

# Playing With Story: Master Storyteller Margaret Read MacDonald Strikes Again!

By Tracy Kendrick.

Over a long and varied career, award-winning folklorist, professor, author and storyteller Dr. Margaret Read MacDonald has inspired thousands of people worldwide to love folktales and storytelling. Last January 16, 2010 she struck again with a lucky group of librarians, storytellers, and educators at a day-long workshop held at the Greater Victoria Public Library. It was a day filled with laughter, many opportunities to practice storytelling skills, and a wonderful opportunity to hear Margaret tell several stories including Appalachian tale *Jack and the Robbers*, Australian Aborigine tale *Old Man Wombat*, *Ko Kongole* from the Nkundo people of Africa, and many more.

In addition to core storytelling handbooks including *The Storyteller's Start-Up Book*, *Three-Minute Tales*, *Five-Minute Tales* and many more, Margaret has also written several picture books for children based on folktales. When it comes to storytelling at storytime for young children, Margaret said parents should be included in the storytime audience because it is an opportunity for parent education. She also feels that storytelling "is a nurturing act" and storytellers "nurture the audience." Margaret encouraged the workshop participants to tell stories not only to young children but also to people of all ages.

Margaret shared several helpful tips for learning stories including:

- Choose a story you love.
- Learn the original story but don't be afraid to tell it your own way.
- Memorize the beginning and ending lines and chants, songs, or important phrases.
- Walk around when practicing stories; humans learn 18% more when they are on the move.
- Practice as you go: in the bath, while driving, while walking, etc.
- Ensure that the first sentence is magical.
- Improve your story every time you tell it.



Margaret Read MacDonald. Photo by Tracy Kendrick.

Should storytellers tell stories originating from other cultural groups? Margaret's recommendation is that if there is any concern about causing offence, storytellers should connect with the people who have traditionally told the story and ask permission. Margaret said some cultural groups or individuals may not give permission for a story to be told by someone other than the originator, owner or a traditional teller.



Having fun with a story. Photo by Tracy Kendrick.

Margaret recounted amusing and touching experiences while she was living in Thailand for an extended period on a Fulbright scholarship. While in Thailand, Margaret gathered and recorded stories for a folklore project and provided storytelling assemblies

and workshops. Margaret's expertise on world folklore extends far beyond Thailand however, and she is the author of several collections of folktales and the indispensable *Storyteller's Sourcebook* which contains subject, title and motif access to world folktales.

The Playing With Story workshop was funded by the IslandLink Federation, and the British Columbia Library Association. The workshop was initiated by and hosted by the Greater Victoria Public Library.

Margaret Read MacDonald lives in Washington State. For more information about Margaret and her books, visit her webpage at:

[www.margaretreaddmacdonald.com](http://www.margaretreaddmacdonald.com).

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