

### STORY 3: "The Long March"

**M**y mother and father divorced when I was ten. Although that was painful, it was nothing compared to the father and son "bonding" experiences that followed. The following true story is an effort to save fathers and their teenage sons everywhere a great deal of pain and trouble.

As soon as my father thought I was old enough, he took me down to the army surplus store to fit me with the best pair of Vietnam-era combat boots that \$19.95 could buy. While we were there, we also stocked up on freeze-dried scrambled eggs, beef stew, and Tang. We were going hiking.

The man behind the counter, in a dirty camouflage hat and with an eagle tattoo on his arm, tried to sell my father an assault rifle to go along with the boots and the food. "Lots of grizzly bears this time of year," he said with a southern drawl. To my disappointment, my father turned down the gun, and we were off to the ranger station in the national forest.

In the warm, cozy station, a cheerful ranger showed us our destination on a forest map. "It's only four miles as the crow flies," she explained.

"Four miles," I thought. "That's not so bad." However, if you remember only *one* thing about this story, let it be this: unless you are *really a crow*, four miles on a map of a mountain means at least ten miles worth of stepping—and almost all of it uphill. I picked up my backpack, which I think was my dad's book bag in middle school and which contained things people should simply not have to carry around with them—such as toilet paper, water, and a folded-up stove. And we were off.



The story-teller's dad, happily hiking along

I can describe the next seven hours in two words: we walked. Now this may be an enjoyable experience for a group of sociable adults that like nature, but for a twelve-year-old from the city, it sucks. It really sucks. Believe me.

The sun was setting as we reached our destination. It was a lake—a nice lake, too. I could have had a good look at it—if I hadn't been blinded with rage at having carried fifty pounds of water all day long on our way to an entire lake full of the stuff. With a sigh of frustrated disbelief, I finally put down my pack. I began to take off my boots. (Those boots were awful—rock hard soles but otherwise made of cloth, with no padding. People ask why the U.S. didn't win the war in Vietnam? It was the boots!)

At that point I hated my father, but I had a healthy new respect for camels. After a dinner of freeze-dried pasta and beans, my dad began to bundle up all the food in a blanket. "What are you doing?" I asked, with very little interest.

"Well, son," he said, "we need to bundle up the food and hang it from a tall branch so at night the bears can't get it." All of a sudden I was *very* interested.

"Wait a minute," I whined. "A 2000-pound grizzly comes strolling by, looks up at the food in the tree, then down at us, just lying there like two six-foot-long hot dogs—what are you, nuts?! Can't we leave the food out? Maybe the bear will be full by the time he gets to us. Why didn't you listen to the man in the surplus store and buy that gun?"

My father laughed as he set up our "tent," which consisted of a rope and a big, long plastic bag that was open at both ends. He put the rope through the bag, tied each end to a tree, and—lo and behold—we had a big, long plastic bag open at both ends.

Well, it turned out I made it through the night without being eaten alive. The mosquitoes gave it a good try, but what are a few dozen itchy bumps when you are already in total misery? Not much, I'd say.



After a breakfast of the yellow Styrofoam that came out of the freeze-dried “scrambled egg” package, we fished. Now, you tell me: where is the excitement in dangling a big piece of food in front of a fish that has a brain as big as a pea until you by blind chance impale it through the head with a sharp hook and pull it out of the water? Fortunately, I was spared the thrill of victory. After three hours of sitting by the lake, fighting the bugs, and not catching a single fish, old tire, or boot (I could have used one or two), we began to pack up.

I was really excited about leaving until I realized, “Now I have to walk back!” At this point, I was seriously considering throwing myself down a hill so I would break a leg and get rescued by a medical team. “This sucks,” I muttered.

“But we’re bonding,” said dad.

“Bonding?” I said. “You take your twelve-year-old son on a forced march, and you call it ‘bonding’? Next time, give me fifty bucks and take me to Disneyland, and we’ll bond there!”

We walked in silence, not because we had nothing to say, but because the blisters on my feet had slowed me down so much that I was always fifty yards behind my father. All that kept me going was the thought of a couple of Big Macs, large fries, and the Sunday night episode of “Battlestar Galactica.” (It was a new one.) I had a headache and a sunburn, and I was sweaty and dirty. About halfway down the mountain, when I slipped in a very cold stream, I discovered the only good thing about

old combat boots: I was able to soak my feet with my boots on, which I did for five minutes, and then walk while the fabric dried naturally.

When we got to the car, I felt like jumping for joy—but I didn’t because my feet hurt. However, I had survived. After all that walking, we had accomplished our goal—to end up standing at exactly the same spot where we had begun.

All I could say was, “McDonald’s.”

Well, I got my Big Macs, and as you might imagine, I enjoyed them very, very much. I missed my TV show.

I have not gone hiking since that time. Most likely, I will never go hiking again. I have since been able to forgive my father, although it took several years, and we have a fairly normal relationship now.

You see, bonding is a good thing for a twelve-year-old. Hiking, however, is not. Fathers out there would do well to remember that.



The author of the story, many years later, in a more comfortable setting.

**C**OMPREHENSION CHECK: Did you get the main events and the point of the *Sample Speeches 6A & 6B*—a news story and a real experience? Then answer these questions about each story in as few words as possible:

1. What were the main or the most important events of the narrative?
2. Does the story make a point or teach a lesson? If so, what is it? (What did you learn from the story?)

# ORAL PRACTICE 6A

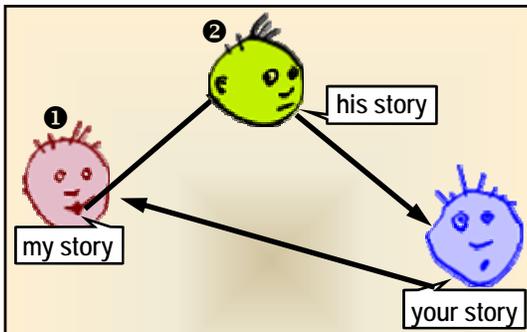
FORM: Retelling Stories in the "Game of Gossip"

TOPIC: News Stories & Personal Experiences



**I**NSTRUCTIONS: For this "Game of Gossip," your group or class will need a collection of short, simple true stories—either news stories or personal narratives. You can use the sets of "True Stories from the News" or "Personal Experience Story Cards" that come with this *Speaking* text, or you can collect true stories of your own. To practice retelling stories in the form of narration, follow these steps:

1. Work in groups of three. Each speaker will receive a card with a different true story on it.<sup>2</sup> Read your story for meaning. To make sure you understand the main events, list them in a few words a note card. Does the story make a point or communicate a message? Jot down what you think this "lesson" is—and why you think so.
2. In this story chain activity, only you know the truth about what really happened in your narrative. Your job is to explain the events in order, clearly and accurately, so that your listener follows the story and believes it. If the story is exciting or scary or funny, try to convey its "atmosphere" too. And if you believe the narrative has a point, a message, or a lesson to learn, make sure that you communicate the point with your story-telling.



In the simplest version of the "Game of Gossip," each person in turn tells a different story to the person on his or her right, who tells the same story to the third person, who retells it again to the original story-teller.

3. In your group of three, tell your narrative in your own words to the person on your right. You can look at your notes or your story, but *don't read your card aloud*. Your listener may ask for repetition or clarification to make sure he or she is following the story correctly.

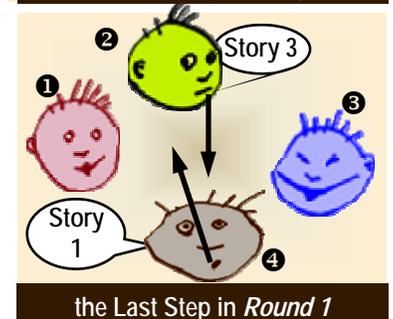
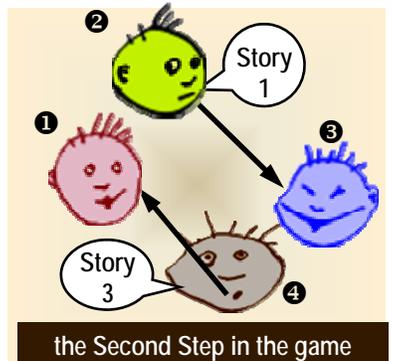
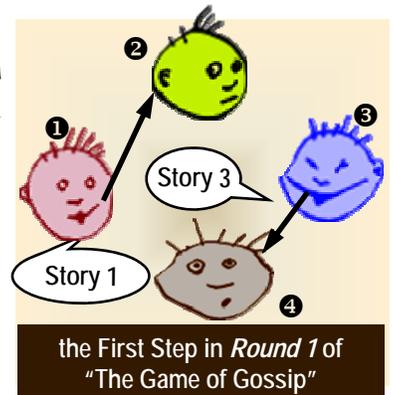
4. Now pay attention as your listener retells *your story* to the third person in your group. You can help him or her to be accurate or can just jot down suggestions to give him or her later.

**NOTES:** To make a set of true-story cards for the "Game of Gossip," collect selections about the same length and difficulty from magazines, newspapers, short-short true-story books, or appropriate online sources. To provide continuity in this activity, the narratives might all be on the same general topic—perhaps *government*, *crime*, or *human interest* stories, or they can be on any topic that comes up. On each card, paste up a different short article. Number the cards.

It doesn't matter if participants in different groups receive *the same* or *different* story cards. Both news and personal-experience stories may be used for a variety of activities.

5. Finally, listen carefully as the third person in your group retells your story to you. Is the narrative essentially the same as the one you read and told originally? If not, discuss the differences—in both content and story-telling style. Where and how did the story change? Do the changes matter? Why or why not?
6. So that all group members get a chance to tell the stories they read—and to hear their stories retold—repeat Steps 3 to 5 two more times. (a) The second group member tells his or her story to the third person, that speaker retells the same story to the first member, and the first person retells it to the original story-teller. (b) The third group member narrates his or her story to the first, who tells it to the second, who tells it back to the original speaker.
7. If there is time, a few speakers can retell the three different stories to the whole group or class. If the people in the audience already know the stories, they can help these speakers narrate them accurately, expand them or keep them short, and generally do a good job at true story-telling. They can make comments and give suggestions for improvement in narrative style.
8. There are several ways to play the “Game of Gossip.” Here is another version to use in addition to or instead of the above seven steps:

- Work in groups of four. Each group member receives a card with a different true story (1-4) on it. Read your story for meaning. Practice—in your head or on paper—retelling the important events and the point (the “message”) of the story.
- For the first “round,” of this game, use only *Stories 1 and 3*. The first participant retells his or her story to the second (the person on his or her left) while the third group member retells his or her story to the fourth person.
- After a time limit, the second person retells the story he or she just heard (*Story 1*) to the person on his or her left (*Participant 3*) while the fourth person retells *Story 3* to the first person.
- Next, the third person retells the story he or she just heard (*Story 1*) to the person on his or her left (*Participant 4*) while the first person retells *Story 3* to the person on his or her left (*Participant 2*).
- Finally, the fourth person retells the first story to the group of four. The three listeners, especially the original story-teller (*Participant 1*), listen carefully for accuracy and make corrections if necessary. If there are mistakes, the group analyzes where the “Game of Gossip” went wrong—in the original telling, a listener’s misunderstanding, the retelling, etc.
- Now the second person retells the third story to the other three group members, who analyze the inaccuracies and improve the story—if it’s necessary, helpful, or fun.



# MINI-SPEECH 6A



**FORM:** *Telling a True Story*

**TOPIC:** *A News Story or a Personal Experience*

**I** NSTRUCTIONS: Can you communicate the main events and the point or message of a true story effectively without losing the attention of your audience?

To tell a story in narrative form, follow these steps:

1. Have you heard, seen, or read any interesting stories recently? Or have you yourself had a scary, exciting, surprising, or funny experience? Choose one incident or sequence of related ones that you think make a point, send a "message," or "teach a lesson."
2. If you wish, write a title for your story. Write one or two sentences to "set the scene," introduce the setting, or give the necessary background information for your narrative. Then in as few words as possible, list the important events of the incident(s). Plan your story-telling so that your audience is sure to follow the sequence of events and get the point or the message.
3. In turn, tell your story to the whole group or class. You may refer to your notes, but be sure to talk naturally, not read aloud. To make your meaning clear, speak louder or softer, faster or slower, and higher or lower when appropriate. Use facial expressions and gestures to help your audience understand, and check that your listeners are following the main events. Before telling the point of your narrative, ask what they think the "lesson" or "message" is.
4. As other speakers narrate their stories, listen carefully for the main events and point. If you're not sure you are following a narrative, ask the story-teller to slow down, speed up, repeat a point, or explain an event in another way. To give "feedback" on what you heard, you can answer one or more of these questions:
  - Did you enjoy the story? Why or why not?
  - Was it easy to follow the sequence of events and get the point? Why or why not?
  - Do you have any thoughts or comments on the story? Does it remind you of any of your own experiences?
  - Do you agree or disagree with the speaker's interpretation of the point, the lesson, or the message of the narrative? Why?

**NOTES:** Here are some suggestions of places to find (read or hear) interesting, exciting, or true stories: the local news section of a paper, a community newsletter or other publication, a "human interest" magazine like *Reader's Digest*, a book of short true stories, human interest news on TV or radio, and of course, online. But if you choose to pass them on, be sure to identify all "fake news stories" as fabricated (untrue).