



Changelings

By Cassy Welburn

Published by Frontenac House

September 2015

978-1-927823-33-0, pb, \$15.95

Changelings, is a book of storytelling through poetry. It focuses on the family and the dramatic changes that happen to all of us at every stage of life. The stories are both ancient and present day episodes in the lives of brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers or grandparents that demonstrate how we turn to each other for understanding and identity. On the recording, *Cassiopeia, Tales From the Night Tree*, characters from the oldest myths and folktales come to life again. The themes of magic, transformation and the mysteries of the natural world unfold in the oral art of storytelling. The writer, Cassy Welburn, has taught performance poetry and storytelling in theatre schools for youth in Vancouver and Calgary. She has also taught both elementary and secondary students for over thirty years. Watching them perform their own versions of myth, folktale and poetry has been a particular inspiration.

The Oral Tradition

Listening/Speaking (Skills: oral literacy, fluency, communication with a purpose for specific audience, strategies for comprehension of literary forms).

Both storytelling and poetry come from a very ancient oral tradition. The presentation of the work uses voice, gesture and melody to enhance the meaning of the words in a live interaction with an audience, often on a special occasion. Having students engage with poetry as though it were a script to be understood through performance, clarifies their understanding of the text, the author's intentions.

- 1) Begin with listening to poems or stories, preferably read or told by performers, but also recordings, to hear good models of the theatre of poetry.
- 2) Warm-up by having a group share in the performance of a poem, noting favourite words, the sounds, rhythms and arc of the piece. (a type of reader's theatre).
- 3) Read or perform the poem in a special place, indoors or outdoors, adding the setting to the work. Read a poem as an argument, a declaration, a eulogy or ritual of some kind. Find a purpose for communicating this message to this audience.

- 4) More ideas for performing poetry and developing oral fluency, clarity of speech and meaning, persuasiveness and confidence in public speaking can be found at www.poetryoutloud.org

The Story in Poems/The Poetry in Story

Representing/Viewing (Skills: making connections to self/cultures, using forms and structures in other traditions to clarify thinking, using inquiry and research to present ideas).

The narrative has its source in poetry and song. It is defined by having a narrator and characters, both of which have a dramatic voice. Early forms such as the epic, ballad and saga celebrated the hero or drew upon mythology and were often chanted. Poetry as metaphor or analogy is the basis of thought and early storytelling explained the world and human nature this way. The structure of a poem or story is a predictable frame for the reader/listener to follow the unfolding of new ideas.

- 1) Find the forms of poetry in this collection, such as the glosa, sestina, ballad or prose poem and the type of story they tell. Who is the narrator? Who are the characters? Try using form to structure your own poem. For more forms refer to poetryinvoice.com/poems-forms.
- 2) Which myths or folktales do these poems draw upon? How do these stories relate to current events or personal stories in your own circles?
- 3) Themes of transformation and renewal are explored in *Changelings* and in the recorded storytelling. What beliefs do the characters hold that help them through these changes? How are family and language relevant to their sense of belonging?

A Close Reading

Reading (Skills: critical thinking and analysis exploring text, the use of figurative language, finding visual images and hearing voice or point of view).

Reading poetry like a writer is noticing the extraordinary in the familiar. It is seeing how the poet uses language in fresh ways to reveal what seems beyond words. Each word and its order, each line and its break, each image and its symbol are important to understanding the meaning. Ask yourself, what do I notice?

- 1) Is it the choice of word, its connotation and place in the unfolding poem? How does the unique vocabulary help to paint a vivid picture? How important is the title? Why?
- 2) How is the image in the poem a surprise? How does it create a metaphor to make you think of something in a completely new way? (e.g. how is a cage like school, a pot, childhood?)

- 3) When you read the poem out loud notice how the visual punctuation of line and stanza break give the poem its rhythm. Try cutting up a poem and reading it differently.
- 4) Is this poem set in interiors or out in the open natural world? How is the tone different for each?
- 5) Whose voice do you hear in the poem/story? Is this the point of view of the narrator, character or object speaking? How does this affect you reading it out loud? Rewrite the poem from a different point of view.
Can you read the poem as an argument? If so, what is the point you, as the poet, are making?

How to Write a Good Poem

Writing: (Skills: writing strategies to create text, critical response, creative expression of ideas and feelings in a collaborative environment).

A good poem is a fresh way of seeing the world. The right word, the particular detail, the unexpected image all combine to give a new insight into the familiar, or into the unusual.

- 1) Pay attention to events that are a little out of the ordinary in your daily routine. Go someplace new and sit quietly for a time. Practice eavesdropping on the world around you. Write down favourite words or scraps of conversation.
- 2) Have an uninterrupted class writing time where no one talks. Write even questions you have for later. Don't stop the flow of writing. Read your work and hear feedback from others.(But stay quiet). What did they notice?
- 3) Start a draft of a poem using some of your favourite words and phrases. Look for strong verbs and nouns and avoid adjectives and adverbs. Look for an unusual combination of words to avoid cliché. Experiment with line breaks. Writing is a process. With each draft of the poem, clarify your thought, your purpose and expression of feeling. Writing develops critical thinking along with creativity.

Changelings: A book of storytelling and poetry by Cassy Welburn, 2015, www.frontenachouse.com

Cassiopeia: Tales From the Night Tree: 2011 – A CD sampling of some of these poems and stories as well as classic tales from mythology, legend and folktale retold by Cassy Welburn, with detailed description of tales on jacket.

Click on the following links for information about Cassy Welburn:

- www.talesstorytelling.com
- www.storytellers-reconteurs.ca
- www.poets.ca/members-directory