

THE LAST WORD

The Story, the Teller, and the Listener

By Bob Kanegis

Students, faculty, and families are gathered in the library for a school-wide Tellabration, where kids showcase the folktales they have learned this semester.

With slightly trembling hands, Alexi rings the Tibetan bells that convene the performance. He's a third grader who rarely speaks, and if he does, usually mumbles. For most of the semester, he's been physically disruptive and often finds himself the object of his teachers' ire.

It was with some trepidation, then, that I let him join a group of tellers in the hopes of placing him in a more controlled setting that might let the rest of the class proceed with fewer interruptions.

Unfortunately, he lived up to his reputation. I could see that there was no way the group would succeed with him trying to learn a part. But I hadn't the heart to ban him.



The author really gets into his storytelling! Here he is doing a performance at the Homer (AK) Public Library during Summer Reading Program 2019.

"Alexi!" I say, I'm going to give you one of the most important parts of all. You will be the listener. The tellers need a listener."

Instantly his demeanor changes. He listens with rapt attention to his classmates through two more rehearsals.

On performance night, when his group takes the stage, Alexi pops out of his seat and joins them. I follow close behind and whisper nervously, "What are you doing up here?"

Surprised, he replies in a clear and confident voice, "I am 'The Listener.'"

Alexi, so often the outsider, has reminded everyone that the story, the teller, and the listener all have a part to play, and we are all in this together! &



Bob Kanegis is a New Mexico storyteller and story coach, who travels nationwide. Through performance, workshops, and residencies, he creates joyful opportunities for children to experience and demonstrate the power and possibilities of language. You can find him at www.librarystorytelling.org

Got a great, lighthearted essay? A funny story about children and libraries? Books and babies? Pets and picture books? A not-so-serious look at the world of children's librarianship? Send your Last Word to Sharon Verbeten at CALeditor@yahoo.com.