

Table Topics is a great way to practice storytelling skills.

Two-Minute Tales!

Don't look now but we're surrounded... by stories! All around us, stories are being created, concocted or cooked up. They're being embellished, enhanced and polished. They're being told and retold.

When we were kids, our parents and babysitters used stories to put us to sleep at night. Whether they read tales from books, told family stories passed down through generations or made up stories to suit our fancy, stories instilled values, pride and an understanding of how the world worked. Stories helped us envision what was possible, and cautionary tales told us what *not* to do!

In school, teachers' stories taught about our nation, Greek mythology and Shakespeare's classics. On weekends, we learned stories of our religious heritage. Summer camps, fishing and camping trips were full of stories. And of course, *we* told tales out of school! We were natural storytellers.

As we grow older we learn new ways of imparting information: the essay, the resume, the elevator speech, job interview and the meeting report. Meanwhile our storytelling skills atrophy. The good news: Relief is just a Toastmasters meeting away. And the best way to start is by telling two-minute stories in the form of responses to weekly Table Topics.

It is crucial that you learn the elements of a story. They are: setting, characters, action and reaction – all leading to a resolution. Though making them work together and make sense is not easy, you can do all that, in style, in two minutes, and even receive applause for your effort. The first rule to follow is, never underestimate the power of an

archetypal story, one whose theme, structure or feel we know almost inherently. Those connect the best!

Here are some topics you might receive and examples of how your response can take the form of a story:

- **My Terrible Tumble.** Answer this topic with a story of you as a biker (or driver). Cycle through the scenario, action and outcome. Color the topic with descriptive language. The *whoosh* of the car, jarring of the pothole or the smell of car exhausts in the bike lane.
- **My Vacation from Hell.** Take us along with you as you revisit the vacation from hell – the misery, monotony or malady that overwhelmed your best-laid plans. Give us a travelogue with sounds, smells, moods and local color.
- **My First Kiss.** We want to hear the love story that blossomed... in school, after school or at summer camp. The tension, anticipation and ecstasy involved with the buss. Let us hear your heart beating, smell the sweat and hear the music as you kiss for the first time.
- **My Scariest Ghost Story.** Weave a yarn about a haunted house or other location where spirits dwell. Give us suspense, fear and trepidation. Let us hear the voices, see the apparitions and suspend reality as you conjure up scary monsters.
- **My Favorite Pet.** A love story if ever there was one. Anthropomorphize. Tell us about your relationship with Fifi, Fido or Fedo.
- **My Favorite Food.** Take us dining with you. Your story lets us relive the meal or special occasion. Help us breathe in the savory smells,

taste the succulent dishes and sate all our senses with your story. Give us the anticipation beforehand and the satisfaction that follows. We'll digest it all as you tell it.

According to storyteller Jean Ellison, co-director of the Bay Area Storytelling Festival, "Stories speak! Among of the benefits of story and storytelling: to remind us how to listen. If we could just be better listeners, we'd reduce our workplace quarrels, interpersonal strife, and globally the world would be a more peaceful place." We, as Toastmasters can do our part, two minutes at a time.

Hunt through your kitchen drawers for an egg timer and use it to practice your two-minute stories. Remember, in Table Topics you have up to two and a half minutes! Leave a little sand in the glass. When you're next called for Table Topics, think story instead of speech or stream of consciousness. Whatever the topic, you can likely tell a two-minute story, replete with locale, characters, a challenge and a triumph. As 85-year old Toastmaster and master storyteller Orunamamu often tells her club:

*"I stepped on a pin, the pin bent,
And that's the way the story went."*

Well, what are you waiting for? It's story time! 📖

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