imagination and personal connection. He even helped open up the June 1990 National Congress on Storytelling with a written greeting, because at the last minute he was too ill to do it by live speakerphone.

Skornia, now 80 and retired in Florida, had to recently quit writing and traveling to speak. He was a college broadcast professor and activist, first full-time director of the old NAEB (National Association of Educational Broadcasters), and generally considered the founder of our present PBS system (he prefers to say "a founder"). Though his name ~~has never beeh a household word (like most of the people who do really great things)~~ is not popularly known except at one time in broadcast circles, Marshall McLuhan, the ~~new~~ famous English and Journalism Professor, considered him a mentor. Skornia also redesigned the German broadcast system (from Nazi propaganda to public service machine) after World War II, and has had some hand in many of the broadcast reform and TV Literacy groups that operate in the U.S. Here then is one of his last written pieces, stating ~~a~~ his view of the milieu in which popular television forces us to educate young people to think and to exercise their free speech as storytellers in a democracy:

AMERICA'S TV ILLNESS
(Harry J. Skornia)

Great as is the destruction wrought by commercial TV and radio on language, saturating it with the same tactics of lies and sadism that Hitler used politically to nearly destroy the German language and the German mind, there is a still greater danger which U.S. broadcasters have ignored. They have sought, for market and profit purposes, to reduce the American mind to the status of mush, in its inability to resist the efforts of salesmen to control their consumer and political behavior. This is particularly worrisome in political campaigns and advertising.

In case you thought you were paying nothing for this "free" commercial broadcast service, there are at least two payments we all have made. One is the actual monetary hidden TV and radio advertising tax, collected as a part of the product price you pay. The other is even greater. In case you hadn't realized it, you have been making available to the media managers your attention, your mind, your very soul--mistakenly thinking you are in control, only "watching": "It's only TV".

As in Orwell's 1984, America might be seen as millions of cubicles (homes) coast to coast, each containing one or more individuals making his mind open to a national hypnosis: attitude and behavior modification and manipulation unique in history.

As we all stare into these same magic boxes, we are usually unaware that the manipulators of what we all are consuming are a limited number of giant, corporate-owned networks, providing the

channel through which other large corporate-owned advertisers, pressure groups and advertisers may "work us over" for a fee, in a process which can perhaps best be compared to rape under hypnosis, or to prostitution. Licensed to operate in the public interest, convenience and necessity, the corporate media's clients are principally business corporations. The viewers are the victims or targets.

Those who control television, and the corporate clients, operating through corporate agencies, are highly skilled in behavior-modification and control. We are getting the best brainwashing that big money can buy. Instead of satisfying the needs and appetites of the public, they create appetites, which they can then profitably "satisfy". Tactics for selling political candidates and policies are now the same as those for selling products.

Since much advertising deliberately misleads or confuses, as a part of its strategic arsenal, it is not too surprising if political ads do the same, to gain their ends. The 1988 presidential campaign represents the highest achievement of these tactics to date. Deliberate incomprehensibility and ambiguity win elections, in our present situation.

The success and reality of this national manipulation can be attested to in education by our best teachers, frustrated by the inability of many students even to compose a coherent paragraph. For, like the body, the analytical, critical part of the brain

needs daily exercise and use. Otherwise, like the body, it becomes soft, weak and malleable. Results are seen in increased functional illiteracy in this TV age. It is attested to, also, by many mental health practitioners and authorities, concerned at what they see happening to American brains and emotions. Among the freedoms that should not be allowed to the "press" or any group, or institution, governmental or private, is the freedom to destroy or deaden selected functions of the human brain.

The U.S. Constitution, in effect, has been unilaterally and unofficially amended by the media controllers, to permit them, for profit, to shape our decision-making as consumers and voting citizens, under the guise of "freedom of the press". That amendment (making a profit from shaping the political and economic system through this brain-washing) is or should be unconstitutional.

How is all this done? Stalin, Hitler, and Mussolini did it through their control of the media. Brainwashing of American prisoners of war during the Korean War provided a later glimpse. The debriefing of returned POWs revealed how insidiously successful this had been. Scores of cults, religious and political, in the U.S. and abroad, including the type involved in in the Jonestown massacre, illustrate other uses of these tactics.

Internationally, research has begun to study the respects in which TV watching can induce in some viewers a hypnotic

condition, the mind lapsing into an unresisting, receptive, alpha state. In others, ideas may be planted regarding how to solve problems, often with violence, which is increasingly used as "entertainment".

There has been great progress in studying the functions of the two hemispheres of the brain. Once an individual is sedated or anesthetized by the medium, the troublesome left or rational hemisphere being short-circuited, drugged and bypassed, the desire for what the sponsor (including the politician) is "selling" is "implanted" in the <u>right</u> hemisphere, which controls most of the non-rational, non-verbal behavior. Here lies fertile ground for appeals to <u>mood</u>, <u>emotion</u>, and <u>sex</u>, the desire for power or success, etc.

To better understand the propaganda techniques used (they are not called that by U.S. PR experts and ad men), one needs only to consult any good hypnotism manual, or propaganda techniques, as illustrated by Joseph Goebbels, Mao Tse Tung, or other totalitarian leaders. For illustrations of these techniques, used on U.S. TV daily, you have only to consult your home TV set.

COMMERCIAL USES OF TELEVISION, SINCE DEREGULATION, AND THE ABOLITION OF CODES WHICH EARLIER REGULATED THEM, CONSISTS IN THE INCESSANT REPETITION OF ONE-TO-TEN-YEAR-OLD COMMERCIALS, INTERRUPTED PERIODICALLY BY SNIPPETS OF WHAT WE REFER TO AS PROGRAM, I.E., ENTERTAINMENT, NEWS, ETC.

THE ULTIMATE HYPOCRISY OF MOST COMMERCIAL TV IS SEEN IN THE USE, BY THE INDUSTRY ITSELF, OF USED, SECOND-HAND, OUTDATED MATERIAL, REPEATED HUNDREDS OF TIMES, TO CONVINCE US, THE GULLIBLE VIEWERS, OR VICTIMS, TO THROW OUT OUR USED, SECOND-HAND, OUTDATED POSSESSIONS AND BUY NEW.

Another unmentioned achievement of these techniques is seen in the inability of our minds to maintain sustained attention. People, including students, now require the presentation of new material in "word bites" (a favorite of politicians) or short versions of important material. Gradually our ability to concentrate for any sustained period is being destroyed. We become incapable of sustained analysis, or critical discrimination. This is increasingly apparent, and dangerous, in political campaigns and other political uses.

Since control of radio and TV was turned over mostly to business corporations, the profit-and power-seeking controllers have in essence been given carte blanche to practice concealed hypnotism as a "public service", with no further qualification or license necessary. In other words free press rights are defined by these controllers to mean the right to use psycho-biological approaches to shape the American brain for the media's (or client's) own ends. The pathetic efforts of our citizenry, flopping helplessly about like lab animals, knowing something is wrong but not suspecting the cause-since the media call it "only entertainment" or "only a commercial"--deserve to be analyzed,

understood, and acted upon more fully while there is still time to salvage our democratic process.

Whether this selective "softening of the brain", our "TV illness", becomes terminal, or not, depends upon our ability to recapture for the public the corporate control now being so ruthlessly wielded. To speak of even further deregulation of communications in this regard is to propose approval of the final steps in the destruction process now going on in our political, intellectual and emotional life, even more than in physical health.

For years, in the TV violence controversy, media spokesmen have told those of us who claimed that so much media violence is harmful, that "you can't have it both ways'! you can't claim that TV incites to violence and at the same accuse it of producing apathy".

We now know (and so does the industry) that we can and do have it both ways. Different individuals are of different susceptibilities. What is merely exciting to some, triggers violence in others. It is now possible to pinpoint those parts and functions of the brain that we want to manipulate. This non-chemical manipulation, like drugs, can be managed-to incite to purchase here, to reduce resistance there. Millions of dollars a year are being made from this practice, and millions of "motiveless" crimes attest to its success.

As 1984 came and went, we find we are even exceeding George

Orwell's predictions in the fiendish effectiveness of non-surgical, non-chemical techniques of attitude-and behavior control, dangerous to democracy, and fatal if continued. Many of the dangers of this course were revealed in the 1988 presidential campaigns. Issues were avoided because they are too complicated to explain. But aren't the viewers, i.e., the citizens, the people, supposed to be the ultimate authority in a democracy, on the basis of informed decision-making? In the face of this need, isn't the cynical pleasure which many media experts take in the ease and success with which they can manipulate the public like putty, dangerous to democracy?

A crash effort to analyze, expose, and control, for the public good, these practices--which exceed the bonds of free speech and free press--is needed if our nation and civilization are not to suffer further destruction politically, economically, intellectually and emotionally. Our present uses of the media in shaping and servicing the political process need immediate and urgent revision.

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Now the world needs the Skornias and the Paul Reveres to warn us of the dangers impending, but the reality is that, like the spiritual prophets of old, few people will listen to such insight till its too late. Relative to the subjects of public education; try announcing to a class of young people weaned on multiple channels and hours of popular TV that there might be something wrong with that. You're in for a fight. The problem, of course, is that television has an intense economic need to get us all just watching (one hour of night-time programming can cost enough to pay the yearly salary of 15 or more school teachers, and a minute of advertising time can cost the salary of 6 or more); it lets us have lots of stories, which we need, but usually without any knowledge or incentive to participate ourselves -- to tell our own stories or to make our own video. Thus the following exercises, designed to be adaptable into almost any curriculim, and hopefully to begin to swallow up more of the time presently taken by however any of us define excessive TV viewing:

BE YOUR OWN TV GUIDE

We all know the TV listings (designed for reading and deliberate selection), even though busy lives make us often do what the TV operators seem to want -- melt down in front of the set, channel flip till something appeals, and before you know it, the night is gone.

A TV Guide, of course, lists all or many of the programs on, often 24 hours a day and up to 50 or more channels. A "Be Your Own TV Guide" lists hours of the day down the vertical left side of your page (every hour or half hour, depending on how you choose to do the exercise). Then you:

(1) Discuss and brainstorm with the group how much TV is healthy to watch in a day. Some pediatricians still say just one hour, but use what you as a group know about studies of obesity from lack of exercise and too much TV junk food,

number of hours between end of school and bedtime, need for fresh air and sleep, homework, etc.

(2) Once you've decided an amount, have everyone, individually or in small groups, read the TV listings, select shows they'd like, prioritize them, and write them in by the appropriate time or times on their "Be Your Own TV Guide". If the group has decided an hour, then a student's top hour of preference gets written into the slot when its on; no value judgments about particular programs here -- just deliberate control of how much TV gets watched.

(3) Next, because storytelling is our strong bias here, talk about places where students or familes can tell stories to and with each other. Students can then write in their choice(s) -- bedtime, at meals, after a game of catch with mom or dad, etc. -- perhaps even deciding what story or stories they might tell. Remember, some of these might be informal "This is what happened . . ." tales rather than the more formal bedtime "Once upon a time . . ." Both are important.

(4) Finally, fill in the remainder of the time slots with other activities of choice -- walking, swimming, playing with dolls. This might be a good time to let everyone "free write" or verbally brainstorm as many active things they like as possible, and then select which ones go on the written schedule. And that's it.

Of course, this is an unwieldy thing to consciously do every day. That's not the point. Doing it once or once in a while makes us think about how we make choices to spend our time listening to, being a part of, and telling stories.

MAKE YOUR OWN STARTOONS

I consider the ancient myth of the princess Andromeda chained to the seashore rock a TV story. Why? Because all these old star stories came when people saw characters and stories in the permanent shapes of the constellations, but also because Andromeda's rescue from the sea monster by Perseus on his winged horse is so often replayed on modern TV. "Clash of the Titans", a frequent cable TV rerun, adapts the story loosely, but alludes to happening in the time of the ancient myth; yet there are in this day of equality, multiple modernizations of the theme of the helpless female rescued by a hero -- from the early "Perils of Pauline" (now replayed on cable) to a more recent "Buck Rogers in the 25th Century" where Miss Galaxy lay beneath a destructive laser, threatening to strike at any moment. Will she be rescued by Mr. Rogers? Of course.

At the core of the Andromeda story is the situation that allows her to let her father, King Cepheus, abuse her by chaining her up to be fed to Cetus, the sea monster, all to protect the abusive vanity of the queen Cassiopeia. That could make it a discussion starter with older students, but even if you don't want to get into that, the fact that all the characters are constellations -- Cepheus, Cassiopeia, Perseus, Pegasus, Cetus -- allows you to go from the story to making your own startoons. How? Tell the old, old star story, using a large star map or drawing the constellations on the board. Then ask students to imagine their own characters and stories in the stars, even as folks did thousands of years ago. Then King Cepheus might become a house, and the big dipper tipped on end becomes a giraffe tall enough to fix the roof on a house in a town without ladders; or King Cepheus becomes a rocket ship which takes off, catches fire, and dives into the big dipper to be put out.

Of course, a lot more could be done with this if you open yourself up to the vast collections (from all cultures) of star legends, and a full map of the sky with all the constellations; and then there's the real-life science tales about the heavens.

EXPERIENCING THE HISTORY OF COMMUNICATION

As near as we know, ancient peoples first told stories to each other, often around a fire. Then they began forming "theater groups" to do plays. When writing was possible, the stories were written down. Radio took the written stories and again did them aloud (but now usually from a carefully crafted written script), and then TV adapted those same stories to its capability (allowing, e.g. the viewer-listener to see an extreme closeup of an actor's face, which is not possible if watching it as a play).

It is possible, and valuable, to take students experientially through this entire history (well, sort of). Here's an example of how I've done it in the past:

In 1988 I told O Henry tales ("Retrieved Reformation" and others dealing with reformed criminals) to Patty Bomash's 4-5th grade chapter one students at Longfellow school in Minneapolis. I then showed them part of a video letter from Wisconsin where a student told his version of a "Nate the Great" detective story. Patty's students then wrote their own detective tale, "The Purse Snatchers", and I taught them to tell it. Some told to a kindergarten class, and all of them made an audiocassette tape of their telling that they got to keep. Then as a group we rewrote the story as video script, carefully deciding and imaging each scene. Finally we made a video "professional style" (shooting and editing individual scenes as opposed to trying to tape a play with a single school camera -- but we did it with a school camera and the central media services editing equipment, so it was the student's work, was good, but, of course, didn't

"look professional", as they say. Anyway, besides playing on the school cable channel, the video went back to Wisconsin on a video letter to boost the esteem of the student there who originally told the detective story to help trigger the idea.

Now, for your guidance, here is the narrative version of the story, followed by the video script as written by the students. It would be good if you could also see the tape, but short of that possibility, a media person or parent volunteer with some video training could help you adapt this exercise to your setting and a story of your choosing. What the students have when they're done is an incredibly comprehensive understanding of how stories are formed in all media, and particularly how much reading, writing, storytelling, and cooperative work goes into forming the seemingly effortless TV stories that we watch so many of:

Purse Snatchers
a story using ch- and -ch words
by rooms 114, 120, and 122

It was the middle of the morning on the first day of the month. An old lady with gray hair, a walking cane, and thick bifocal glasses was walking on the boardwalk next to the beach. She had her purse in her hand. She crossed the street and went into the bank to cash her social security check. When she came out of the bank, she walked toward the secondhand store and the deli. To get to the secondhand store, she had to walk past a large city church. Two teenagers were lounging on the steps in front of the church, apparently waiting for a bus.

As the old lady hobbled by, one of the kids said good-by to her friend and walked down the steps. She elbowed the old lady, knocking her down. At this moment, the boy ran down the steps and snatched the old lady's purse.

Then a man who had been sitting in his car reading a newspaper jumped out and began chasing the kids. A woman ran out of the church and ran after the girl. The woman shouted, "Stop, police! You're under arrest!"

In a short time the policeman and policewoman had the two kids under control. Then they helped the old lady get up. A squad car came to pick up the purse snatchers. The policeman and woman drove the old lady to the station to press charges against the kids.

Late that afternoon, three people were in the lunchroom at the police station having coffee together. One was the man from the car, one was the woman from inside the church, and one was the old woman. Now the old woman looked different. There was no cane and there were no thick bifocals. She looked a lot less helpless. The three were laughing and talking over their coffee.

"Well, Charity," the man said to the old lady, "we certainly caught those two purse snatchers this morning."

"Yes Charlie. Let's hope that puts an end to the purse snatching in that neighborhood. Those kids have robbed a lot of old ladies in the last two months," said the old lady. "Let's finish our reports and wrap up the day. I've got to get home and cook a birthday dinner for my grandsons. They're coming over tonight."

The three stood up, took their dishes to the counter, and left the lunchroom.

AND NOW FOR THE VIDEO VERSION: each number represents a different scene

VIDEO	AUDIO
1. "The Purse Snatchers" (written on blackboard)	Music
2. Hand crossing off 1st of month on calendar	
3. Old lady with cane and bifocals walking down sidewalk and across street	
4. Shot of bank (TCF sign)	
5. Banker	
6. Closeup of old lady	Lady: "I'd like to cash my social security check"

VIDEO	AUDIO
7. Old lady out door	
8. Old lady by church with 2 kids lounging.	
9. Man in car reading paper	
10. Kids get up	
11, One kid knocks old lady down and grabs purse.	
12. Purse snatcher runs.	
13. Man in car gets out and chases purse snatcher	Man in car: Stop, police.
14. Woman comes out church door	Woman: Stop, you're under arrest.
15. Woman catches other kid who didn't take purse.	
16. Police car drives up	
17. Man and woman help old woman up	Man and woman: "Well, I guess that wraps that up".
18. Kids loaded in police car	
19. Man, woman, and old woman having coffee. "Old woman" removes wig.	Man: "Well, Charity. We sure caught those purse snatchers this morning.
20. CU Old woman	Old woman: "Yes, Charlie. Let's hope that ends the purse snatching in this neighborhood. Those kids have robbed a lot of old ladies in the last 2 months. Let's finish our reports and wrap it up. I've got a birthday dinner to cook for my grandson.
21. All 3 bus dishes and screen fades to black.	
22. Credits -- student's names.	

TELLING FROM A TV SCRIPT

Most storytellers have their own system of remembering and visualizing the main plot of a story so they can tell and recreate in their own words. Because my training is in TV, I use the idea of a TV script, plotting the visual (what I see and want people to see) in the left "video" column, and the audio (what I want folks to hear) in the right.

Here's a tellable story that goes even one step further (because in many stories all the "video" goes on in your own imagination only). It's written as a TV script, and the audio column gives you the story line, while the video suggests appropriate actions. Other stories could, of course, be written this way, either to tell or produce:

How Some Children Helped Invent the Stethoscope

VIDEO	AUDIO
1. Put your ear to each other's heart and listen the way the doctor had to without the stethoscope.	1. Long ago before the stethoscope was invented, a doctor wanted to help his patient get well, but he couldn't listen to the heart very well with just his ear.
2. Scratch on a board or on the table and listen on the other end. Put your ear right down on the board or table.	2. One day on the way home the doctor saw some children on the playground doing a curious thing. They were taking turns scratching on the end of a long board and listening on the other end. The children let the doctor try, and when he put his ear on the board, he heard the scratching come through much louder than if his head weren't down on the board itself.
3. Listen to each other's heart thru a cardboard tube.	3. The doctor got an idea. He rushed back to the hospital rolled up a cardboard tube and placed it over his patient's heart. The tube helped carry the sound of the heartbeat much better so the doctor could help his patient get well. After that other people improved the doctor's idea until they got the stethoscope we have today.
4. Look at a real stethoscope.	4. This story has been brought to you by a real workable stethoscope which the doctor uses to help you stay well.

TELLING STORIES ABOUT TELEVISION

We've grown so accustomed to letting the TV tell us stories, we find it difficult or even impossible to have the awareness that television is a thing and/or experience that we can step back and tell stories about. This is a valuable way to preserve the importance of personal storytelling as well as to understand the impact of TV, control it to a degree, and put it in perspective.

One way to approach this is to use the old story circle idea, passing a staff from person to person (holding the staff meaning its your turn to tell, if you wish), with the "assignment" to tell a tale about TV. Jogging memories with an example or two is always good, like -- "We were in the grocery store and mentioned we had to get home to watch 'Murder She Wrote'. 'We don't watch much TV at our house' responded the clerk. 'The reception is so bad my husband has to sit in the corner and hold the antenna to see anything at all'." Stories may be slow, especially with young people who have never known a time without TV, but they begin to come.

Another approach might be to do an oral history collecting, for example with older people. Ask them "What did kids do for fun before TV and nintendo games"; and still another way is to make a point to read and tell some of the slowly growing number of children's books coming out about TV. Here are as many as I presently know about:

Angell, Judie. A Word From Our Sponsor. Dell, 1979.
Alfred leads a consumer rebellion against TV advertising.

Berenstain, Stan and Jan. The Berenstain Bears and Too Much TV. Random House, 1984.
Mama Bear decides there will be no TV watching for one week.

Blume, Judy. Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing. Dutton, 1972.
Fudge seems the perfect boy for the Toddle-Bike commercial . . . till the filming.

Bond, Michael. Paddington on Screen. Houghton-Mifflin, 1982.

Brown, Marc. The Bionic Bunny Show. Atlantic Monthly, 1984.
Story shows how the stunts and effects are accomplished backstage on "Bionic Bunny".

Buchwald, Art. Irving's Delight. McKay, 1975.
A famous french detective is called in to rescue a beloved cat in this spoof on cat commercials.

Byars, Betsy. The TV Kid. Viking, 1976.
Lennie imagines he's a TV hero till he has to live through real life terror in an abandoned cottage.

Carris, Joan. Witch-Cat. Lippincott, 1984.
A magic cat learns about the twentieth century by watching TV.

Cleary, Beverly. Ramona Quimby, Age 8. Morrow, 1981.
Ramona gives her book report in the form of a commercial.

Cleary, Beverly. Ramona and Her Father. Morrow, 1977.
Ramona hopes to earn a million dollars doing TV commercials while her father is out of work.

Cohen, Miriam. Jim Meets the Thing. Greenwillow Books, 1981.
Jim feels badly about being the only first grader afraid of a TV monster till he rescues his friend from a real praying mantis.

Collier, James. Rich and Famous: The Further Adventures of George Stable. Four Winds, 1975.
George sings and plays guitar on a TV pilot.

Gerson, Corinne. Son For a Day. Atheneum, 1980.
Danny makes friends with divorced fathers and their sons at the zoo. Making friends with Ms. Anderson gets his story on television.

Harris, Mark. Confessions of a Prime Time Kid. Lothrop, 1985.
A 13 year old TV star writes his memoirs.

Heide, Florence and Roxanne. A Monster is Coming. A Monster is Coming. Franklin Watts, 1980.
Little brother encounters a monster sneaking in the window while his sister is totally absorbed in a TV show.

Heide, Florence. The Problem With Pulcifer. Lippincott, 1982.
Pulcifer's parents are worried because he refuses to watch TV.

Heilbroner, Joan. Tom the TV Cat. Random House, 1984.
Tom the cat is a "watchaholic".

Hicks, Clifford. Alvin Fernald-TV Anchorman. Holt, 1980.
Alvin takes a TV news spot and solves an 11 year old crime.

Johnson, Larry. 2615 So. 6th St, Mpls, Mn, 55454. "Garden Hose Cable TV" available as reprints for SASE. Two TV stories, "The Devil and the Tree House" and "This is a Films Production - Destruction of Pompeii" available for $8.95 plus $1.00 postage and handling on KEY OF SEE'S audiotape Running Scared and Flying High.

Levy, Elizabeth. Something Queer is Going On. Delacorte, 1973.
Jill's dog is used in a TV commercial.

Lindgren, Astrid. Karlson on the Roof and Karlson Flies Again.
Among the tales in these lesser known works by the creator of Pippi Longstocking are episodes like the one where Karlson tries to figure out where the "cute weather girl" goes when the TV picture changes.

McPhail, David. Fix-It. Dutton, 1984.
Emma is upset one Saturday when the TV won't work, but while the repairman is coming, her parents help her discover books.

Miles, Betty. The Secret Life of the Underwear Champ. Knopf, 1981.
Larry is thrilled to be doing TV commercials till he learns he will appear in underwear.

Personal Experience -- Here's where a lot of great TV stories can come from: the child who accidentally discovers you can permanently distort the TV image like a funhouse mirror by waving a magnet in front of it; the boyfriend who doesn't like to stand in the corner and hold the antenna to get good reception. What are your unusual or funny or serious experiences with television?

Rettic, Margaret. "Television in the Snow" in The Silver Touch and Other Family Christmas Stories. Morrow, 1978.
Two children discover they can see TV programs in holes they make in the snow.

Rodgers, Mary. A Billion for Boris. Harper, 1974.
An old TV set shows programs a day in advance.

Rosen, Winifred. Ralph Proves the Pudding. Doubleday, 1972.
Ralph makes a TV commercial even though he feels the dessert tastes like shoes.

"The Selfish Giant" by Oscar Wilde -- I consider this a TV story because when I first read it, I thought "I like it but I can't tell it". Then I saw the animated TV version and changed my mind. More and more students in my storytelling classes are telling stories they heard on TV. I think that's good.

Shyer, Marlene. Adorable Sunday. Scribner, 1983.
The story of Sunday's career as a TV commercial performer.

Weber, Judith. Lights, Camera, Cats. Lothrop, 1978.

Wildsmith, Brian. Daisy. Pantheon, 1984.
Daisy, an inquisitive cow, becomes a TV performer.

West, Dan. The Day the TV Blew Up. Albert Whitman and Company, 1988.
Ralph's TV explodes, and he discovers the library.

"TUNE IN AGAIN TOMORROW" -- TELLING LONG CLASSICS AS SERIAL TALES

Many TV shows (not just the soaps) are continued from week to week, or at least build on information from last time. Also, many longer tales from literature are condensed or changed considerably when adapted for TV or movies. Telling these longer stories as "to be continued serials" not only mimics the TV style, but also can allow for comparison and discussion of the differences.

When I directed travel camps in the 60's, I used the days events to include the campers in daily serials about "The Flying Meatball and His Wonderful, Marvelous Swiss Army Knife With a Blade for Solving Every Problem" -- certainly not great literature, but a lifesaver on rainy days and those long bus trips; and today, 20 years later I occasionally run into adults (grown up campers) who remember those stories. The same is true for the great literature which I began using in schools a number of years ago when I read that Richard Wyche, first president of National Story League in 1903, advocated exposing children to the long classics by telling as serials in schools, camps, and other settings where one sees the same groups regularly.

Breaking up the longer stories like Pinocchio (Collodi's original tale is very different from Walt Disney or any of the modern media adaptations), Tom Sawyer, Charlotte's Web, King Arthur or Robin Hood, creates healthy suspense and imagination building. When they say "Tell us what happens next", you say, "I will; next time." Next time you say, "When we last left Pinocchio, who remembers what was happening?" They remember and they tell and retell it.

To get a longer story together to tell, you must read the whole book first and make sure you still really love it and are willing to commit to learning the whole thing. Then it's the same as learning to tell any shorter story, except you must know how many sessions you have, allowing for one or two to be "rained out". You also need the overall tale blocked out to allow a 10-15 minute piece each time which can end with a "cliffhanger": "Will Pinocchio starve because Geppetto was thrown in jail before he could buy groceries? Will Pinocchio be sorry he lied to make that happen? How and when will Geppetto get out of jail? To find out, we'll have to wait until next time when I ask you, ' When we last left Pinocchio and Geppetto . . .'"

There are, I'm sure, lots of ways to do it, but here are my notes for Pinocchio, after which I usually show the Walt Disney or Faerie Tale Theatre version and discuss the differences and why:

PINOCCHIO by Carlo Collodi — blocked into 9 segments for a 10 week session.

1. Master Cherry gives the talking log to Geppetto who carves a special puppet which misbehaves even before it's finished. Pinocchio runs away, lies and gets Geppetto jailed.

2. Pinocchio smashes the talking cricket (no suit on this one) against the wall for correcting him. He finds just one egg in the house to eat, but a chick comes out and flies away. Pinocchio begs downtown at 2 a.m., gets garbage water dumped on him; he comes home exhausted and accidentally burns his legs off, warming them in the fire.

3. Geppetto returns and gives a fussy Pinocchio his breakfast; he makes new feet for the puppet and sells his only winter coat to buy a new spelling book so Pinocchio will attend school. Pinocchio sells the book to go to a puppet show where the puppets recognize him. This stops the show which irritates the puppetmaster who threatens to cut Pinocchio into firewood as a lesson to all the puppets.

4. Harlequin saves Pinocchio who is then saved by saving Harlequin (did you understand that?) and the puppetmaster gives Pinocchio five gold pieces to take home to his father. Then the cat and fox persuade Pinocchio to go plant his money in the field of miracles to grow money trees and on the way there they disguise themselves and try to steal it. Pinocchio, money in mouth, is hung from a tree to choke the money out.

5. Blue fairy takes him down and calls 3 doctors to make him well. Pinocchio won't take medicine until she sends for the undertaker. When he does, he lies to the blue fairy and his nose grows so long he's jammed into the room.

6. Millions of woodpeckers rescue Pinocchio by whittling his nose. He meets the cat and fox again, buries his money (plants it?) and of course has it stolen. He's thrown in jail when he complains to the judge. When he's released and heads home, he's caught in a trap, forced to play watchdog, and then finds the blue fairy's tombstone — "died of a broken heart because she was abandoned by her little brother Pinocchio".

7. A giant pigeon flies Pinocchio to the seashore where he swims to try to catch his father who's rowing to find him. Pinocchio ends up on isle of Industrious bees, meets a grown blue fairy ("I died as your sister and now could be your mother if you were a real boy"). Pinocchio promises to be good, and is, but "bad boys" trick him down to see the dogfish (he fears his father's been swallowed), start throwing books at him and knock out Eugene. The police blame Pinocchio because the other boys run. Pinocchio rescues a police dog, drowning from trying to chase him into the sea, and in the process Pinocchio is caught in a fishing net and fried as a "puppet fish".

8. The police dog returns and saves Pinocchio, delivering him to the blue fairy's door, answered by an incredibly slow snail. She offers him a real boy party ("You're close now"), but he is tricked by Candlewick into going to "the land of boobies" (Pleasure Island in the Walt Disney cartoon — a land mine if walked into directly out loud). It's a lot of fun — all that was promised — till they end up donkeys and are sold, Candlewick to a farm and Pinocchio to a circus.

9. Pinocchio breaks his leg performing and is drowned to be sold as drum skins; the fish eat off his donkey body and he swims away, only to be swallowed by the dogfish and to discover his father. They escape to an island run by the talking cricket with the snail as doorman. The blue fairy really has died of old age but appears in a dream and tells Pinocchio he will now be a real boy because he really has cared for his father and others.

THE END.

MODELS OF RESPONSIBILITY

A while back I bought the unabridged "1001 Nights", told by the beautiful and wise Scheherezade. In the original they're very, very adult, but many (e.g. Aladdin, Ali Baba, Sinbad) have been rewritten as children's tales, and are often recast as TV movies, minus most of the explicit sexuality, but not the very graphic violence. One key difference between Scheherezade's presentation and that of much TV usage of the tales was that she told them to "get the attention" of an evil king to teach him to stop terrorizing his kingdom and especially its young women. TV, on the other hand, tells the tales to get our attention to make us buy the advertised products, often things we don't really need.

I appall censorship, and once had a wonderful discussion with 5th graders on same after showing them a scene from a Walton's show where the minister almost burned a German Bible in a rash of anti-German, anti-Hitler conglomeration and confusion. Yet I also fear greatly the amount of overt violence portrayed on TV, and the growing number of young people saying that's what they like; that and the rising number of young people imitating such violence in real life.

I generally don't lay a lot of content rules on students telling stories or producing videos. I personally don't like most ghost stories, but I allow them as one form of literature. However, if a student storytelling session gravitates into all ghost or horror tales, and especially if it falls into horror for horror sake alone, I will both discuss "gratuitous violence" as a concept, and I will talk about and/or tell other kinds of tales to reinforce the fact that there are many kinds to tell. I also have to say things like "You certainly can tell those stories if that's what you like, but even if you tell them well, I can't choose you to tell it on the TV channel at Children's Hospital (a prime community telling opportunity). Scary stories aren't appropriate at all there; the kids are already scared". I've also said things like "You really told that story well, but the story isn't OK for the hospital. I hope you also work on something that is".

I also once banned showing violence on videos a group of jr. high students were making because it began to be the only content they could see to do. I said things like, "If you grow up and do TV in America, unfortunately in my opinion, there will be plenty of space for what you're doing, but it concerns me because I'm aware that, for example, in Japan overt depictions of violence have been not allowed on NHK TV and its still safe to walk the streets in Tokyo. There may be many other factors as well, but we ought to look at that because I think we all want to feel safe . . . I also want

you to be forced to use your imagination to come up with interesting ideas other than the "easy violence".

Next I showed the group one of the Davenport Films "Tales From the Brothers Grimm" where the mean sisters committed suicide. The filmmakers didn't water down the Grimm story, but they elected not to show violent deeds take place. An off-camera voice told about it over an outdoor scene (thus not visually reinforcing the act itself), and the well-dramatized tale went on. Anyway, my class, as prone to gratuitous violence as any I've ever had, liked the story. They took the written story and some of them adapted it to tell and some for video, but like Davenport, they elected not to show the awful deaths happen. A different way was modeled for them than the common network TV or feature length film. Incidentally, if you'd like more information on the Davenport Grimm Films (they've worked a lot with the storytelling community), write them at Rte 1, Box 527, Delaplane, Virginia, 22025.

IS THAT A TRUE STORY?

The last few years I've become more and more accustomed to being asked, "Is that a true story?", even when I'm telling some fantastic tall tale like the gopher who hooked garden hose to the outside faucets of all neighborhood homes to tell stories (illustrated on tires rolling by the window where you listened thru the drain) on GARDEN HOSE CABLE TV AND CGSN (Canadian Goose Satellite Network).

First I was puzzled (in a way I still am), but I've taken to answering by saying, "There are 2 kinds of lies -- a fiction tale made up to entertain or teach something. That's OK, but there's the story made up to hurt someone else or to try not to have to take the consequences for something you did wrong. That's not OK.

Some of the recent research suggests that most older children can easily separate fact from fiction, especially regarding cartoons and "real life drama" or the news, but often emotionally disturbed or learning disabled young people can't even do that (and they tend to watch the most TV because reading is even harder for them). However, I think it all goes deeper than that because much of what's in the news is not necessarily true as we think of it; witness such things as Iran-Contra, the Persian Gulf, and the increasing need again to keep things from us for security reasons. And TV drama? I believe most or all of it really happened in some way somewhere; but if you watch several hours a night, you'll usually see a number of people murdered, often brutally. How many times have you seen that in real life. I'm over 40 and once in my life I saw a person stabbed out of the corner of my eye (I don't know whether he made it or not; an ambulance came, and it wasn't news 300 miles away the next day). That's fewer times than some, and

more, I suspect, than most. Yet people think its real on TV because it looks real (let's not get into the current growth of mixing cartoon characters with real humans), and I wonder what this proliferating TV environment really does to children's sense of "Is that true?"

I think it helps to tell stories about this (like mine above about seeing one stabbing in real life and many on TV), but mostly I find it hard even for adults to understand. TV has created almost an invisible environment that we think we're experiencing, but we can't really because our only known experience is to watch the pictures and sounds on the screen, and that doesn't seem to make sense to tell about except "You should watch that if it comes on again". So, to enable this discussion along, here are a couple of "teacher-storyteller friendly" reality exercises that play with what is real and what merely looks real:

(1) I Can Make You Disappear -- To do this you need a fairly new camcorder with a good pause button. Set the camera up on a tripod (it must be steady and stay in the same spot the whole time) and take a shot of one student who will say, "When I snap my fingers, I'll disappear". Shoot that and then pause immediately. Leave the camera shot in exactly the same spot, but have the student move out of the picture. Shoot the same spot again with everything the same except that person being gone, and when you play the tape back, he or she will magically disappear. If you want to get fancy, have the student say "Where did I go?" off camera on the second shot.

(2) Beautiful Music -- By mixing one sound with another visual, you can, e.g., make a person play guitar music on stethoscope, or harmonica music on a blackboard eraser. How? Set the camera up to take a person strumming the stethoscope (practice doing it in time with your off camera record or guitarist) and then record while the music plays. We used to do it in the hospital with discarded IV bottles and trumpet music, and even adults would ask, "Are they really doing that?" But the children who made the tape knew, and now had an experiential base from which to discuss or tell stories about "Just because it looks real, doesn't mean it is"

Once you've done this with your students (and with a little practice anyone can learn to use a camcorder and do these simple effects), you can build stories to tell and adapt them to video. I once had a Sunday School teacher in a story-video class who had her class make the angel suddenly appear on the hillside (same effect in reverse); a homeless man cheers himself up making money for shelter by playing harp music on a discarded bed frame; a small boy magically disappears when a bully is about to beat him up. Now you take it.

USING THE STARMAKING POWER OF VIDEO

Since there are now a number of resources available on teaching students to tell stories, the purpose of this section is only to reinforce that its important, and to perhaps add a new twist to that. After all, the Singers at Yale have long been saying things like "children who have adults tell them stories and play games with them become more creative adults" (from Partners in Play), so let's start now to teach a whole generation of young people to be ready to tell stories to their own children again; or think about the implications of fine adults who don't get deserved promotions because they fear getting up and "telling their story; or look at the research now coming out that says "story retelling aids in reading comprehension (see e.g. "Using Story Retelling to Develop Comprehension" in K.D. Miller, Children's Comprehension of Text, Newark, Delaware, Intl Reading Assn, 1989). So we should be teaching students to tell -- no question.

I never make students get up and tell in front of their peers (though I encourage it and provide the opportunity every time, and many do), but I do say "Even if you don't feel comfortable telling before a group, we can all tell and need to tell stories at home to the people we care about; but there's something else going on in teaching students to tell stories. Some of the least inhibited and best potential storytellers may never really do it because they're always busy telling inappropriately and at inappropriate places and times. I do a lot of work trying to get them to tell appropriate tales in appropriate places and to get positive recognition for it. Often this is on TV, a very fascinating medium for all young people, but especially those having particular difficulty in school.

One of the sometimes if not often sad facts of our culture is that popular TV elevates certain people to star status and creates the illusion (often mainly for marketing purposes) that these folks somehow are better than the rest of us.

Now that "alternative uses of video" are becoming more common, it is more and more possible to put young storytellers on TV as "stars" and hopefully to redirect some of their energy to positive sharing of their talents -- the fact is there are many valid and valuable uses of TV or portable video that never get touched by popular TV because they always have to justify their enormous expenses against the biggest possible audience. Some things are just for small audiences, and they're just as important.

I often let students tape each other telling, both to try out stories and video skills, and to see themselves for evaluation (without the fear of ridicule that's ever lurking among peers, especially in jr. high). When a story is ready, either from seeing it on one of these trial tapes, or from seeing it in a live telling, I invite the student to tell the story for patients on the closed circuit channel at Children's Hospital (since its call-in, we have them tell part of the tale and invite patients to call in and finish), or for the school closed circuit channel, or for a video letter to be exchanged with Japan or Ecuador or . . . There's also the whole area of cable access TV. For several years I've made tapes with student tellers occupying a small circle in the corner of the screen while full screen is occupied by a sign language interpreter. The tapes, starring the students play on cable access TV, and then are made available as check out cassettes thru the schools hearing impaired program (who helped select the stories and make the tapes in the first place). So in all of these, and in live tellings in other school classes or the community, the students get to be "stars", doing something worthwhile that might not otherwise get done.

TELL-A-PHONE

I have suggested in the past that the telephone may in fact be the storytellers real broadcast mechanism. If storytelling really is an intimate personal exchange, is it really storytelling anymore when it becomes just one more of the "acts" on a million dollar network TV production? Can we or should we try to afford it? Does it further the cause of education? But almost anyone, grandparent, parent, teacher, student, can pick up the telephone and for a few dollars "broadcast" their story and get one back from a friend or acquaintance in another state or country.

And you, in your classroom, could also use the telephone to bring in a storyteller you really need to hear, but don't have the budget to do so. It could be a volunteer parent across town who has a story but no time to drive to the school, or it could be a professional in another state whose stories fit your project, but you can-t pay airfare and a whole day -- just for a story or two.

Here's what you do. Hook a speakerphone to a telephone your class can gather in front of (some modern phone systems already have them built in, or they're $40-$50 at Radio Shack, or maybe your media services loans them out). Then arrange ahead of time when you will call. When you do, introduce the person as if they were physically in the room, let them tell their story and take questions from the group (the speakerphone lets everyone hear and talk with each other. If its a volunteer, thank them as you usually do, and if its a professional, send them the honorarium you negotiated for their 15 minutes by phone.

TRACING THE ROOTS OF YOUR TV STORY

Many movies or TV shows are stated adaptations of written tales we often tell -- like "Camelot", "Sword in the Stone", "Excalibur", "Gawain and the Green Knight", and who knows how many other remakes of the King Arthur legends. We could cite many others, but here I'm more interested in the subtler connections, like the movie "Mr. Mom" which doesn't purport to be, but is definitely the same story as the old folktale "The Man Who Tended the House". "Mr. Mom" is very modernized and not set on a farm (there's not even a garden in the suburban yard), but in both stories a man and woman switch places, and the man messes things up royally at home. Or how about the old TV show "Dukes of Hazzard" -- this horrifies most people when they hear it, but the fact is the general plot line follows the classic Robin Hood pretty closely. There's the corrupt Sheriff Boss Hogg, and the "outlaw" Duke boys who actually keep the county clean.

If you read the TV Guide carefully, as I do, you'll begin to notice that though there are always new shows, the proliferation of channels has led to many more reruns than in the past. This might suggest the eventual possibility of systematically cataloguing this information as curriculim, but for right now you'll have to do (or get your students to do) as I do -- read TV Guide, compare to your knowledge of written or told stories, and when it comes on the air, record "Mr. Mom", show a representative portion (the spot where the washing machine is overflowing in the basement while the furnace blows up and the vacuum cleaner is chasing the baby across the floor?), tell "The Man Who Tended the House", talk about it, and then erase the tape so you're inside of "fair use" law and not violating copyright.

Or you can just deal with it conceptually when it comes up. For example, recently I told my version of the hare and the tortoise to a group of first graders, and one vociferous boy shouted, "I know that story. It's a TV story". I said, "Well, that's not exactly true. It's been made into TV many times, from Bugs Bunny to Ninja Turtles, but its actually an old story, told thousands of years ago by a wise Ethiopian slave. Then its been written down many times, aand finally made into TV" and so it goes . . .

TELLING THE STORIES TV FORGETS

Decisions about what goes on TV are made by people in charge, and they may well not decide to tell the tales most important to you. A glaring example is that not too many years back, blacks were portrayed only as buffoons, criminals, or kindly servants. They didn't come on TV as shrewd detectives, Dr. Huxtables

or other competent professionals. That story has begun to change, but at one time it wasn't there. The trick is to look carefully at what is there and think, "Is there something important to me that's not represented or underrepresented? Something I could make a point to tell stories about because TV is forgetting?

I just made a rather comprehensive bibliography of children's stories about gardening because I believe growing your own garden is a best, accessible way to learn to take care of the earth, and that there are tasty treats besides the sugar snacks advertised (having their stories told) on TV. Actually, since much of what advertising consists of is creating and telling a story to make us desire some product, a good project might be to:

1. Define valuable things that can't necessarily be packaged and sold, but are still valuable -- a glass of drinking water, a toy you make yourself, telling a bedtime story to children.

2. Then write or produce an ad that "tells the story" of this act or item and makes people want it.

Here's one of my favorite examples -- an empty plastic dish detergent bottle becomes a "squirt gun" that need not add to the landfill problem, nor does it require pointing a gun at someone to have the fun.

Finally, if you have really good ideas for stories that should be on TV and you want to do more than tell them yourself, write to Norman Fleischman at Box 2602, Malibu, California, 90265. He makes it his business to get positive social ideas (stories that are missing) introduced into the scripts of popular TV. Or if you want to join a media reform and literacy group that has a pretty good understanding of storytelling (person to person) as it relates to electronic media, write to National Telemedia Council, 120 East Wilson St., Madison, Wisconsin, 53703.

GOOD LUCK AND GOOD STORYTELLING IN THIS ELECTRONICALLY OVERPOWERING WORLD.