

Storytelling was an important part within the Roadville and Trackton communities. In Roadville, individuals told personal stories in the sense that they were about themselves or those close to them (Heath, p. 149). Heath says, "Stories [that recounted] an actual event either witnessed by others or previously told in the presence of others and declared by them 'a good story'" (p. 149).

Roadville residents did follow somewhat of guidelines when they told their stories. For instance, "stories 'told on' someone other than the storyteller [were] never told unless the central character or someone who [was] clearly designated his representative [was] present" (p. 149).

Men and women had different ways of storytelling. Heath states, "Women invited stories of other women, men regaled each other with tales of their escapades on hunting and fishing trips, or their run-ins (quarrels) with their wives and children" (p. 150).

Stories usually "triggered" other stories, which "[reaffirmed] a familiarity with the kind of experience just recounted" (p. 150). Essentially, stories such as these "tested publicly the strength of relationships and openly declared bonds of kinship and friendship" (p. 150).

In terms of group dynamics, "either the story-teller who himself [announced] he has a story or the individual who [invited] another tell a story was, for the moment, in control of the entire group" (p. 151).

Heath states, "[T]he most frequent gossip in Roadville [took] place between only two people, with an unstated and often unfilled agreement that neither [would] reveal her participation to others; breaches of such trust [were] frequent causes of female disagreement" (p. 154).

Stories covered a wide range of topics in Roadville. Stories could have contained "a moral or summary message which [highlighted] the weakness admitted in the tales" (p. 153). Similar to "testimonials," stories such as these included citing scripture (p. 153). "Parable-like stories," particularly those "told repeatedly or handed down in families over generations, [were] the most preferred ones since "the retelling of the entire story [was] often not necessary" (p. 155).

Other than referencing the Bible for their stories, Roadville residents rarely used other kinds of "written sources" (p. 155). Roadville women bought family and home magazines, as well as "'True Story' magazines and publications which [featured] the personal stories of movie and television personalities, but they [did] not usually read these publicly" (pp. 155-56).

The stories that were given to children in "Sunday School" and "in Vacation Bible school" were "printed materials prepared by the national association of their church's particular denomination" and contained stories from the Bible (p. 157).

Heath confides, "Children in Roadville [were] not allowed to tell stories, unless an adult [announced] that something which happened to a child [made] a good story and [invited] retelling" (p. 158). Roadville children were encouraged to tell stories "along the model of adult stories" (p. 159).

Prior to them entering nursery school, "Roadville children had relatively little exposure to extended prose fictive or fanciful stories, either told or read to them" (p. 161). However, once children entered nursery school, they had access to "a wide variety of books about fanciful characters doing preposterous deeds, and the children themselves [were] often asked to tell stories" (p. 161).

Roadville children engaged in "make-believe," which was considered part of "play" by adults and involved telling "fictive stories, [exaggerating] real-life events, [drawing] in TV characters or events, and [creating] their own combinations of events, objects, causes and effects" (p. 162). Essentially, "children [told] stories to each other or they [monologued] their creations" (p. 162).

Heath says, “Roadville children [carried] their parents’ requirements for using language: [reported] exactly how something [was] said, [maintained] a single consistent label for items and events, and [rendered] stories in absolute chronological order with direct discourse” (p. 165). The attention to details for what was said and what took place was further “reinforced in many of the community’s church-related practices and on other occasions when adults [told] stories on themselves or each other” (p. 165).

Trackton residents considered “[g]ood storytellers” to be ones that “[based] their stories on an actual event, but they creatively [fictionalized] the details surrounding the real event, and the outcome of the story [might] not even [resembled] what indeed happened” (p. 166). “Talkin’ junk” usually was part of good storytelling in Trackton, which included “laying on highly exaggerated compliments and making wildly exaggerated comparisons as well as telling narratives” (p. 166).

The “stories” that Trackton residents told “[were] intended to intensify social interactions and to give all parties an opportunity to share in not only the unity of the common experience on which the story may be based, but also in the humor of the wide-ranging language play and imagination which [embellished] the narrative” (p. 166).

The children in Trackton, Heath claims, “learned to appreciate the value of a good story for capturing the audience’s attention or winning favors” (p. 166). In this sense, children “[could] create and tell stories about themselves, but they [had to be] clever if they [were] to hold the audience’s attention and to maintain any extended conversational space in an on-going discourse” (p. 167).

Trackton men and women had their own ways of storytelling. For instance, “[m]en [recounted] to their buddies stories [that] they would not want their wives or womenfolk to know about; women [shared] with each other stories of quarrels with their menfolk or other women” (p. 168).

Men tended to “focus on stories which [told] of their own current adventures or [recounted] fairly recent adventures of particular personalities known to all present” (p. 168). Women, on the other hand, “[chose] similar topics for their stories: events which [had] happened to them, things they have seen, or events they have heard about” (p. 168). When telling their story, women [were] encouraged to tell it in their “own particular style” (p. 168).

Children’s stories in Trackton were usually about “rivalry over objects or people but their primary messages [were] of accomplishments, victories over adversity, or cleverness in the face of a mutually recognized enemy” (p. 170). Heath says, “Between the ages of two and four years, Trackton children, in a monologue-like fashion, [told] stories about things in their lives, events they [saw] and [heard], and situations in which they [had] been involved” (p. 170).

There were different ways that “preschool storytellers” could engage an audience, such as through “[expressing] an emotional response to the story’s action; they may have another character or narrator in the story do so, often using alliterative language play; or they may [have detailed] actions and results through direct discourse or sound effects and gestures” (p. 171).

In this sense, children’s “story-poems” were performed with “verbal elaboration and exaggeration of detail plus nonverbal embellishments” in order to “win over an audience” (p. 173). Trackton children attempted to emulate “patterns” similar to “adults’ narratives,” with additional aspects, such as “insults,” with some older children employing “elaborate word games,” rhyming” in the form of “[c]lever language play,” and “skillful manipulation of content” to “score the highest response from the audience” (pp. 174-76).

Insults played an important role in how younger Trackton girls and boys interacted with one another. For example, prior to entering high school, boys engaged in “intense” insults and girls in “playsongs,” which took the form of “[challenges] and mockery” (p. 177-78).

In the case of “true stories” Trackton “boys especially [excelled]” (p. 183). Heath states, “[T]he storyteller [was] usually the star, and he [gave] highly detailed exaggerated accounts of his adventure” (p. 183). The storyteller would provide the audience with a “[dramatization],” such as “[gesturing] wildly,” facial contortions, “grunts, [and] groans” (p. 183). The purpose of the story was to “highlight the ridiculous, but it often also [provided] illustration of the hard

lessons of the story-teller and the audience [shared]" (p. 183). The majority of "these true stories [were] cooperative stories, told with the help of the audience or with two or more participants" (p. 183).

In terms of storytelling, Roadville residents tended to favor "formulaic openings" where "a statement of a comparison or a question asked either by the story-teller or by the individual who has invited the telling of the story" (pp.184-85). The stories "[maintained] strict chronicity, with direct discourse reported, and no explicit exposition of meaning or direct expression of evaluation of the behavior of the main character [was] allowed" (p. 185). Roadville storytellers "[ended] with a summary statement of a moral or a proverb, or a Biblical quotation" (p. 185).

Storytellers in Trackton "[used] few formulaic openings" and "[maintained] little chronicity; they [moved] from event to event with numerous interspersions of evaluation of the behaviors of story characters and reiterations of the point of the story" (p. 185). Storytellers would sometimes end their stories with "a reassertion of the strengths of the main character, which [could lead to] the opening to yet another tale of adventure" (p. 185).

In Trackton, only the "true story" was meant to "entertain and establish the story-teller's intimate knowledge of truths about life larger than the factual details of real events" (p. 188). Other kinds of stories in Trackton, which were not called "stories," included "the retold story (these stories contained vivid "details" brought "to life with exaggerated gestures"), the formulaic story (which were stories "based on Bible stories" and commonly used by adults as a way of "social control"), and the straightforward report or factual story (this type of storytelling was usually learned as a lesson about a historical person or event in school by children)" (p. 188).

Reference

Heath, S.B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms*. New York: Cambridge University Press.