Carrie LeBaron

LBSC 622

Talk Story Paper

**Background of Talk Story**

Talk Story is a joint program created by the Asian/Pacific American Library Association (APALA) and the American Indian Library Association (AILA)[[1]](#footnote-1). It was originally funded by the ALA’s Family Literacy Focus Initiative, which was launched in January 2010 to encourage families in ethnically diverse communities to read and learn together[[2]](#footnote-2). The ALA’s five ethnic affiliates (APALA, AILA, the Chinese-American Library Association, the Black Caucus of the American Library Association and REFORMA) received funding to develop sustainable library-based family literacy programs. The APALA and the AILA pooled their resources together to create Talk Story.

Talk Story launched several pilot programs in five libraries across the country in the spring of 2010[[3]](#footnote-3), and began offering grants to libraries in 2011[[4]](#footnote-4). Starting this year, the APALA and AILA have partnered with Toyota Financial Services, who will supply grant funding for 2012[[5]](#footnote-5).

The name of the program, “Talk Story,” refers to a Hawaiian expression. In the concept of “talk story,” one person shares a story while others add to it[[6]](#footnote-6). In the Talk Story project, books are used as a jumping-off point for storytime, where children can share their experiences and tell related stories.

**Uses of Talk Story**

Talk Story aims to promote greater representation of Asian/Pacific American and American Indian communities in books and library programming, to build the cultural identity and self-esteem of community members, to provide opportunity to build the literacy skills of children and their families, and to create programming that matches any library’s budget and community[[7]](#footnote-7). Talk Story provides free resources to libraries on their website, including an 81-page manual of program models and free resources.

The website contains culturally-relevant booklists compiled by librarians from public, school, academic and special libraries[[8]](#footnote-8). The book lists are categorized first by culture, then by age group or book type (picture books, children’s chapter books, young adult novels, folktales and nonfiction). Talk Story also provides advice on selecting books that are culturally accurate, and how to avoid offensive content and stereotypical portrayals. For example, the AILA resources provide librarians with a checklist of things to watch out for in books for and/or about American Indians (“Do the Indians talk like Tonto or in the noble savage tradition?”)[[9]](#footnote-9).

The site also provides storytime ideas and themes[[10]](#footnote-10). In addition to topics on individual cultures such as the “Chinese Storytime” or the “Hawaiian Storytime,” Talk Story provides program models for the subjects of adoption and multicultural families. The themes and ideas come with templates, forming a schedule involving reading books out loud, singing songs, fingerplay, snacks and felt-board stories.

Talk Story users are encouraged to submit their own topics and ideas so librarians can share successful programming with others[[11]](#footnote-11). Moderators look over all submissions to ensure cultural competency. The Talk Story site also provides free downloadable materials such as posters, fliers and brochures, allowing libraries to advertise their programs inexpensively.

**Talk Story Benefits**

Talk Story provides libraries with free resources and ideas to implement culturally-relevant programs that fit into their current storytime models. Libraries can also apply for grants through Talk Story. A library can get a $500 grant from either the APALA or the AILA. Libraries that receive grant money are required to fund at least one program event for Asian/Pacific American or American Indian/Alaska Native families, and 25% of the money must go towards library materials. Each year, four grants are given out, though the 2012 winners have not been posted as of the writing of this paper (winners were scheduled to be announced March 15th)[[12]](#footnote-12).

Talk Story is especially beneficial to APA and AIAN children and their families. It is important for children to be exposed to literature with characters they can related to and cultures that reflect their own, as this builds confidence and encourages them to read. Talk Story connects children and families with their cultures and heritage. Finally, Talk Story’s focus on family literacy lays the foundation for further learning.

1. Talk Story, *Home Page*, <http://www.talkstorytogether.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. American Library Association, *ALA Family Literacy Focus*, <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/literacy/earlyliteracy/famlitfocus> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Chen, Jeannie. *Talk Story Program Manual*, <http://www.talkstorytogether.org/sites/default/files/download/TalkStoryProgramManual.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pelayo-Lozada, Lessa K. *Talk Story Grant Winners*. Lessa Librarian. <http://lessalibrarian.wordpress.com/2011/03/24/talk-story-grant-winners/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Pelayo-Lozada, Lessa K. *Toyota Financial Services Sponsors Talk Story!* <http://lessalibrarian.wordpress.com/2011/10/29/toyota-sponsors-talk-story/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/literacy/earlyliteracy/famlitfocus> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Talk Story, *Celebrating Cultural Heritage and Reading* <http://www.talkstorytogether.org/about> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.talkstorytogether.org/about> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Talk Story, *What to Look For When Selecting Books*, <http://www.talkstorytogether.org/american-indian/alaskan-native-book-list/guide-selecting-books-and-sources-current-reviews/what-look> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Talk Story, *Storytime Ideas,* <http://www.talkstorytogether.org/storytime/ideas> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Talk Story, *Submit a Storytime*, <http://www.talkstorytogether.org/storytime/submit-storytime> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Talk Story, *Grant*, <http://www.talkstorytogether.org/grants> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)