

Learning Guide



Bill Harley

We hope you enjoyed hearing master storyteller Bill Harley share his hilarious songs and stories. Practice telling and creating your own stories with this print-ready Learning Guide!



What's in this Learning Guide?

Get Set to Listen

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2-8.2

Discussion Questions

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3-8.3

Writing Prompts and Extension Projects

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.1; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.2; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.3;
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.4; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.7; CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3-8.8

Become a Better Storyteller: Resources & Activities

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.1-8.1, SL.1-8.4, SL.1-8.6; TH:Pr4.1, TH:Pr6.1, TH:Re8.1, TH:Cr1.1

“The Teachers’ Lounge” Activity Guide

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-6.1, RL.3-6.3, RL.3-6.4, RL.3-6.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-6.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-6.3

Draw the Scene

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3-8.3, RL.3-8.7; VA:Cr1.1

Write a Silly Song

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-6.3, W.3-6.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-6.4, SL.3-6.6;
CSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL/SL Integration

Additional Resources & Book List



The Children's Hour
kids public radio



Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Bill Harley says small moments in childhood are important?
2. What does Bill mean when he says, “Your job is not to be the best, your job is to be the only”?
3. Why do you think humor is important in storytelling and music?
4. Which song or story did you relate to the most? Why?
5. Have you ever had to choose between following rules and helping someone? What did you do?
6. What is something small that has happened to you that shaped who you are?
7. Do you like to sing, tell stories, or create things? What kind?
8. Think of a funny or frustrating moment in your life—how could you turn it into a story or song?
9. Why is it important for kids to “use their voices and trust their ideas”?

Group Discussion Strategies

Think Pair Share:

1. Individually, student writes down their answer to a question.
2. Students pair up and tell each other their answers.
3. Teacher calls for volunteers to share with the whole class their answer (and/or their partner’s answer). Teacher notes key words/phrases on board.

Round Robin:

1. Teacher poses one question (written on top of a large page) to students, who are assembled into small groups of 3 or 4.
2. Students take turns brainstorming the answers. The recorder of the group writes down all answers.
3. The leader reads the group’s ideas to the entire class. Teacher moderates.



Writing Prompts

Prompts

1. Write about a moment that changed how you think or act.

Extension: Write a paragraph about how this moment might still affect you in the future.

2. Write about a funny or frustrating moment with your family (like waiting, arguing, or singing in the car).

Extensions:

- Add sensory details, like sights, sounds, and feelings, to make the story more vivid.
- Rewrite the story using only dialogue.
- Turn the story into a short skit and act it out.

3. Create your own story about a mysterious place in your school that you've never been allowed to enter.

Extensions:

- Draw a map of the school and label the mysterious place.
- Write two endings—one expected, one surprising.
- Sequel Story: What happens after the character discovers the place?

Interview a friend or family member and invite them to share stories from their life.

Extension:

- Record your story for [StoryCorps and the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress archives](#).

Their website includes tips for a great conversation, great questions to guide your conversation, access to a facilitator, and self-directed recording tools!



Become a Better Storyteller

Everybody is a storyteller. To be a human being is to be a storyteller.”

-Joe Hayes

Prepare

Check out the unit lesson plans, [The Art of Storytelling from MENSA for Kids](#), to get great practical activities and lessons about the history of storytelling, getting ready to tell a story, finding and mapping a story, getting your story ready, presenting the story, and extensions.

Watch

- [Penny’s Top 5 Storytelling Tips](#)
- [7 Tips to Master Storytelling: Become a Great Early Years Storyteller](#)

Write

instructions for becoming a storyteller.

- Include tips about voice, pacing, and audience awareness.
- Add examples of exaggeration or humor.
- Include a “Do’s and Don’ts” chart.
- Teach your lesson to younger students.

Practice

Sit in a circle and take turns telling a short, dramatic story using the above storytelling tips that answers the question: “How was your day?”

Extension: *Retell the same event in a boring way. Compare the difference.*

Discuss: *What makes something a “story” instead of just information?*

Retell

Using voice, gestures, and facial expressions, retell one of the stories Joe Hayes told or another story (see “Book List” for some ideas).

Focus on:

- Pacing
- Tone
- Audience reaction

Extension: *Memorize and perform your story for an audience.*

Reflect: *How did the audience change your storytelling?*

Remember! *Stories are for the listeners, so pay attention to how they are responding to your story as you tell it!*



“The Teachers’ Lounge” Activity Guide

Discuss

Have you ever been curious about a place you weren’t allowed to go? What happened?

Listen

to Bill Harley tell his story “The Teacher’s Lounge” on [The Children’s Hour, “Bill Harley” episode](#) (segment 21:28-33:05).

Reflect

1. What was the one room Bill and his friends had never been in?
2. Why was Bill often in the hallway at school?
3. How are Bill and Emily different in their personalities?
4. What does the teachers’ lounge represent to the kids in the story?
5. What lesson does Bill learn from this experience?
6. How does the author use humor to tell the story? Give an example.

Decoding Vocabulary

Bill and the other students had no idea what a teachers’ lounge was. At first, he couldn’t even read the word “lounge”. What strategies did he use to figure out what the signs “Teachers’ Lounge” and “Staff Only” might mean?

Draw

- What the students imagined the teacher’s lounge looked like before opening the door.
- What it actually looked like.

Write

Write about a time when you had to choose between following the rules and helping someone.





Draw the Scene

Listen

to one or more of Bill Harley's stories or songs from [The Children's Hour, "Bill Harley" episode](#):

- "The Teachers' Lounge" (segment 21:28-33:05)
- "Everybody's a Baby About Something" song (segment 10:31-14:03)
- The full playlist from the episode can be found [here](#).

Illustrate

Choose a scene from one of Bill Harley's stories or songs to illustrate.



Write a Silly Song

Bill Harley says that your job is not to be the best, your job is to be the only. In other words, you have to find a way to say things in a way that is unique to you. Give it a try and write a song in your own, unique voice!

Listen

to Bill Harley talk about the importance of finding your own voice on [The Children's Hour, "Bill Harley" episode](#) (segment 44:38-45:41).

Listen

to how Bill Harley uses his unique voice to write silly songs about everyday things:

- ["Like to Sing" from Yes to Running](#)
- ["Black Socks" from Play It Again](#)
- ["Is Not, Is Too" from Play It Again](#)
- ["Mom and the Radio" from Down in the Backpack](#)
- ["I Don't Wanna Wait Anymore" from One More Time](#)

Reflect

- *What makes it funny?*
- *What repeated parts (chorus) did you notice?*
- *How does it connect to everyday life?*

Create Your Own Silly Song

Use Bill Harley's humorous songs to inspire your own short, funny song about something relatable (waiting, siblings, school, etc.), written in your own, unique voice.

Use the template on the next page to help you get started!





Write a Silly Song

Brainstorm

Choose a relatable topic, such as:

- Waiting for something (lunch, recess, a video to load)
- Siblings or family moments
- School routines
- Funny problems (losing things, forgetting homework, etc.)

My song is called: _____

Funny detail or moment about my topic:

- _____

- _____

- _____

Create a Chorus

Write a repeating chorus that everyone can sing.

Examples:

- “Oh no, oh no, here we go again!”
- “Wah wah wah, this is so silly!”
- “Waiting, waiting, what a day!”

The chorus should:

- Be short
- Be easy to repeat
- Match the mood of the song

My Chorus: _____



Write a Silly Song

Write the Song

Write 2–3 short verses.

Each verse should:

- Tell a funny moment or problem
- Stay simple and clear
- End by leading back to the chorus

Verse 1: _____

Verse 2: _____

Verse 3: _____

Add Rhythm & Practice

- Clap a beat or tap desks
- Practice singing together
- Emphasize the timing of the chorus

Perform Your Song!

Invite audience members to join in singing the chorus!



Additional Resources

[StoryCorps: Record the Conversation of a Lifetime](#)

“Since 2003, StoryCorps has built the largest collection of human voices ever archived — and we want to add yours. Our mission is to build connections, encourage compassion between people, and share stories, big and small. Have an incredible story to tell? Want to have a meaningful talk with someone important in your life? We’d love for you to join in and preserve your voice for future generations. It’s simple to get started!”

[The Art of Storytelling from MENSA for Kids](#)

This unit includes great practical activities and lessons on the history of storytelling, getting ready to tell a story, finding and mapping a story, getting your story ready, presenting the story, and extensions.

[Family Storytelling: PBS Kids](#)

A collection of storytelling activities and articles, tips on storytelling, and storytelling printables.

[Making Storytime Magical: Engaging Storytelling Tips](#)

[billharley.com](#)

Learn more about our guest, Bill Harley!

Videos

[Penny's Top 5 Storytelling Tips](#)

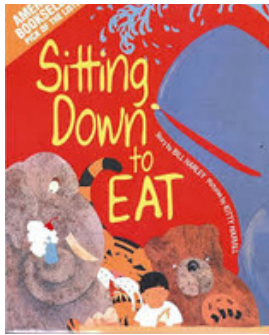
[7 Tips to Master Storytelling: Become a Great Early Years Storyteller](#)

[7 Fun and Easy Storytelling Activities to Boost Literacy Skills](#)

Experts describe and demonstrate 7 activities: storytelling basket, play with open-ended toys, 3-part story, puppet play, story stick, act it out, and visual prompts.



Book List

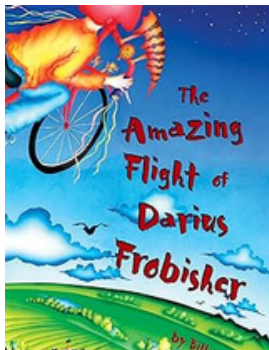


Sitting Down to Eat

by Bill Harley

In this counting book, snacktime is interrupted by an increasing number of animals, until the house is so full it eventually bursts! This hilarious tale teaches about the importance of sharing.

ages 4-8



The Amazing Flight of Darius Frobisher

by Bill Harley

This story follows Darius, an orphaned boy living with his cruel aunt, who finds hope and a chance for escape when a mysterious bicycle inspires a magical plan to change his life.

ages 8-12

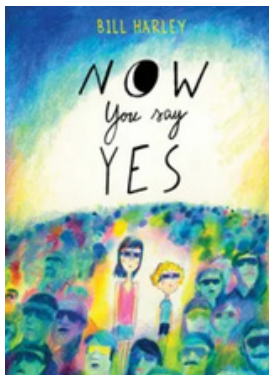


Charlie Bumper series

by Bill Harley

Charlie Bumpers wants to play the villain, but must learn to handle disappointment and responsibility without causing chaos.

ages 8-10

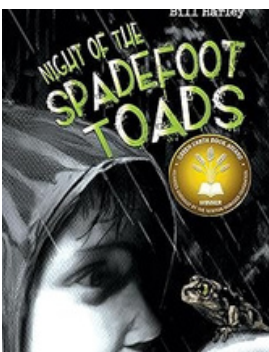


Now You Say Yes

by Bill Harley

After losing their mother, Mari and her stepbrother Conor run away on a cross-country journey to find their grandmother, discovering family, trust, and their place in the world along the way.

ages 10-14



Night of the Spadefoot Toads

by Bill Harley

An engaging story about a 12-year-old boy who, with the help of his neighbor, learns to appreciate nature and works to protect endangered toads, discovering the importance of conservation and connection to the natural world. Available on [Epic!](#)

ages 8-12