Running from 29th April to 11th May, TradFest Edinburgh • Dùn Èideann 2014 celebrates the arts of tradition in local, national and international contexts, combining authentic cultural sources with contemporary edge and flair.

After a successful run last year, the festival will once again see the cream of Scotland's traditional artists combine with a wave of community participation to deliver all that is best in Scotland, ancient and new.

As Scotland's capital, Edinburgh wears many faces, but with TradFest Auld Reekie celebrates its identity as a hive of cultural tradition, honeycombing the closes, streets, courtyards, cafés, arts centres, concert halls, restaurants and pubs of R.L. Stevenson's 'precipitous city'. The festival will see the Old Town come to life, showcasing how it was made for conviviality. The Old Town Trad Trail will guide visitors and residents alike through the pubs, galleries, shops and workshops that are contributing to the contemporary Trad renaissance.

TradFest will also be linking in with National Galleries of Scotland around the J.D. Fergusson exhibition, and there will be a big visual arts strand with exhibitions at the Talbot Rice Gallery, the Museum of Edinburgh, and the Scottish Storytelling Centre.

The festival theme for 2014 is Revival and Renaissance, looking at the ways in which, during big moments in Scotland's history, people have dug into folk traditions as a source of inspiration and orientation. In 2014 Scotland is also at a turning point, with a Year of Homecoming, the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the Independence Referendum. What is happening in our culture and what might be its significance?

One thing is certain, Scotland's traditional arts scene is alive and kicking, if the vibrancy of the programme is anything to go by. Storytelling, music, song, dance and traditional crafts weave together, combining as it used to be in times past, embracing Scots and Gaelic and ultimately providing an integrated cultural experience for all tastes and ages.

www.tracscotland.org/festivals/tradfest

We are the Storytellers!

I loved teaching (I am now retired), and I love storytelling, so when the opportunity came up to do both, I immediately seized it! It all began with a conversation with a supportive class teacher a week or two before Tell-a-Story Day, when I invited myself to tell stories in Hillhead Primary School, Kilmarnock which somehow developed into me delivering some workshops to a P3/4 composite class who would then tell their stories to the whole school. Why not?

**DAY 1** (pre-workshop assessment) - I told the Hat Pedlar and The Icky-Sticky Monster encouraging participation, handling of props and questions at the end.

**DAY 2** - I attempted to learn names - in a circle everyone says their name, then the second round they say their name in a sentence, then in a funny voice, then with an action… so by the end of round four all children were participating in a relaxed way and I had a reasonable chance to call them by the correct name.

Then I told The Enormous Turnip with particular emphasis on repeats. The children acted out, joined in and contribute ideas of who could help pull out the turnip, and in short order we enlisted friends, neighbours and even a passing circus. Children are introduced to their very own Storyteller's Book where they draw the important bits of the story.

continued on page 2
They then tell their story to their neighbour, their group, and their family when they go home. Three brave souls even told to the whole class!

**DAY 3** - Motivational chants. I am . . . and I am a . . . storyteller! We talked about fabulous beginnings and satisfying endings. Children sat on the Storyteller’s Chair and delivered only a beginning or an end. We sang silly songs with even sillier actions. Some children volunteered to tell their version of the Enormous Turnip with repeats. I then told the Gingerbread Man with some props. The pupils practiced again telling this new tale to each other after they put it in their book.

**DAY 4** - We built on what has been done in the previous days with the addition of dramatic voices, more songs and chants. I told Three Billy Goats Gruff and The Magic Fish.

**DAY 5** (Tell-a-Story Day) - We had a quick run-through to fix everyone’s choice of story in their heads then off to perform in groups of 3 or 4 to other classes. Nerves, excitement, delight and success followed.

That was amazing! Everyone was looking at ME and listening to ME - even the teachers!

‘I was so nervous until I started my story then it was fantastic!’

‘Can we do that again?’

**DAY 6** - I told a creation tale, which in retrospect was too long and involved, so they found it difficult to make their own. We played with my basket of musical instruments from all over the world and added sound effects to our list of skills.

**DAY 7** - I handed them a synopsis of Three Little Pigs and let them work on it in groups. The children looked for props and appropriate sound effects then told the story in groups, with some amazing ideas!

**DAY 8** - The pupils performed for other classes. The feedback received included words like funny, imaginative, good voices and actions, enjoyable and enthusiastic!

**BETTY SKELTEN**

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**By heart - an aid to memory**

As a storyteller working with elderly people I am well aware of the importance of memory, of how the sense of well-being of a person can be greatly improved by recollections stimulated by storytelling.

Despite knowing this, until fairly recently I didn’t really trust my own memory. I avoided learning things off-by-heart, and I didn’t try to remember people’s names when I met them, because I wasn’t confident that I could. And yet whilst still having these issues I was making my living as a storyteller, with a repertoire of hundreds of stories.

As a child I didn’t like school. The teachers were strict and severe from the start in those days, and so I shied away from learning to a great extent. All I was interested in was having laugh with my pals in class, which got me many a telling off, and occasionally the belt. I had a total aversion to learning anything off-by-heart, especially my times-tables, and the first poem we got. As a result I hated poetry for a long time.

It wasn’t until many years later when my son was not yet at school but was already learning all sorts of things that I had an important realisation.

We happened to see a bee in a garden, and I was saying that when a bee stings it dies. But my son argued that if a bee retrieves its sting it won’t die. I was amazed at this, and in that moment realised that the accumulation of knowledge could be thrilling.

When I was at school I had come to believe (although I hadn’t realised until this moment) that education was a form of punishment; and as such had steered clear of it as much as possible. Seeing my son now thriving in his learning made me appreciate how wrong I had been. But it wouldn’t be correct to say that I wasn’t learning all this time.

It’s just that it wasn’t in a formal study way. Actually I’ve learnt a great deal over the years through storytelling. I learnt to picture the story unfolding and identify with the characters of the central character. Pictures are easier to learn, especially if you are emotionally involved. And along this journey I discovered that my memory is actually improving all the time. At home I no longer walk into a room and forget what I’ve come in for.

Or at least if I do forget, it comes back to me quickly. Rarely now do I forget where I’ve put something, I often picture me putting it away, in the same way that I recall a story.

Once I used to think that, if I had forgotten something, there was nothing I could do about it. Whereas now the more times I revisit a memory to recall the story of it, the more details I remember, which is equally useful for giving flesh to a story and for locating a misplaced set of keys. When you remember an event (whether it is an actual event or a story) it is almost like you’re re-experiencing that event. This is one of the greatest powers of storytelling, the ability to bring the past to life, and even to give us the comfort of feeling close to loved ones no longer with us, anytime we like.

I still shy from learning things word for word, but I do learn from my heart. I cannot say whether when I reach old age I won’t have any memory problems, but by working with stories I believe that my memory will remain fit for some time to come.

**JAMES SPENCE**

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is for characterisation and coaching

Years ago I learned a valuable lesson from Israeli storyteller Roi Gal-Or on how to develop character in a story. To put it simply, he encouraged me to recognise three layers of storytelling and to become more conscious of how I used them in my telling.

Firstly, there's the public YOU layer. This is the self you project to others when on stage - the you that introduces yourself, engages in conversation with the audience before you start, and the you that occasionally re-emerges apologetically when you've momentarily forgotten what comes next in the story.

Secondly, there's the Storyteller layer. The Storyteller is a persona you adopt to tell the story. You may choose to project a different voice and adopt certain body language and gestures to tell the story. You might even wear a costume to reinforce this persona. The Storyteller is a powerful role and many storytellers, once they've adopted it, are reluctant to step out of it, which, as I'll explain in a moment, can be limiting.

Thirdly, there is the Story Character layer, which includes all the characters in your story. We know these characters are important, yet we often don't do them justice, not allowing them to fully emerge and reveal themselves. Instead, we are too often reluctant to step outside the role of the Storyteller. After all, the Storyteller controls the story. Right? Let's explore that for a moment.

When we tell a story, most of us adopt the role of Storyteller and hold on tight. When it comes time to reveal a character, we don't commit fully to that character. We try to tell and act at the same time, and this can weaken the story. In my coaching sessions, I've watched characters only partially emerge as the Storyteller tries to keep the story going, thus cheating the audience of an opportunity to experience the story fully through that character's perception and experience.

Of course there's no one way to tell a story and every storyteller has to choose their own techniques and approach, but what Roi encouraged me to do was to recognise, explore, and commit fully to all three roles. When it's time to be a character, he advised, then BE the character. Step out of being the Storyteller for a moment and enjoy being the character whoever he or she or it might be. Experience that character's personality, walk around in his or her shoes. If it's a giant, then BE the giant - explore and enjoy the giant's character. If you're a mouse, BE the mouse in all its 'mouseness'.

Obviously, it's not always practical to devote time equally to every character, but you should be aware of which characters attract or repel you. I've worked with storytellers who when questioned why they didn't allow a particular character to emerge, admitted they didn't like or even understand the character, or didn't think the character was important.

I believe that every character gives us the opportunity not only to deepen our appreciation and understanding of a story but also deepen our understanding of ourselves.

When it's time to be the Storyteller, resume that role with awareness and joy. After all, the Storyteller is a character too. And, when it becomes necessary to be YOU again, don't apologise. Every storyteller forgets what comes next from time to time or is interrupted for one reason or another. If it's necessary to step out of the Storyteller role and become YOU, do so with ease, humility, and a little humour. When ready, resume your role as Storyteller, taking the time to make the transition. The audience will appreciate it.

As I said earlier, there's no one way to tell a story; but over the years Roi's advice has helped bring my awareness to these multi-layered aspects of telling a story. It's not meant to be overly analytical or mechanical but rather, with practice, a seamless process that serves the story and deepens your connection with it. This approach to storytelling has taught me a great deal about myself, revealed previously hidden aspects of the story, and enabled me to connect with audiences at a deeper and more meaningful level.

By encouraging other storytellers to explore these layers of characterisation during my story coaching sessions, I have witnessed powerful transformations and revelations. These, in turn, have led to further development and refinement of technique as well as growing self-confidence and greater self-understanding. And for me that's what story coaching is all about.

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Michael Williams is a story coach and professional storyteller. He offers one-to-one and small group story coaching and mentoring for all levels. More info on http://michaelwilliamsstoryteller.blogspot.com
Storytelling in the US

When you think of America, films and TV shows probably come high on your list of examples of local culture. But is there an appetite for storytelling in the US, stories shared among groups of listeners with a storyteller or storytellers leading the event? Over the years I have built myself a picture of how storytelling is received in the US. That is, how it is received by the wider population, those who are not affiliated in any way with any of the numerous storytelling clubs and groups that exist there.

The first time I told stories in America it was in a community for people with learning difficulties, in New York State. This was a community that made its own entertainments, and there were no TV sets around. They were a highly appreciative bunch, and there was a readiness to join in with a song, or offer a tale or song from the floor, and I was happy to go back a couple of years later.

Another occasion was on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. This was in a posh hotel for an audience of mostly well-heeled Californians, though when I invited people to tell stories from the floor, the only person brave enough to do so was a lady from Newcastle upon Tyne who had become a keen student of Hawaiian culture. She told the story of going to the British Museum, to find the watercolour paintings made by Joseph Banks when he accompanied Captain Cook on his travels in the South Seas. (Joseph Banks’ life is a tale worth telling, by the way!) She was so moved to find these paintings that she almost did untold damage to one of them by shedding her tears of joy on the picture.

Then there was the care home for the elderly in Massachusetts. The organizers saw this as therapy for the old folk and a respite for them. One of the listeners was a lady from Glasgow who was especially pleased to hear tales from her native land, but her pals were just as happy - except one lady, who tholed the experience with as much good humour as she could manage. After all she had had a hard day of community singing followed by occupational therapy, and then to top it all here comes this guy from Europe telling stories! Ah well, I suppose you cannae win 'em all.

Another wonderful place was a bookshop in Cedar City, Utah. This is a town that takes you back, in atmosphere, to the 1950s. Crossing the Main Street there is not a matter of pressing a button and waiting for the WALK sign, with the seconds counting down so that you know how much time you’ve got before you’re fair game for the traffic. Instead, you take an orange flag on a stick from a tubular container at the kerb and hold it up conspicuously. Then, at the far side, you stick your flag in the tube there. There is a sort of alternative culture in Cedar that expresses itself for instance in the local bookshop - the one that doesn’t exclusively sell books to do with the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

I had already visited Braun Books when the local belly-dancing ladies were giving a display of their considerable skills, and I’d also taken part in a drumming workshop there. The storytelling was a great success, largely through the enormous generosity that you find all over the US. The audience were enthusiastic listeners, and not afraid to let their feelings show as the tales evolved. It was also a chance to sell some copies of my book The Shifty Lad, and I’m glad to say I shifted the lot! (Scottish readers please copy.)

On my most recent visit, I was at a conference in Massachusetts for teachers and student teachers, at which I was asked to give the keynote talk. Well, of course, what else could I do but tell a story - one of my favourites, from the Jewish tradition: the tale of the King and the Cobbler. It seemed to touch their hearts and minds deeply. It was often referred to in the working groups, I was told, and people kept on approaching me throughout the following week with their insights about what the story could mean for them. (This was America, remember.)

The climax of that visit was a gig I got at a very interesting place, the Dobra speciality teahouse in Portland, Maine. The house was full, and a great audience they were! They were a bit slower to join in the choruses of songs, and, in common with most of the other storytelling experiences I’ve had over there, they were definitely more of an audience, and the sense of ceilidh culture was clearly a foreign concept. They had come to be entertained, rather than arrive with an active sense of something to contribute. It probably would have been out of place to demand of them to ‘tell us a story, sing us a song, show us yer bum, or oot ye gang.’

Overall, my experience of storytelling in the USA is that there is a big and hungry appreciation for tales told eye to eye, heart to heart and mind to mind.

PETER SNOW
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Storytelling for the Elderly

Having worked predominantly with children and young adults, I was delighted yet nervous to be offered the chance to work regularly in residential homes for the elderly. I have been to about fifteen separate residences since I anxiously told my first story in a home for the elderly in July. I haven't found the elusive 'typical' or 'average' group yet but over the months I have gained a better idea of what works and doesn't work when storytelling to older people.

In most of the residential homes I've visited, the events organiser had selected fifteen to twenty residents to attend. Within these groups there were people with sight problems, hearing loss, early-stage dementia, dexterity problems and those with no sense of smell. This mixture of abilities meant that organising joint participation or formal activities was almost impossible, so I tried to encourage interaction in a more informal way instead. Each session consisted of either three stories or two stories and a poetry recitation (designed to tap into their long-term memory) with informal activities between each one. These activities could involve passing around items from different countries, playing musical instruments, answering riddles, solving puzzles, playing 'story bingo' or even dancing.

I found that, on the whole, the groups preferred historical stories rather than traditional folklore (which I usually tell). Sometimes I based the sessions on a particular country such as India or China, or even on an 'around the world' theme. I would wear an outfit from the country, drape materials behind me, bring in teas and incense for the residents to smell, musical instruments for them to play, masks for them to wear and items for them to touch and hold. I would encourage the residents to share their own memories or stories inspired by the objects. I have found that different items are popular in different homes. In one place everyone wanted to learn to play a Tibetan singing bowl, whereas in another the residents were fascinated by the materials and costumes I had brought in.

After the residents discovered I do belly dancing in my spare time, I was asked to do a belly dancing set. Researching famous belly dancers I decided to set the session in Byzantine Constantinople and started with a story based around the historical figure of Empress Theodora who was a belly dancer and actress in her youth. Setting the story in Constantinople also meant that we could all sing 'Take me back to Constantinople' together at the start! After the story, I did a short dance for the residents and then taught them some basic moves which they could do in their chairs. I found that most of the residents got involved in some way, whether it was dancing, trying on outfits or beating out a rhythm for those who did dance and, of course, we all had a laugh! I then went on to share other stories about dancing. The oldest dancer I've had so far was 104 years old!

I have been visiting an average of four homes a month for the first few months of 2014 and am excited about preparing the next project for them: stories behind the old musicals!

ANNA FANCETT
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What storytelling can do for you

Storytelling is a unique human skill and one of our oldest artforms. It brings words and the world to life together, stimulates the imagination, and builds a sense of community between tellers and listeners.

Storytelling is also versatile. It can be entertainment, it can be a way of learning, it creates a sense of wellbeing, it brings places and objects to life, it roots communities to their areas and binds social groups together. Telling stories is an important part of what makes us human.

So if you have a project, an idea for an event and are wondering if storytelling can be a part of it, chances are the answer is yes, so just get in touch!

At the Scottish Storytelling Centre we also provide a range of training opportunities for anyone who wants to develop their storytelling skills, and offer bespoke storytelling training for groups and professionals, including teachers, health professionals, care home workers, corporate teams, librarians, tour guides and university researchers.

Whether you want to become a storyteller, organise a special event, arrange a bespoke workshop, please contact Davide (davide@scottishstorytellingcentre.com or 0131 652 3272) to discuss what storytelling can do for you.
What the Future Can Hold - Storytelling in Prisons

Storytelling is the art of the *what if*. Imagine you are a twenty-year-old young offender at Polmont, with a father in prison, a younger brother on the cusp of incarceration and a son of your own.

If you were asked 'Would you like your brother and son to be in here too?' I believe the answer would be 'No'. Well, the good news is that there is a free, everyday practical key that you can use at the drop of a hat. Which can help reduce drastically the chances of it happening. That key is storytelling.

Young offenders have very rarely been told any stories, many cannot read or write, others can but are too disengaged to do either. Telling is a platform to self-expression that overcomes these hurdles and helps create a sense of self-worth. If a father or a brother sincerely feels his voice has worth, he will start to be mindful of what he says. He will start to take responsibility for what his siblings and children hear. They in turn will recognise this and take it on board, so their behaviour too will change.

Young people will take pride in their community and their approach will start to switch from aggressive to protective. A lonely-looking house with an old lady inside is a target, but a lonely-looking house, an old lady inside and a well in its garden, and a story inside the well is something to tell friends about. And the friends to their friends, so that a seed planted will continue to grow and flourish for years, and the value of the project will extend well beyond its completion.

**BREAKING THE CIRCLE**

Re-offending is commonly due to young offenders returning to the same environment, habits and social circles after the end of their sentence. But how can a young person break out of these if there is no alternative there for them?

During my project at Polmont prison I often asked participants if they felt they had confidence to attend an interview for college, a job or even just to talk to someone new outside of their known social circle. No-one did. But when I asked 'If you had at least one good story that you could keep and tell when you were with new friends, and some interesting facts around it, would you feel more equipped to engage in conversation with new people?', the answer was invariably yes.

The feedback I received and the discussions that took place whilst conducting workshops with young offenders, confirmed my impression that this is a fundamental issue. In order for any individual to make new friends, they need at least ONE person who enables them to move away from a damaging social circle. Storytelling, that is the ability to partake in basic communication, is key to the young offender being able to progress, through new friendships, onto a more positive footing, attending interviews for employment or further education.

All of this shows the power and importance of storytelling with vulnerable and marginalised people, and I am in no doubt that storytelling workshops should be a permanent fixture within prisons.

CLAIRE DRUETT
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Claire was involved in a storytelling project between the Scottish Storytelling Centre, Fife College and the Scottish Prisons Service along with Stuart McHardy, Colin McEwan and the Far Flung Dance Company at Edinburgh (Saughton) Prison and Polmont Young Offenders Institution. To learn more about this project read Stuart McHardy’s article at page 9 of Blethers issue 27.
Folk Tales of the Western Isles

About a year ago I was invited by The History Press to compile a collection of tales from the Western Isles, as part of an ambitious project to produce a UK-wide series of stories retold, county by county. Other weel kent tellers are mapping the rest of Scotland in tales, area by area.

I applied for a research grant from the Traditional Arts Fund. That was successful and enabled me to devote time to travel, to be re-immersed in stories from my home territory. This brought my thinking right back to my own first encounters with oral storytelling. When I began going out in boats, as a boy, I realized that conversation became stories, once the engine was shut down and we were casting our lines, at anchor. My mentors taught me more than knots. There seemed to be a particular name and a tradition for every stage of every species of fish we caught. Later, as a Coastguard Officer, I was immersed in Merchant Navy colleagues’ reminiscences from their travels. And in one memorable watch, I heard two separate unrecorded stories, a significant part of the maritime tradition of the Western Isles.

So what exactly is a story? I’ve concluded that there is the finest of lines between a person’s memory of a recorded historical event and a story. Then there is the huge number of premonition accounts and strange sightings told as a person’s memory of an actual experience. There are also remembered twists of eloquent wit. Examples of all of these had to be included as well as tales which could easily fit into a worldwide pattern of folktale types. Stories remembered from different ‘ceilidh-houses’ exemplify how the contemporary and the timeless bounce off each other at an informal gathering. It is not easy to select what to publish amongst such a huge number of recorded stories.

Also, I was keen to demonstrate that storytelling continues and the process of compiling is not only about sifting through existing recordings or transcripts. I have decided to retell the selected stories in my own voice, while trying to be faithful to their essential detail and what seems to me to be their true spirit. This has sometimes involved intuition, in navigating between different known versions of the same story, whether from oral or published sources. The work of the School of Scottish Studies was invaluable, both at the physical archive and the stories available on line (www.tobarandualchais.co.uk). Recent researchers were also generous in sharing the discovered tales, as an open resource. Ruth Brennan and Stephen Hurrel’s Mapping the Sea project, collects lore linked to the names on maps and charts of the Barra area. Chrisella Ross worked for many years telling in Gaelic as the Proseact Nan Eilean storyteller, while Maggie Smith has worked with many community groups, exploring traditions told in both Gaelic and English.

Sometimes, the gems were so close to home that I was in danger of missing them.

One of my mother’s brothers, Calum ‘Safety’ Smith, recreated the move of a large family from the village of Shawbost to the outskirts of Stornoway in his memoir, Around the Peat-Fire. Calum Smith, Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2001 (reprinted 2004).

He portrays my grandfather Murdo Finlay Smith as a spirited storyteller and debater as well as a formidable worker.

Here is one Shawbost story, based on my uncle Calum’s recollection:

When times were hard, as they usually were, village folk would walk considerable distances, across the moor to the town with any produce they thought they might be able to sell. One woman learned how to distill a potent whisky from a little spare grain. She asked around her neighbours and sure enough one of them also distilled the illegal spirit and told her of an address in town she should take it to.

So she set off with her best produce in two corked clay jars. It’s over eighteen miles from Shawbost to Stornoway by the road and still a long distance taking the shortest route over rough terrain, the saddle between the hills, barefoot on moorland.

At last, she came out on the old Pentland Road. She followed it into the town and asked for the street name she’d been given. She was taken in and whispered her business to the man of the house.

‘It was no friend of yours that gave you this address,’ he said. ‘This is the house of the exciseman.’

She realised then that her neighbour didn’t want any competition in her trade. But the fellow could see that she needed every penny to keep her family so he whispered another address she might try.

She made her deal there and the precious liquid was decanted into other containers once the buyer had tasted a sample. On her way back, she crossed a burn. Of course she was thirsty after all that walking. So she rinsed out one of the jars and she was far from straight in her deep walking. But they say she rinsed out and walked on. And in one memorable watch, I heard two separate unrecorded stories, a significant part of the maritime tradition of the Western Isles.

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She made her deal there and the precious liquid was decanted into other containers once the buyer had tasted a sample. On her way back, she crossed a burn. Of course she was thirsty after all that walking. So she rinsed out one of the jars and filled it with cold water. She drank deeply and walked on. But they say she was far from straight in her walking when she appeared again in her home village.

So it must have been a very powerful spirit, produced at home, in the stills of Shawbost.

IAN STEPHEN
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Reading Fairytales to Children

In January this year I was involved in the Cultural Rucksack Storytelling Project in South Ayrshire. I went to eight Primary Schools and told stories but also encouraged teachers to read fairytales to the children. Reading stories? We all know the value of telling from memory and how it can really make a story come alive, but although this comes naturally for some, for others it requires work and devotion to overcome difficulties and constantly improve. The crucial thing is that the more children are exposed to fairytales, the better.

Fairytales are important for language and story writing skills, discussion, imagination and values.

The language of fairytales is structured, while storylines are simple with repetitive descriptions. Every fairytale has a hero/heroine, a place where the story happens, a problem which needs solved and help is often needed by way of cunning or magic. At the end there is usually a reward and often a moral or social lesson of sorts. If you read fairytales you will recognise the format. Fairytales are brilliant for discussions about good and bad, about behaviour and friendship, and the motifs and symbolism are easily absorbed by the children. They will learn the modular structure of the story and then use the images in their head to create their own stories.

It is impressive just how much vocabulary a child can absorb from a fairytale. Children can build their communication skills, improve their verbal language and unlock their imagination through fairytales, and are also able to learn about life and its values. In short, fairytales equip the children with the basic tools for understanding the world around them, and more than anything else they are fun!

KATI WAITZMANN
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Book Blethers

First up this time is the ongoing renaissance of the picture story book. Picture Kelpies are a fine example of Scottish publishing in this field. They have also cottoned on to using excellent storytellers including Janis Mackay and Lari Don. See amongst the most recent additions Lari’s The Magic Word and Janis’s The Wee Seal, with illustrations respectively by Claire Keay and Gabby Grant, both fine productions. This kind of book will multiply.

Lari Don is to the fore again with Breaking the Spell - stories of magic and mystery from Scotland. There are ten classic tales retold with illustrations by Cate James. Excellent for telling and for reading aloud.

The Hidden Door is a labour of love by latter day ‘sagaman’ David Brown, who has been telling the classic Norse tales for twenty-five years. Here he offers his crafted versions of both prose and verse tales, along with background notes and advice on metres and rhythms. It is often forgotten how much a part of Scotland’s story Norse culture is and David has done us a service in bringing these tellings together. The book is designed for adults and young adults.

More generally, watch out for the expansion of Stuart McHardy and Donald Smith’s Journeys and Evocations series with Luath Publishing. The Arthur’s Seat volume is now complemented by one on Calton Hill, linked with the Seeing Stories European project for the recovery of urban and rural landscape narratives. Keep a weather eye open too on the History Press storytelling series which will have more Scottish volumes out this year.

As for pamphlet publishing, Sheena Blackhall’s fecund imagination in poems and stories has no equal. Most recent additions include Pirrins and Magnus and Hare’s Foot - see sheenablackhall.blogspot.com for full info.

May 2014 bring many more fine books to light - inspired by Scotland’s storytellers!