The Story Pouch and Bead Chain
by Diane Fitzgerald

When my first grandson, Adam, was about three or four years old, I made my first story pouch and bead chain for him. The beads and charms on the chain are used to prompt the storyteller in a free-association manner and to give the child something to hold and touch as the story is told. The pouch was made from an old leather glove which I cut off just above the thumb leaving a tube of leather about 3" x 6" which was sewed up along the bottom. I embellished it with beads and bead embroidery, closed it with a drawstring and permanently attached the story chain to the seam inside. Adam enjoyed the pouch and stories so much that I had to make another one when his brother, Scott, came along and now its time to make one for their little sister, Kaitlin.

Telling stories is an intimate way to spend time with a child that will long be remembered. Many cultures use objects as an aid in storytelling including aboriginal Australians who draw in the sand; Pacific Islanders who use string figures and the Chinese use tangrams, a Chinese puzzle consisting of a square cut into five triangles, a square and a rhomboid, to be reassembled into different figures. Dolls, plants and finger puppets are other items that can help bring a story alive.

One can use the storytelling to convey values, establish family identity and history and shape attitudes. Reading aloud is also good also, but the personalization and spontaneity of a good story is very enjoyable.

A story line my grandchildren have enjoyed immensely was the "Adventures of Young Adam, Young Scott and Young Kaitlin Searching for the Golden Treasure." Of course, the search was never ending and there were many hurdles to overcome. Each item on the story chain represented an obstacle or a magical amulet to aid them in the search. My model for this story, of course, was Greek myth, "Jason and the Argonauts" which tells of the obstacles Jason had to overcome in searching for the golden fleece. As I tell

the story, I weave in values by giving examples of how the children worked together (cooperation); how one stood up to the roaring lion (courage); how they had to collect and count stones to give to the wicked witch to cross the river (intelligence).

A Specialized Story Chains

When traveling you might encourage a child to collect inexpensive or small found perforated objects such as charms, beads, or other bits related to the place and to put them in a story chain as a reminder for later story telling. Depending on the child's age, she can learn to sew the edges of a pouch with a simple running stitch, to cut holes near the edge and insert a cord for a drawstring. Encourage the child to sign and date the work so he will feel a sense of pride and accomplishment in his work and know that some day when he is older, he will look back on this happy time. Other special story chains might be assembled for holidays such as Christmas. Miniature Christmas ornaments are widely available and inexpensive and provide a way to convey the myths and joy of this holiday season.

How to use the story chain

After you have assembled a general story chain with many beads and charms, how do you use this to tell a story? You can begin at any point on the chain and go backward or foreward or skip around when you select the next object. As you select (or as the listener selects) the next item on the story chain, let you mind free associate to begin the story. For example, If you select a red bead, it might remind you of a favorite necklace your grandmother wore to a family picnic when she was 70 years old. At the picnic she challenged all the grandchildren to see who could make the funniest monkey face and the family would vote, etc. etc. If your story line begins to run out, move along to another item on the chain.

Allow the child to hold the story chain while you're telling the story and be ready to move to a new object or bead when she says, "Tell me about this one!" After a while you can let the child be more involved in the stories by completing a portion after you've posed the question, "And, what do you think happened next?" You might also ask the child to make a sound or clap her hands when you point to her to emphasize a point in the story.

A second way to use the bead chain is to ask the child to find a certain bead by feeling the chain without looking inside the pouch. To practice, have the child feel of certain

The string of beads and charms...

beads or charms with her eyes shut to recognize their shape and texture. Point out the shape of a heart or shell, the facets on a bead or or the texture of a seed. You will be helping the child to learn new vocabulary and to recognize detail, but most of all to begin a lifelong love of beads.

Making The Pouch
Select a piece of soft leather or sturdy fabric about 6" x 10", large enough for a child's hand to go inside. As I mentioned, an old glove works well, or you might use Ultrasuede

or chamois skin (available at auto supply stores). Embellish with the child's name or initials and the date. Then add special symbols or simply free-form beading using the back stitch, lazy stitch or other stitches, or attach pieces of beadwork.

Making The Bead/Charm Chain

Begin with a piece of heavy nylon cord, used double, which can easily pass through the beads. I recommend Conso #18 or FF bead cord made by Beadsmith. The first 6" can be simple beads because most of the time they will be inside the pouch. Then begin to add larger, more interesting beads and charms. Separate them with about a half-inch of size 11 or 8 seed beads. Knot the ends of the thread and sew one end securely to the seam at the bottom of the pouch so that the chain will always stay with the pouch. Make 1/4" slits near the top of the pouch and string a heavy cord through them to make a drawstring.

Further Reading: There are many books to use for inspiration for embellishing the pouch, but two of my favorites are "One Bead at a Time: Exploring Creativity with Bead Embroidery," by Robin Atkins and books by Judith Baker Montano.

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