

# WHAT IS TPRS STORYTELLING®?

TPR Storytelling® stands for Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling. This student-centered language teaching method is based on comprehensible input, repetition, and student interest. TRPS is a grassroots language teaching movement based on Stephen Krashen's second-language acquisition theory. Founded by Blaine Ray in the 1990s, TPRS has gained more popularity among groups of language teachers and is transforming the way their students of all ages learn second languages around the world – including the U.S. Department of Defense's Defense Language Institute in Monterey, CA.

Humans acquire language through comprehensible input (listening and understanding). It is an unconscious process and it happens when the learner is focused on the *meaning* of the message. TPRS focuses on high frequency words (words that appear often in a language), which are most needed for speech. During each lesson, students focus on no more than three new high-frequency vocabulary structures. This allows the language to be repetitive, in turn allowing the learner to acquire that structure more deeply.

A young child will acquire language roughly 10 hours a day for 6 years. In this case, he or she would have over 20,000 hours of language acquisition. A student in Verona who starts a language in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and continues through 12<sup>th</sup> grade will have only 750 hours of language acquisition. In order for students to achieve fluency by the time they graduate, language instruction needs to be highly engaging and motivating. The three steps of TPRS allow the teacher to focus on students' interests, talents, and passions while providing a structure curriculum to ensure success.

## STEPS OF TPRS®

Step One: Establish meaning.

Three new vocabulary structures are introduced, one at a time. Students write down and listen to the word. The teacher uses a technique called Personalized Questioning and Answering (PQA) to begin establishing meaning. TPRS guru Carol Gaab explains PQA as "level-appropriate questions that are personally relevant to specific learners (or learner groups) and that revolve around the target language. The teacher uses PQA to elicit an engaging conversation that will provide the context and repetition that language learners need as they begin the acquisition process." In simpler words, PQA is a way to engage students in meaningful dialogue instead of forcing them to memorize lists of words.

Step Two: Ask a story.

This is where the kids would say the fun happens. When asking a story, the teacher guides the class into creating a story. Students volunteer to act in each story, often taking on another persona. The teacher asks the class for detailed information, such as where the character lives, what their interests are, what they look like, etc. The teacher also asks questions that include the three focus vocabulary structures from that unit. All of the ideas come from the students, but the teacher guides the story's structure through specific questioning.

Step Three: Read and discuss.

In the final step, students read and process a story that is pre-written by the teacher. The story includes the focus vocabulary structures from that unit. Students translate and process the story, often by drawing, acting, or answering questions. This is where students get to show what they know.

## HOW ARE STUDENTS ASSESSED?

At the end of every story unit, students take a quiz to show what they have learned. Students are allowed to use the story and any notes they've written on the story handout during the quiz. Details of the story – a character's age, which day the character did an activity, the name of a city – have nothing to do with learning the language. Students are not expected to learn the "facts" of the story, but rather are expected to *understand* the story as a whole.

## WHAT ABOUT GRAMMAR?

Grammar is taught embedded within the language. The students acquire grammar as they acquire the language. When students are ready to learn about a specific grammar structure, they will ask. This is called "Pop-Up Grammar." When a student inquires, then the class discusses the grammar topic for no more than three minutes and moves on.

## LAUGHTER = LEARNING

Students are very attentive and interested when the topic is about them, their peers, and their interests, especially in middle school! A TRPS language class is relevant, motivating, and highly engaging to them since it is about topics that they enjoy. Personalization also builds a sense of community within the classroom, allowing for students to feel more comfortable communicating in the target language.

Outsiders might criticize that a TRPS classroom is too chaotic and silly. However, stimulating emotion allows students' brains to dig past their working memory into memory storage. Laughter, giggles, and silliness convince "the doorman" of our brain to let information through – and stay – by adding visual, kinesthetic, and emotional information. Students remember the funny stories they tell – along with the vocabulary from that story!

## WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A PARENT?

- Ask your child to retell you a story from class in the target language! The student can act out the story as they tell you the story. Then you can guess what happened in the story!
- Have your child read a story from class to you. Consider them the expert while they practice their pronunciation and reading skills in a safe environment!
- Encourage your child to write their own stories, or sequels to class stories, in the target language.
- Congratulate your child on his/her language accomplishments, no matter how big or how small!

