

# Motivate Language Learning Through Story Telling & Dramatic Play

Submitted by Rena Carney, MS & Gail Van Tatenhove, MS, CCC-SLP, United States

Individuals can learn how to communicate with an AAC system through the use of story telling and dramatic play. Learning lines for a story or play (story-play) is a motivating strategy for practicing new vocabulary and rehearsing simple language structures. It is also a great way to practice turn taking and attention to communication partners.

## Example Goals:

1. Pragmatic/Discourse Goal = The person will practice turn taking in a conversation with multiple communication partners use story telling/dramatic play as a strategy.
2. Vocabulary Goal = The person will learn (receptively) and produce (expressively) new vocabulary using story telling/dramatic play as a way to learn and produce vocabulary in context.
3. Syntax Goal = The person will produce specific language structures (2 word utterances, agent/action/object word order, subject-verb agreement, negation, etc.) produced word-by-word using story telling/dramatic play with specific lines developed that target specific syntactical constructs.
4. Morphology Goal = The person will produce specific word endings (verb tense, singular/plural, comparative/superlatives) using story telling/dramatic play with specific lines developed that target specific morphological structures.

For maximum language learning, the story-play emphasizes the use of CORE VOCABULARY, with the language produced generated WORD-BY-WORD. Using a generative, core vocabulary approach, the vocabulary, language structures and communication give 'n take learned (while performing the story-play) can be used later when the person is engaged in spontaneous, self-selected communication.

\*Note: For some individuals who have significant access issues, the person could "rehearse" his/her lines word-by-word, developing proficiency with the Minspeak codes and language structures. However, during a live performance of the play, the person may need to have his/her lines prestored as sentences for speed and accuracy in the performance. However, using pre-stored sentences is NOT a useful strategy for learning to produce generative language and should not be used outside of a live performance.

## Using Story Telling or Dramatic Play to Develop Language and Learn Minspeak

1. Review possible stories-plays. Consider folk tales, fables, fairy tales, classic children's stories, or poems. You could also write a play based on a life experience or family story.
2. Define the language learning goals for the student using the Minspeak device (see above.)

3. Compare and adapt the vocabulary/language for the story-play with the vocabulary/language available in the person's Minspeak device. It will most likely be necessary to paraphrase the story in order to emphasize the use of core vocabulary. Paraphrasing is also a good way to adjust the language of the story for specific pragmatic, syntax, and morphology goals.
4. If necessary, program the person's Minspeak device with new words **crucial** to the story (e.g., name of characters). Limit the programming and **DO NOT** emphasize nouns or unusual story-specific verbs.
5. Create visual support materials for use in the rehearsal/performance of the story-play, such as script lines that include the icon sequences for each word in the line.

### **Example Story-Play**

The following story illustrates how to use story telling and dramatic play to develop language and learn Minspeak. Rena Carney developed it for use with students with complex communication needs.

#### **1. Selected Story**

- a. The Story of "Sikulume," In *Famous South African Folk Tales* by Pieter W. Grobbelaar, with illustrations by Sean Verster, Cape Town, South Africa: Human & Rousseau, First revised edition 2003.
- b. The Minspeak User performs the role of Sikulume.

#### **2. Adaptation of the Story**

- a. The author wrote a play based on the selected story.
- b. In the play, the actors "echo" the Story Teller as a strategy to speak their lines and perform their actions.
- c. Lines were created for Sikulume emphasizing a small set of core vocabulary.

#### **3. Language Learning Goals**

- a. Pragmatics
  - ◆ "Sikulume" will listen to his communication partner and take his turn to speak the "echo" line at the proper time.
  - ◆ "Sikulume" will learn to interject a comment using simple interjection phrases, such as "uh oh" or "oh no."
- b. Vocabulary
  - ◆ "Sikulume" will learn the following pronoun-helper verb phrases: you are, I am, I will.
  - ◆ "Sikulume" will learn the following adjectives: beautiful, tired, bad.
  - ◆ "Sikulume" will learn the following verbs: get, eat, watch, live, die.
- c. Syntax
  - ◆ "Sikulume" will produce 2 – 3 word utterances, including Agent-Descriptor, Verb-Locative, Action-Object, and Agent-Action.
- d. Morphology
  - ◆ "Sikulume" will learn to produce the first person verb form.

#### **4. New Vocabulary**

- a. Add “Sikulume” in the Activity Row with other names.
- b. Add “oh” as a core word with Interjection + Chest. (This icon sequence was available in Unity60 sequenced and is the same way that the word “oh” is coded in Unity144.)

#### **5. Visual Supports**

- a. Use the PASS program to create “sentence strips” for Sikulume’s lines.
- b. Put the lines in a “flip-book” in the order produced in the script.
- c. Create a second strip of “lines” with the printed words ONLY. Use this version to cue the line as the person becomes more proficient learning the codes and sentence structure.

# **Sikulume: A South African Tale**

Adapted by Rena Carney, MS

## **Characters**

- Story Teller
- Chief
- Sikulume
- Old Man
- 6 Brave Warriors (you can name them)
- Cannibal

## **Set:**

- Roundabout: may be a large circle, drawn with masking tape.
- Screen: cannibal hides behind for surprise chase; bush and hut are also behind screen
- X's for places (where actors stand)

## **Props:**

- Bush
- Stars and Moon on stands, for display (hidden behind screen)
- 7 birds (can use puppets, bird cut-outs, etc.)
- Stick/Kerrie
- Skin Karoo
- Net

## **Sound/Music Cues:**

- Drums
- Birds
- Introductory music
- Laughter
- Night sounds
- Footsteps
- Running/chase music
- Dance music

## **Conventions:**

- Sound is used to bring in characters, for movement, and for scene changes.  
Drum beats when actors walk round the roundabout.

## **Shadows:**

These are the attendants that help the actors, move the props, beat the drums etc. They are dressed in black and sit quietly without moving during the play. They may stand behind wheel chairs, etc. Sometimes each character needs his/her own Shadow Partner.

## SCENE 1

**Sound:** (Drums, Birds, Music and Laughter)

*[As music fades, all actors enter and stand with their backs to audience. Story Teller enters. As she introduces the characters, they turn and face the audience.]*

**Story Teller:** This is a story of a brave warrior named Sikulume.

**Sikulume:** My name is Sikulume. (Bows to audience)

**Story Teller:** His father, the Chief...

**Chief:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Bows to audience)

**Story Teller:** An old man...

**Old Man:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Bows to audience)

**Story Teller:** Six brave warriors...

**Warrior 1:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Bows to audience)

**Warrior 2:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Bows to audience)

**Warrior 3:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Bows to audience)

**Warrior 4:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Bows to audience)

**Warrior 5:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Bows to audience)

**Warrior 6:** My name is \_\_\_\_\_. (Bows to audience)

**Story Teller:** And a terrible cannibal.

**Cannibal:** (Roars, grunts, and groans from behind screen.)

**All:** (Cover their ears, tremble and shake.)

**Story Teller:** (To cannibal) YOU BE QUIET!!! Now, where was I? Oh yes, long, long ago there was a Chief who had eight sons. Sikulume was the youngest. He never learned to talk. Seven of the Chiefs sons were so brave, they died in battle. They all died but one. Sikulume.

**Sikulume:** (Points to self.)

**Warriors:** They all died but one! (All cry.)

**Story Teller:** Stop crying. One day an old man came to the Chief and said "I saw seven beautiful birds at the cattle kraal."

**Old Man:** (Bows to Chief.) Chief, I saw seven beautiful birds.

**Story Teller:** The Chief said, "Seven Beautiful Birds?"

**Chief:** Seven Beautiful Birds!

**Warriors:** Seven Beautiful Birds!

**Story Teller:** The chief said, "Thanks for telling me! I will give you seven fat cows."

**Chief:** Thanks!

**Old Man:** You're welcome.

**Warriors:** Thanks and you're welcome **(to each other).**

**Story Teller:** The Chief thought for a while. Everyone thought for a while. **(All scratch heads and think.)** The chief said, "I lost seven sons. I want those seven birds. They will be my sons."

**Chief:** I lost seven sons. I want those seven birds. They will be my sons.

**Story Teller:** The chief called the young warriors of the kraal together.

**Chief:** Hey, all of you! Come here!

**Warriors:** **(Gather around the chief.)**

**Chief:** **(Mimes a chicken dance, catching a bird, etc.)**

**Story Teller:** See, it was like this. The Chief decided to send out young warriors of the kraal to catch the birds. He chose seven young people and the seventh was his youngest son - Sikulume. He told the warriors and Sikulume "don't come back until you each bring me one of those birds!"

**Chief:** Don't come back until you each bring me one of those birds!

**Sound:** **(Drums)**

**All:** **(All mill around as if leaving and return to original places with backs to audience.)**

## SCENE 2

**Sound:** **(Birds)**

**Warriors & Sikulume:** **(Begin walking the round-about.)**

**Story Teller:** For three long days the warriors journeyed through the land. But the birds kept in front of them, out of reach.

**Warriors & Sikulume:** (Warriors walk around the roundabout looking into around and into sky for birds. A bush is moved out, with the 7 birds in it. The warriors freeze. Each one tiptoes up and captures a bird from the bush. )

**Story Teller:** On the third night the birds roosted in a small bush. The young warriors crept up and caught them one by one. The birds were so beautiful, that when the warriors caught them, they couldn't help but say, "You are beautiful!"

**Each Warrior:** You are beautiful!

**Story Teller:** Sikulume was troubled. **(All look really sad.)** You see, he could not talk. He held his bird, close to him and said with all his heart, using his device, "you are beautiful."

**Sikulume:** You are beautiful! You are beautiful! You are beautiful!

**Story Teller:** So it was that Sikulume learned to talk.

**Sound:** **(Night sounds)**

**Story Teller:** They all started the long walk home. **(Walk around the roundabout)** As night approached, they became very tired. Sikulume said, "I am tired."

**Sikulume:** I am tired.

**Warriors:** We are tired too!

**Story Teller:** They all went to sleep.

**All:** **(All go to sleep. They mime lots of yawning and stretching and settling down. All sleep and snore.)**

**Story Teller:** The stars and moon came out. During the night, Sikulume woke up and saw the full moon! He said, "The moon? You are beautiful!"

**Sikulume:** The moon? You are beautiful!

**Story Teller:** Then Sikulume heard something. He heard footsteps.

**Sound:** **(Footsteps)**

**Story Teller:** He heard a deep voice muttering **(muttering)** it was an ugly terrible scary voice.

**Cannibal:** **(Muttering from behind the screen.)**

**Story Teller:** All of a sudden, a cannibal jumped out!

**Cannibal:** (Cannibal jumps out and scares everyone in audience, generally roaring and carrying on.)

**Cannibal:** I smell tender young meat. **(Big deal of sniffing and smelling.)** I like to eat small crunchy feet. Yum arrghh gobble gobble. . . I am hungry. I want to eat these warriors and scrawny birds. Fried chicken! **(Does a chicken dance.)** I am going to go get my friends. There are enough warriors here for my friends to eat too. I'll just go and get my friends Godzilla and \_\_\_\_\_ . Shhhhhhh!!!!

**Story Teller:** It was a cannibal! He tried to sneak away, but he was so fat, he made giant clomping noises like thunder, dum dum dum dum dum dum dum dum. Sikulume was scared! He said, "Get up!"

**Sikulume:** Get up!

**Story Teller:** He was so scared, all he could do was say "EAT" and "BAD" and do a chicken dance and point in the direction of the cannibal.

**Sikulume:** EAT! BAD!

**Story Teller:** That was enough for the warriors. They all jumped up and ran and ran and ran, hollering "eat" and "bad" and doing a little bit of the chicken dance because they were so scared. **(They run around the roundabout twice, then stop and are panting, out of breath.)**

**Sound:** **(Running music)**

**Story Teller:** Sikulume said "Oops!"

**Sikulume:** Oops.

**Warriors:** Oops?

**Story Teller:** Sikulume had left his bird. **(Slaps head.)** He said "Oh no!"

**Sikulume:** **(Slaps head.)** Oh no!

**Warriors:** **(All slap head.)** Oh no?

**Story Teller:** Sikulume told the Warriors that he had to go back to get his bird. He took his stick and stuck it in the ground. He said, "Watch this."

**Sikulume:** Watch this!

**Warriors:** Watch this?

**Story Teller:** Sikulume told the warriors, "If the stick stays upright, I will live."

**Sikulume:** I will live!  
**Warriors:** You will live!  
**Story Teller:** Sikulume told the warriors, "If the stick moves, I will live."  
**Sikulume:** I will live.  
**Warriors:** You will live!  
**Story Teller:** Sikulume told the warriors, "But if the stick falls over, I will die."  
**Sikulume:** I will die. **(Mimes cutting throat or dying.)**  
**Warriors:** **DIE!!! (All mime dying. Warriors gather around stick as Sikulume starts off.)**

### SCENE 3

**Sound:** **(Drums)**  
**Story Teller:** Sikulume went back to the land of the cannibals. **(Sikulume walks the roundabout while the warriors watch the stick.)** He went in the hut, and caught his bird. Just as he was leaving he heard a terrible sound. Dum Dum Dum. . . Sikulume said, "On no! The cannibal is back!"  
**Sikulume:** Oh no! **(Sikulume shakes and trembles and looks really scared.)**  
**Cannibal:** **(Roaring etc.)**  
**Story Teller:** The cannibal was awful. He had one eye in his forehead, a mouth full of teeth like a shark; he was carrying a big net to throw over Sikulume and the bird. **(Cannibal scares audience with net.)** Sikulume started running and the cannibal started chasing him.  
**Sound:** **(Chase scene and music. Can chase through audience if you want to.)**  
**Sikulume:** **(Sikulume runs around the round-about. The cannibal follows him, but trips and fall down. Cannibal cries. The stick moves and shakes.)**  
**Story Teller:** The stick was shaking!  
**Warriors:** **(Pointing at stick.)** Shaking!  
**Story Teller:** Sikulume took off his skin karoo and threw it at the cannibal. The cannibal could not see very well and he thought it was

Sikulume. Sikulume kept on running and ran all the way to where his warriors were. The cannibal was fooled. He grabbed the skin karoo and started eating it, tearing it and chewing it with terrible sounds. The cannibal said, "This flesh is dry and old. But it is still good. Yum Yum!"

**Cannibal:** This flesh is dry and old. But it is still good. Yum Yum!

**Story Teller:** After the cannibal ate the skin karoo, he looked up and Sikulume was gone. He said "Rats!" and wandered off and went to sleep. You could hear him snoring.

**Cannibal** **(Moves toward screen.)** Rats! I sure am full. **(He burps and yawns etc. on his exit.)**

#### SCENE 4

**Sound:** **(Bird sounds)**

**Story Teller:** Sikulume and his friends looked at his Kerrie, which was still shaking. The warriors said to Sikulume, "Hau! Sikulume! You run fast"

**Warriors:** Hau! Sikulume! You run fast!

**Story Teller:** They all went to see the Chief. He was playing a game (hop scotch?) with the Old man. The chief's heart was sooo glad when they showed him the seven birds. He said, "My heart is glad."

**Chief:** My heart is happy. **(Beats his heart with fist.)**

**All:** Happy! **(Mime pounding their hearts.)**

**Story Teller:** He told Sikulume "I am so proud of you, I will give you your own kraal."

**Chief:** "I am so proud of you; I will give you your own kraal."

**Story Teller:** He told Sikulume "Someday you will be a great chief."

**Chief:** Someday you will be a great chief.

**Story Teller:** They he gave Sikulume a big hug. Everyone hugged each other. Then they all had a big dance. **(Characters go behind screen and get cannibal to dance and may get audience members to dance with them.)** And that is what happened.

**Sound:** **(Dance music)**