



# How to Create, Tell, and Recall a Story

by  
Rudolf Steiner

translated by Helen Fox

Let me give you an example of something which can sink into the child's soul so that it grows with his growth, something which one can come back to in later years and make use of to arouse certain feelings within him. Nothing is more useful and fruitful in teaching than to give the children something in picture form between the seventh and eighth years, and later, perhaps in the fourteenth and fifteenth years, come back to again in some way or other. Just for this reason we try to let the children in the Waldorf school remain as long as possible with one teacher. When they come to school at seven years of age, the children are given over to a teacher who then takes his class up the school as far as he can, for it is good that things which at one time were given to the child in germ can again and again furnish the content of the methods employed in his education.

Now suppose for instance that we tell an imaginative story to a child of seven or eight. He does not need to understand all at once the pictures which the story contains; why that is, I will explain later. All that matters is that the child takes delight in the story because it is presented with a certain grace and charm. Suppose I were to tell the following story:

Once upon a time in a wood where the sun peeped through the branches, there lived a very modest violet under a tree with big leaves. And the violet was able to look through an opening at the top of the tree. As she looked through this broad opening in the treetop, the violet saw the blue sky. The little violet saw the blue sky for the first time on this morning because she had only just blossomed. Now the violet was frightened when she saw the blue sky—indeed, she was overcome with fear, but she did not yet know why she felt such great fear. Then a dog ran by, not a good dog, a rather bad snappy dog. And the violet said to the dog: “Tell me, what is that up there that is blue like me?” For the sky was blue just as the violet was.

And the dog in his wickedness said: "Oh, that is a great giant violet like you and this great violet has grown so big that it can crush you." Then the violet was more frightened than ever because she believed that the violet up in the sky was so big that it could crush her. And the violet folded her little petals together and did not want to look up to the great big violet anymore, but hid herself under a big leaf which a puff of wind had just blown down from the tree. There she stayed all day long, hiding in fear from the great big sky-violet.

When morning came the violet had not slept at all, for she had spent the night wondering what to think of the great blue sky-violet who was said to be coming to crush her. And every moment she was expecting the first blow to come. But it did not come. In the morning the little violet crept out, as she was not in the least bit tired. For all night long she had been only thinking, and she was fresh and not tired (violets are tired when they sleep, they are not tired when they don't sleep!) and the first thing that the little violet saw was the rising sun and the rosy dawn. And when the violet saw the rosy dawn, she had no fear. She was glad at heart and happy to see the dawn. As the dawn faded, the pale blue sky gradually appeared again and became bluer and bluer all the time, and the little violet thought again of what the dog had said, that this was a great big violet which would come and crush her.

At that moment a lamb came by and the little violet again felt she must ask what that thing above her could be. "What is that up there?" asked the violet.

And the lamb said, "That is a great big violet, blue like yourself." Then the violet was afraid again and thought she would hear from the lamb just what the wicked dog had told her.

But the lamb was good and gentle, and because he had such good, gentle eyes, the violet asked again: "Dear lamb, do tell me, will the great big violet up there come and crush me?"

"Oh no," answered the lamb. "It will not crush you. It is a great big violet, and his love is much greater than your own love, even as he is much more blue than you are in your little blue form." And the violet understood at once that there was a great big violet who would not crush her, but who was so blue in order that he might have more love, and that the big violet would protect the little violet from everything in the world which might hurt her.

Then the little violet felt so happy because what she saw as blue in the great sky-violet appeared to her as Divine Love, which was streaming towards her from all sides. And the little violet looked up all the time as if she wished to pray to the God of violets.

Now, if you tell the children a story of this kind, they will most certainly listen, for they always listen to such things. But you must tell it in the right mood so that when the children have listened to the story, they somehow feel the need

to live with it and turn it over inwardly in their souls. This is very important, and it all depends on whether the teacher is able to keep discipline in the class through his own feeling.

That is why when we speak of such things as I have just mentioned, we must also consider this question of keeping discipline. We once had a teacher in the Waldorf school, who could tell the most wonderful stories, but he did not make such an impression upon the children that they looked up to him with unquestioned love. What was the result? When the first thrilling story had been told, the children immediately want another. The teacher yielded to this wish and prepared a second. Then they immediately wanted a third, and the teacher gave in again and prepared a third story for them. And at last it came about that after a time this teacher simply could not prepare enough stories. But we must not be continually pumping into the children like a steam pump; there must be a variation, as we shall hear in a moment, for now we must go further and let the children ask questions. We should be able to see from the face and gestures of a child that he wants to ask a question. We let him ask it, and then talk it over with him in connection with the story that has just been related.

Thus a little child might ask: "But why did the dog give such a horrid answer?" and then in a simple childlike way you will be able to show him that a dog is a creature whose task is to watch, who has to bring fear to people, who is accustomed to make people afraid of him, and you will be able to explain why the dog gave that answer.

You can also explain to the children why the lamb gave the answer that he did. After telling the story, you can go on talking to the children like this for some time. Then you will find that one question leads to another, and eventually the children will bring up every imaginable kind of question.

Your task in all this is really to bring into the class the unquestioned authority about which we have still much to say. Otherwise it will happen that while you are speaking to one child, the others will begin to play pranks and be up to all sorts of mischief. And if you are then forced to turn around and give a reprimand, you are lost! Especially with the little children one must have the gift of letting a great many things pass unnoticed.

But now let us consider the following question: Why did I choose a story with this particular content? It was because the thought-pictures which are given in this story can grow with the child. You have all kinds of things in the story which you can come back to later. The violet is afraid because she sees the great big violet above her in the sky. You need not yet explain this to the little child, but later when you are dealing with more complicated teaching matter, and the question of fear comes up, you can recall this story. Things small and great are contained in this story, for indeed things small and great are repeatedly coming up again in life and working upon each other. Later on then you can come back

to this. The chief feature of the early part of the story is the snappish advice given by the dog, and later on it is the kind, loving words of advice uttered by the lamb. And when the child has come to treasure these things in his heart and has grown older, how easily then you can lead on from the story you told him before to thoughts about good and evil, and about such contrasting feelings which are rooted in the human soul. And even with a much older pupil, you can go back to this simple child's story; you can make it clear to him that we are often afraid of things simply because we misunderstand them and because they have been presented to us wrongly. This cleavage in the feeling life, which may be spoken of later in connection with this or that lesson, can be demonstrated in the most wonderful way if you come back to the story in the later school years.

In the religion lessons too, which will come later on, how well this story can be used to show how the child develops religious feelings through what is great, for the great is the protector of the small, and one must develop true religious feeling by finding in oneself those elements of greatness which have a protective impulse. The little violet is a little blue being. The sky is a great blue being, and therefore the sky is the great blue God of the violet.

This concept can be used at various different stages in the religion lessons. What a beautiful analogy one can draw later on by showing how the human heart itself is of God. One can then say to the child: "Look, this great sky-violet, the God of the violets, is all blue and stretches out in all directions. Now think of a little bit cut out of it—that is the little violet. So God is as great as the world-ocean. Your soul is a drop in this ocean of God. But as the water of the sea, when it forms a drop, is the same water as the great sea, so your soul is the same as the great God is; only it is just a little drop of it."

If you find the right pictures you can work with the child in this way all through the early years, for you can come back to these pictures again when the child is more mature. But the teacher himself must find pleasure in this picture-making. And you will see that when, by your own powers of invention, you have worked out a dozen of these stories, then you simply cannot escape them; they come rushing in upon you wherever you may be. For the human soul is like an inexhaustible spring that can pour out its treasures unceasingly as soon as the first impulse has been called forth. But often people are so indolent that they will not make the initial effort to bring forth what is in their souls.

**Resource:**

Translated by Helen Fox and printed as lecture four in *The Kingdom of Childhood*, Rudolf Steiner Press, London, 1974. In German the lecture is found in GA 311, *Die Kunst des Erziehens aus dem Erfassen der Menschenwesenheit*.