

# TELLING CLASSIC TALES OF TERROR

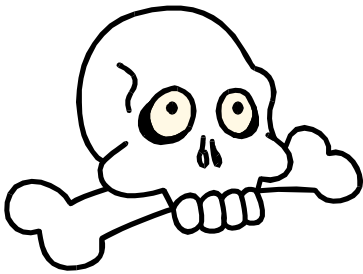
*Retell a story you heard today as if you were there when it happened.*

Go to the library and find a classic tale of terror that you love. This is an important point. If you are excited by the tale and thrilled to be able to tell it, then your enthusiasm will be contagious. You will find scary stories under 398.2 in the Dewey Decimal System in your library. Or you could visit “I Know You Like a Book” bookstore in Peoria Heights.

Edgar Allen Poe’s stories are my favorite, especially *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, and *The Cask of Amontillado*.

When you find one you like, read the story several times. It is important to know the material well. Do not memorize it word for word. Remember the important details and order of events. Read the story out loud several times. Experiment with different voices, pacing, tone, sound effects and dramatic inflection. Allow yourself the freedom to improvise while trying to maintain the voice of the author. Also, pay attention to body language. Stand up and act it out. Use gesture and facial expression to engage the audience, play with their disbelief, or entice them to believe. While rehearsing, close your eyes and see the story in your imagination. For more about how to tell stories click on the fox on my web page: [www.foxtalesint.com](http://www.foxtalesint.com)

It is also very important that you are credible. As with any story, the art of a good telling involves the ability to suspend disbelief and enter into the story with complete conviction and integrity, even if you know it is a work of fiction. This is especially true with ghost stories. Scaring an audience can be as simple as quietly building suspense and then, “BOO!”, surprising them. Or it can be as complicated as creating an otherworldly scenario that haunts them, challenging their beliefs about good and evil. This is more effective if you can completely enter into the tale and bring the audience with you.



Before you go any further, there are a few ethical issues involved in the telling of scary stories. These are questions you must think about and answer for yourself: Why do listeners love ghost stories? What are the pros and cons of telling/hearing scary stories? Where do *YOU* draw the line with blood and guts and gore? How you answer these questions might be different for different audiences. What is acceptable for an audience of pre-school kids would be demeaning for high school students; whereas stories appropriate for junior high might be too scary for younger kids. Choose and tell stories with these questions in mind. Feel free to edit or tailor a story to fit your ethical standards and the age of your audience.

To write your own scary story start with a main character your readers will like and root for when they are in trouble, a protagonist. Imagine a force or creature that is spooky, an antagonist. Create a setting that is sinister, dark, and foreboding. Put these characters in this setting and see what happens. What really scares you? How can one of your nightmares provide inspiration for the plot? To add suspense give clues about what is coming but don’t give it away too soon. Also, have them try to solve the problem, try to get out of the jam and fail, then what happens? How do you create a quiet moment that leads to a big BOO! Do you like happy endings or do you end with a hint that it might still be out there?

Use your voice, body, and imagination together to TELL, not read, your story. Practice, practice, PRACTICE! With practice and imagination you too can tell classic tales of terror!

*Here are a few of my favorite collections:*

*Poe, Edgar Allen. Poe’s Tales of Mystery and Terror. Magnum Books. 1967.*

*Dockrey Young, Richard and Judy. Scary Story Reader. August House. 1993.*

*Martin, Rafe. Mysterious Tales of Japan. G.P. Putnam’s Sons. 1996.*

*McKissick, Patricia. The Dark Thirty. Alfred A. Knopf. 1992.*

*Schwartz, Alvin. Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark I, II & III. Harper Trophy, N.Y. 1981*

