

How to do PQA

TPR Storytelling is an awesome teaching method. One thing that makes it especially fun is the flexibility inherent in the method. The fact that you can literally “wing it” (go into class with your words, an understanding of what the kids need, and no story) means that it is possible to produce outstanding language students while always keeping them the center of attention.

What is the secret for getting great stories?

Learn to do PQA! (Personalized Question-Answer)

Ask your kids questions using the words of the day. The general format is: ask a kid a question (looking straight into her eyes and smiling eagerly.) When she responds, STAY THERE and smile and repeat her response with a "I'm very interested in this" tone of voice. FOLLOW UP with another question to elaborate on her answer. STAY THERE and sort of raise your eyebrows and tilt your head like the new information is even more interesting. Repeat back to her what she said to you. (These repetitions are like caretaker language. A little kid says, "Cookie" and the mother replies, "Oh, you want a cookie?" They give you the chance to recast the answer in the second person singular while faking it that you are fascinated in this child.) Silently count to 2 or 3.

Then turn your head, step back one or two steps to address the entire class. Say, "Class, Kelly is going to work this summer! She is going to work at MacDonald's!" (or whatever it was that your two questions were.) Remind the entire class to exclaim "Ahhh!" because this is fascinating. Ask a few circling questions. Then go BACK to Kelly and get another little tidbit or two from her. THIS TIME it is fun to see if you can get her to lie. Like get her to say that Freddie Prinz, Jr. works there, too. Or get her to say that she puts cat's eyeballs on the hamburgers of really good-looking guys. Again report to the class, with more circling questions.

Now go to a different kid and begin with a question that uses a word you are working on. It can be the same question you asked Kelly. Follow the same procedure, but make one little change: Ask the new kid if he is going to work at MacDonald's (or whatever Kelly said.) This one little change shows Kelly that you really did think she was interesting. It shows that you cared so much about what she said that you REMEMBERED it!

When you ask questions of the class, you can now ask, "Who is going to work at MacDonald's? Where is Nate going in August?" This type of questioning alerts the class that they are responsible for learning what others in class have said. It makes them listen and pay attention to the PQA.

By doing good PQA, a story will bloom in front of you. It will be better than if you simply went in with a pre-determined story line. If your students have not

yet caught on to the need for bizarre, this will lead them there. Soon they will do it all for you.

If you need help with creativity, simply have three weird words that you can throw into your questioning and it will all work out. Blaine's favorite weird words were Julia Roberts, Toad Suck, and "pato" (duck.) In the above example, he might have located the Macdonald's in Toad Suck, Arkansas. Or he might have had hamburgers made out of ducks, hamburgers with duck's feet added to them, he could have had a duck customer come in, or maybe Julia Roberts comes in and wants to see/kiss/smell/touch/paint/hit/listen to Kelly's duck. Anything with a duck would have made the conversation funny. Then when he reported it to the class Kelly would have the chance to blush or giggle or shake her head in denial or nod her head like it was the truth. Whatever. She was the star for a second and it was fun.

My favorite words were Matt Damon, "grenouille" (frog) and "pamplemousse" (grapefruit). I would use one of those words like this: Matt Damon is going to work there too, because he wants to look at Kelly. But he always forgets to add the Heinz Grenouille Catsup so his hamburgers aren't as good as Kelly's. Or Matt Damon comes in as a customer and is so in love with Kelly that he offers her two pamplemousses. Anything like that to get the lies started. Once the kids were off and running, I didn't need my favorite words anymore.