



Country & Partner Institution	
Unit 1 – CANTASTORIE A TOOL WORKING WITH CULTURAL HERITAGE STEP BY STEP ROMANIA EXAMPLE	
Activity n°	1
Description of content	<p>The activity is a tool of exploring cultural heritage. CANTASTORIE is a storytelling technique, while also being the name of person that masters the art of storytelling, which (s)he usually does through song or rhyme. We will, therefore talk about Cantastorie in order to identify a certain type of storyteller, as well as to focus on the technique used in such storytelling, also called cantastorie. To avoid confusion, we will hereafter use “Cantastorie” with a capital C to talk about the performer and “cantastorie” (in lowercase) for the technique itself. The Cantastorie usually uses efficient active communication techniques such as sounds, images, words and gestures, which we will analyse later on. The listeners/spectators, be it children or adults, are deeply involved, due to being stimulated by this variety of expressions, and they are often invited to participate actively. The great importance of the Cantastorie, which endured for centuries, is also given by the choice of topics, favouring social ones. Within the project we considered it to be essential to disseminate this storytelling technique, born among the people and preserved by oral tradition - as it was transmitted from one generation to another, and from one storyteller to another - a technique which still bears, both in Romania and around the world, traces and vestiges of customs as well as contemporary reinterpretations of it.</p>
Learning outcomes and competencies	<p>We tell stories for pleasure, for curiosity, out of necessity, and we listen to stories for the same reasons. Stories have always existed both in public spaces and inside the domestic sphere in all cultures and historical periods. The figure of the public narrator has endured by playing a fundamental role in disseminating culture, language, and</p>

news, while also encouraging the strengthening of traditions, identity, and history.

We can easily imagine that even in prehistoric times groups of people would gather around the fire eager to listen to stories of a hunting trip or to pay attention to religious rituals, while also probably joining in with dancing and singing. The aed represent the figure of the ancient Greek narrator: people, often blind, who sang about the adventures and deeds of mythical heroes. The aed would speak in rhymes, thus becoming the voice of the muses and having both a sacred and a prophetic role. He would use a simple language, filled with analogies, and was accompanied by a stringed musical instrument. The poems were not told in their entirety, but as episodes and this job was transmitted from one generation to another by word of mouth. The most famous aed was Homer.

Leaping forward in history up to the Middle Ages, we meet the figure of the histrion or the jester. He wandered around public squares and high courts in order to describe current events or ancient stories, enriching them with jokes and often being accompanied by musical instruments. The jesters represented a true media channels of the time, as they were the ones spreading the "news". They transmitted anecdotes and stories orally, which were later learned and passed on by the common folk, thus participating in shaping public opinion. These figures represented the connection between cultures and countries, being themselves the vehicle through which the stories of great adventurers, decisions made by authorities, and even linguistic phrases of particular places were transmitted. These Cantastorie often used a language accessible to ordinary people and used music and painted pieces of canvas, or put on puppet shows. The role of these histrions was gradually defined and, at the end of the Middle Ages, the figure of the troubadour finds its space and recognition as it moves towards a more "educated" and noble class, as this character was singing stories of heroic and romantic deeds. Nevertheless, the figure of the jester did not disappear. However, it changed, by "specialising" in a single form of art (either musician, artist, or acrobat) or becoming an entertainer at fairs.

In Europe, starting with the 14th century, the Cantastorie started moving away from literary themes and helped spread the acts of glory of the Carolingian paladins through chanson de geste especially around Sicily through Opera dei Pupi. As such, the work of the Cantastorie was rewarded with donations made by the spectators and with the revenues made from selling these fliers. After the 1950s, with the invention of

vinyl discs, these stories were also recorded, first at 78rpm (rotations/minute) then at 45 rpm, and sold. The richest research materials about the figure of the Cantastorie come from Sicily: here they were called "orbo", precisely because they were often blind, and would narrate, at least during the 60s, stories about saints and the mafia. There's a very interesting interview from the '80s with one of the last Cantastorie of Palermo, Fortunato Giordano, also called the "sacred one"; it is available at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMWHLbFcPjg>. A more emotional clip features Ciccio Busacca, a Cantastorie who travelled around the country to speak against the Mafia. A lot more information is also available on the website dedicated to him: <https://www.cantastoriebusacca.it/> As such, the arrival of the television was a significant turning point for many aspects of society and consequently influenced the lifestyle of the so-called "street-artists", including the life of our Cantastorie. But these figures so deeply rooted in tradition cannot completely disappear, and some experiences inspired from the past survived in certain niches, by "professionalising" themselves, as we will see in later chapters on contemporary Cantastorie. However, at least until the 90s, some artists survived thanks to migration, as Franco Trincale, recalls in this fascinating interview, where we find out that the Sicilian Cantastorie moved first to Rome and then to Milan.

We saw how the figure of the Cantastorie is present in several different cultures, which use different techniques and methods: painted cloth, Kamishibai, songs, rhythm. The cantastorie is, therefore, a cultural product that expresses various aspects of peoples, with the common goal of transmitting a message. Let's see how. The Cantastorie are usually histrionic and nomadic characters. During their trips, they gather material (oral, historical, human-related) which they then reinterpret in order to make it usable by other people as well. If they do not travel, the Cantastorie have a repertoire of traditional stories that were transmitted from one generation to another (thus making their journey a timetravelling one). So their role is to disseminate, either recent or past events, religious or secular, political or moral. By telling their stories, they spread them around the world, and imbue them with significance and attach a message to them. The role of the Cantastorie is not merely one of entertainer, their mission – whether they realise it or not – is to encourage the audience to think. The chorus – which we will talk more about later – is an element that helps the process. When

one is not available, the Cantastorie will invite the audience to participate, voice an opinion or actively get involved in the story. The active involvement is a functional practice for various reasons: it keeps the audience attentive, and uses the motto "learning by doing". Often after a performance, the spectators would leave humming a song or repeating the most impressive jokes. The Cantastorie is capable of stimulating those parts of the brain that create emotions: emotions are linked to memory, so (s)he knows how to manage audience participation by using elements of surprise, fear, aversion, and love. As such, Cantastorie had, and still have today, an important role when they go out on the streets with their stories: they are accessible to everybody young and old, all classes, especially the common folk. Indeed, they address those who need "simpler" information channels in order to understand reality because cantastorie works for different types of intelligence – audio and visual – which complement for other shortcomings.

The Cantastorie truly addresses people, by speaking their language, by appealing to their stomachs to awaken their brains and try to develop the audience' critical thinking.

Illustration from the book *The little prince* by A. de Saint-Exupery



Listening to a Cantastorie helps promote divergent thinking because, by empathizing with a character or a situation, the spectators have the opportunity to escape their everyday life and become malleable to change and to seeking new solutions by identifying with a character or trying to understand a situation. In conclusion, we think that the role of the Cantastorie, as well as that of Theatre and Art in general, is part of the "lifelong learning" model that should always be cultivated to fill the world with aware people, who in turn are able to build proactive social aggregates and therefore a better world. As previously mentioned, La Corte della Carta organised several workshops on cantastorie, aimed for children as well as adults. We noticed the increased potential

cantastorie has both for the shared reflection of the group, as well as for creating cohesion inside the group and with the audience during the performance. We concluded that the cantastorie method is valid both during the creative phase (brainstorming inside the group, learning through cooperation while creating the necessary materials and preparing the performance), as well as during the performance through its impact on the public. We present the example of an experience we had with a parade performance from 2006 created by the Bread and Puppet Theater (an American company we will talk more about in the future); it was a co- 110 production of Pergine Spettacolo Aperto and Piùfestival from Brescia titled "Circus of America", in which our involvement was not limited to just performing, but it also extended to the creative process. The performance took place in several languages, but the message was conveyed through images, songs, and artistic moments. The following section is a presentation of how Bread and Puppet Theater structured this event, considering it is the same operating mode since the 70s. First of all, we started work with director's notes on the performance topic and structure from Peter Schumann (the founder of the company), who also lend his artistic vision to the props. In fact, almost all drawings used were made by him. As for the internal structure, the sub-groups were organised as such that they could move freely and organise micro-performances. Inside these groups, a dynamic specific to collaborative work naturally developed, coordinated by the "seniors" (long term members of the company), who initiated the working technique, thus generating a chain reaction at an operational level with a real informal learning dynamic. These mini-performances were then "adjusted" by the Maestro and introduced into the general context. The apparent topic was a biblical one, but in reality the story showed (in several stages) a capitalistic society with its contradictions and injustices, with references to sacred elements and traditions mixed with contemporary facts and events: Christian symbols such as the ark or the flock were inserted alongside local songs such as "Mamma mia dammi cento lire" that would connect it to everyday life. The choice of using such "popular" references was made in order to guarantee the audience's involvement. For example, a Christian audience had the opportunity to sing the songs they knew, because it was part of the local tradition. This way, the audience was involved both practically and emotionally, thus facilitating the comprehension of contemporary events. Consequently, we can definitely say that creating a cantastorie performance is a fantastic experience, both at a

collaborative level, in the phases of designing, building, preparing, and acting, as well as an instrument of disseminating a story or opinion. This method has multiple fields of application: it can be shaped as community theatre, as well as a manifesto type representation. It is undoubtedly an excellent exercise in learning cooperation for students as well as educators – if they are part of the creation process. It is also an excellent opportunity for informal learning (in the case of an "ad hoc workshop") or non-formal learning (in the case of a "casual activity" with a group of teenagers, for example), depending on the context. The activities developed in Galicia by Xandobela, also showed us that the cantastorie method could be an efficient instrument for linguistic revitalisation and for disseminating the oral and literary heritage in Galicia. We also concluded that creating a cantastorie with a heterogeneous group, made out of people of different ages and cultural backgrounds, is a feasible and ample experience. This was further proven by the local initiatives developed by La Corte della Carta between 2017 and 2018 by involving the population in our area of activity, as well as by our experience with the Bread and Puppet Theater company. Through cantastorie, it is possible to develop a platform for dialogue between generations, comparing their life-stories and building a constructive relationship. Another useful field, especially nowadays, is public speaking, very sought after in multinational companies. Lately, these companies have been very focused on communication methods and techniques and often ask for input from a Storyteller. The figure of the modern storyteller does not necessarily coincide with the figure of the Cantastorie, but the skills are the same, and people who possess them are often hired.

Materials and equipment

A computer, blackboard/screen, videos from Youtube, flipchards, pencils

Setting

Face to face with a teacher

Theoretical lessons

Duration	From 15 to 55 minutes.
Type of interaction and brief description of the activity	<p>It is not impossible to become a Cantastorie: indeed talent and charisma form the base of any histrionic character (as a short document about Giovanni Virgadavola, a living Cantastorie from Victoria-Sicilia tells us: but the technique used in cantastorie can be learned. Through local experiments and activities, La Corte della Carta managed to create events for adults and children alike, and we will hereafter present the results of the research methodology experimented with by the association in recent years. We will illustrate the most critical elements necessary to create a good cantastorie. The presented elements are not consequential to one another (while of course choosing the story is a strong base for developing the rest of the performance), but are of equal importance and are conceived and modified according to each other. In this visual explanation, we can find the elements necessary for a good cantastorie. The canvas in the photo was created to playfully present the cantastorie method in a workshop designed for adults and children alike. Each frame presents an activity necessary for building a cantastorie that is briefly summarised by the narrator and amplified by the accompanying chorus (who was instructed before the performance). For the last part (frame 10), the audience is actively involved. 1 - choosing the title 2 - getting to know each other 3 - telling/sharing a story 4 - reading books/stories 5 - finding ideas 6 - drawing 7 - using our voice 9 - introducing music 10- introducing rhythm As mentioned before, the Cantastorie uses efficient communication techniques, creating a melange between the rhythm given by the story itself, by the sequence of images, by music, their own voice and body language, and the chorus. We will further analyse these points:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1 THE STORY Choosing the story or the event narrated is essential in motivating the Cantastorie to perform in front of the audience. Bear in mind that the Cantastorie needs a relevant topic to convey, often a social one. Obviously, the chosen topic could be an entertaining one, not necessarily dramatic. Ideally, the story should be accessible to the audience on multiple levels, so it can be understood by adults and children alike, so by a heterogeneous public. You can</p>

choose traditional or contemporary stories and present local or current events. It can be one single (longer) story, or shorter stories connected either through topic or their protagonist. Of course, the choice needs to be made considering the context, audience, and available time.

2 THE RHYTHM Rhythm points, anticipates, dazzles, and can also create suspense or end a phrase. It is imperative to keep the audience involved. Even without special abilities, we are all able to recognise and follow a rhythm, as well as recognise its variations. We suggest that less experienced people choose simple stories, that already have a set rhythmic structure. Italian fairy tales, a collection of texts by Italo Calvino, is a source of such stories, from which people can draw inspiration for future cantastorie. In order to present the story using rhythm, one can use, apart from the internal rhythmic structure of the story itself, the support of popular musical instruments such as a guitar, an accordion, or other wind instruments. Nonetheless, if you do not have any musical abilities, you can efficiently use simple percussion with lids, sticks, whistles, etc. or anything else that makes a sound. Rhythm can also be created by using voice and words, by slowing down and accelerating parts of the text, through the volume or tone of voice. Melodies or sounds made by the audience can be introduced as well. Many times, gestures can also provide rhythm: repeating movements made by the chorus or body percussion could be efficient tools in maintaining rhythm with the help of the chorus.

3 THE TEXT The text should be simple, linear, and straightforward. It can be a narration of consecutive facts, or a so-called cumulative story, or multiple short stories connected to each other. It is essential to divide the story into scenes when creating the structure. It would be best if you numbered them so it is easier later for the visual organisation into drawings. You are not restricted to using written texts, but also books that tell stories only through images, such as the example of silent books. However, it is useful to make a storyboard in order to connect the frames of the story with the sounds and gestures of the chorus or Cantastorie. In this case, the book can be used as a physical prop during the performance and does not have to be

reproduced on canvas. "Silent book is an illustrated book that tells a story exclusively through images, without using written words. It is accessible to everybody and has the capacity of overcoming linguistic barriers and create exchanges between different cultures. It is important in promoting learning through a visual language, and helps children "read" drawings and give them meaning, value, and merit. Silent books support a script, they have a clear sequence, well-defined characters and images". From the methodological guide of The Adventure of Reading project.

4 THE IMAGES The images must match the scenes identified in the text. Consequently, we must build a storyboard (a continuously evolving canovaccio - canvas) and work dynamically and flexibly when it comes to changes to organising the text or managing the involvement of the chorus. The images must be clear. Like the best illustrated books, the images should show a little more than the text tells, but they can also be captioned. If you choose to paint on canvas, it is better to draw first in chalk, then do the contours in black acrylic paint, and then use water-based acrylic colours to fill in the images. Acrylic paints are water-resistant and allow for the conservation of the drawings even in case of rain or if the canvas is washed. If you work with children or teenagers, you could use tempera. If time does not allow or if your artistic abilities do not excel, you can use the collage method and create images by photocopying them and then modifying them manually. We also created cantastorie by using pieces of felt and other textiles that were then sewn on cloth. You could also use books as direct visual support: in this case, the images must be large enough to be visible to the entire audience. You must also ensure that you have the author's permission for using their materials or illustrations. Here are a series of possible "cantastorie canvases". Choosing how to illustrate the story can vary a lot: Flip Flop: the cantastorie is made out of several overlaid and connected pieces of canvas, which you manage similarly to turning the pages of a book. The Cantastorie can turn the "pages" themselves, or someone from the chorus can help. Parchment: the canvas can be very long, and rolled

vertically or horizontally. The canvas can be "unfurled" during the narration in order for the audience to discover one by one each scene of the story. This action of rolling the parchment can be done manually or mechanically (with a crank system). Single canvas cantastorie: the entire story is drawn on a single canvas. Each scene is framed and numbered. The canvas can have a cut-out in the middle - a "window" where characters (small marionettes or silhouettes) or other drawings can appear .

5 THE CHORUS The function of the chorus, which does appear in the method presented by us, is not specific to the tradition of the cantastorie, but is a reinterpretation of Greek theatre made by Bread and Puppets Theatre during the 60s. In actuality, the Romanian and Italian traditional Cantastorie did not use the element of the chorus, but relied on their interaction with the audience. Nevertheless, the presence of the chorus is instrumental as an intermediary between the narrator and the audience: as is the case with the Greek paideia, the chorus stimulates critical thinking and reasoning and teaches citizens to become aware of and participate in the life of their community. In the same time, the chorus is an additional instrument through which the Cantastorie can direct the action. The chorus, as previously mentioned, comes from ancient Greek theatre. It was seen as a homogeneous organism and is a type of "collective character" that dances (or moves in a coordinated manner), sings and comments on the story. The chorus is traditionally made out of "amateurs" taken from the audience, trained during an actual rehearsal, and led by a coryphaeus, which is the "leader of the chorus". The choir therefore participates in the action, often comments, sometimes finds solutions, and almost always expresses emotions and acts as a sounding board. A simple and clear study of the Greek chorus is available here. So the Cantastorie interacts with the chorus, who often emphasises the most important lines and enriches the narration with gestures and sounds. The chorus is usually positioned to frame the canvas by forming a semicircle in front of the public, so as not to obstruct their view. The chorus will be placed on a single line or in the shape of a

"bunch of grapes" (if made out of numerous people, with the tallest ones at the back). According to the story, it can be placed on one or both sides of the canvas and its members can have similar costumes (in order to emphasise the unitary element of the chorus and their gestures). In cantastorie, similar to the ancient Greek theatre, if the chorus is numerous it is necessary to have a coryphaeus who directs the moments in which they intervene. An example of how the chorus functions can be seen in Fire, a spectacle by Bread and Puppets Theatre at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g72Q7_tL1FQ&t=24s.

6 THE MUSIC Music is a fundamental element in the traditional Romanian and Italian cantastorie which nonetheless can be easily created by relying the rhythm of words or on sounds made by improvised "instruments" or even by the human body. As such, even if no musical backup is available or if no one on the team has any musical abilities, it is still important to include songs, rhymes or sound effects which can be produced with recycled materials, maracas, newspaper sheets distributed to the audience (who is "trained" in advance on how and where to intervene). All these are possible, including simple body percussions, e.g. clapping, tapping one's feet, etc. You can also use pre-recorded music, but risk losing the "artisanal" feature, which is pivotal to cantastorie. Besides, this requires sound equipment specialised for outdoor areas such as speakers, amplifiers, etc..



7 THE SPACE Space should be adequate to this type of performance: if the canvas is small (and not visible from far away), the audience is not so numerous, and the group performing the cantastorie is small, then it is best to choose a small space that is nevertheless large enough to fit the chorus and the canvas. You should also carefully assess how easy it would be to perform the movements in the cantastorie (such as turning the pages if the canvas has multiple scenes; unfurling the canvas if you are using the parchment type; or the choreography of the chorus, if there is one). The cantastorie could be performed on a raised stage, but its beauty lies in the fact that it takes place among the people, so it's on the same level as the audience (physically and metaphorically). If the event takes place in a large open area, with a numerous audience, and you do not want to use a stage-like platform, you can raise your canvas by using tall sticks as shown in PHOTO 10, or with the help of people wearing stilts. When setting up the space, it is necessary to consider that the performance will take place in a semi-circle type shape (which includes the Cantastorie, chorus and canvas) which will be completed by the audience precisely to create the idea of circularity in which the performer and the spectator are communicating.

Performance by the Bread and Puppet Theatre



8 THE AUDIENCE The audience is essential to any theatre performance. You can have a text and a group of actors, but without somebody to see and listen to it, the magic of the theatre does not exist. The same applies to cantastorie. More than that, considering its immense social value, it is fundamental that the audience is actively involved in the performance, rendering the fourth wall elastic and mobile. Of course, the performance should be adequate to the chosen

audience: it is pointless to propose an adult story containing horrific crimes in a playroom during a Saturday afternoon. But you can create stories that layer multiple comprehension levels: one for adults and one for children in order to approach a wide range of audience, especially if the cantastorie is performed in the streets, in front of a general, heterogeneous audience. The audience completes the circle of dialogue and responds to what the Cantastorie is saying - it is both interlocutor and actor (because it can be attracted to get involved), but it can also become the chorus (through a more active involvement than simply answering questions). For example, you can involve the audience by instructing them to answer with "knock-knock" every time the Cantastorie says "knocks on the door"; or you can write the lyrics to a song in a very large and visible font and ask the audience to sing along; or you can invite the audience to perform specific, pre-established gestures. Often two spectators are asked to hold up the canvas at the beginning of the performance in order to "break the ice". This is a good first step to breaking the fourth wall. If you are in a performance hall and the audience attends based on reservations, you can control the audience by drawing chalk marks, sticking adhesive tape or placing objects to indicate the position of the spectators. Most times, however, the audience is asked/called to participate voluntarily. As such, the performance can start with a parade in which the chorus and the Cantastorie (the entire team or part of it, accompanied the painted canvas) walk along the streets surrounding the area where the show is going to take place, stopping passers-by, singing, sharing invitations, using flags with images of the cantastorie, dancing and escorting the

audience to form a semi-circle around the Cantastorie. Until the actual performance starts, the first spectators to arrive will be entertained with songs, announcements and maybe small objects that produce sounds, etc. - in short, they are beginning to be engaged in the story

9 THE PERFORMANCE The performance is the moment when everything prepared can be enjoyed by the audience. It is the moment the Cantastorie must be able to first capture the attention of the audience using techniques specific to street theatre: singing and parading to the place the event will happen, attracting and calling the audience in and announcing the beginning of the show. It is crucial that during the performance the Cantastorie stands out from the rest of the characters: (s)he can wear a hat or some exaggerated makeup, or, if (s)he is not used to being the centre of attention, a costume which could help overcome shyness. Also, a short presentation of what the audience is about to see is very important; the audience can find out that they are supposed to "help" you in your endeavour or you can keep that a secret. During the performance, it is essential to keep eye contact with the audience by stimulating them with questions or actions prepared beforehand or improvised. The ending could be obvious, written on the last "page" of the cantastorie by using "The end", or you can close using a song calling for applause. You can explain the intention of the performance, "pass the hat around" (ask for donations), sell fliers with the stories/songs used in the cantastorie, or distribute other materials with information related to the performance. Of course, everything depends on the context in which the performance takes place, and on the group involved in the preparations: for example, passing the hat around an end-of-the-school-year event could be

inappropriate!



Glossary

Roman, storytelling, Cantastorie

Assessment method

There is no single way of being a Cantastorie. In fact, everyone has their own style that shows through their personal poetic language and the way they act in the public square and on stage. The style is refined with direct contact with the audience. The assesment is made by showing number of fingers of how participants feel. From 5 the best and 1 less.

**Sources /
further reading /
resources**

<http://www.areateatro.it/> <http://www.alessiodimodica.com/>
http://lucachiergato.it/wp_site/