

# How to Summarize a Story

by Edie Cunningham, Former BVI Associate Director

When you are invited to tell a visualized story, always ask the leadership, "What is my allotted time for storytelling?" It is common courtesy to observe the time constraints. Less than that standard may frustrate the leadership and your audience.

More often than not you are assigned a 20-minute storytelling slot, yet you have enough material to fill 60 minutes! What to do? **SUMMARIZE!**

Summarizing is challenging, yet the outcome can be as powerful as telling the full-blown version of the story. I've seen an

audience erupt into applause at the end of a five-minute story because all the elements of storytelling were not abandoned.

- The opening lines of the story must give the audience a reason to listen.
- Present a problem in the introductory paragraph which is succinctly solved by the end of the story.
- The body (facts) must flow in logical order with descriptive words, dramatic tones, pauses and dialogue.

## Steps to Successfully Summarize a Story

1. Photocopy (for a one-time educational use) the printed manuscript. Read it thoroughly while asking yourself, "How can I summarize/reduce an entire segment (a chapter, facts, etc.) into just a few sentences?"
2. Using a pencil, cross out lines, dialogue, facts and paragraphs that you feel are unnecessary. Write a short sentence in the margin rephrasing the section. Retain only essential facts and supporting details such as main character, setting and the main idea.
3. Begin to develop a new outline (introduction, body and ending). Remember, you are not re-writing the story to say something different from what the author intended. You are merely reducing word count—making an abridged version.
4. Time yourself while you read your shortened version of the story aloud and listen to yourself. Ask yourself if the condensed version is accurate, logical, fits the storytelling time you've been allotted, etc. Rework your version until you are pleased with it.
5. Practice telling the condensed version of the story aloud with the new arrangement of the flashcard illustrations or projectable CD illustrations.

